Anthony Trollope

Marion Fay: A Novel

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Anthony Trollope
Marion Fay: A Novel

VOL. I

CHAPTER I

THE MARQUIS OF KINGSBURY

When Mr. Lionel Trafford went into Parliament for the Borough of Wednesbury as an advanced Radical, it nearly broke the heart of his uncle, the old Marquis of Kingsbury. Among Tories of his day the Marquis had been hyper-Tory, – as were his friends, the Duke of Newcastle, who thought that a man should be allowed to do what he liked with his own, and the Marquis of Londonderry, who, when some such falling-off in the family politics came near him, spoke with indignation of the family treasure which had been expended in defending the family seat. Wednesbury had never been the Marquis's own; but his nephew was so in a peculiar sense. His nephew was necessarily his heir, – the future Marquis, – and the old Marquis never again, politically, held up his head. He was an old man when this occurred, and luckily for him he did not live to see the worse things which came afterwards.

The Member for Wednesbury became Marquis and owner of the large family property, but still he kept his politics. He was a Radical Marquis, wedded to all popular measures, not ashamed of his Charter days, and still clamorous for further Parliamentary reform, although it was regularly noted in Dod that the Marquis of Kingsbury was supposed to have strong influence in the Borough of Edgeware. It was so strong that both he and his uncle had put in whom they pleased. His uncle had declined to put him in because of his renegade theories, but he revenged himself by giving the seat to a glib-mouthed tailor, who, to tell the truth, had not done much credit to his choice.

But it came to pass that the shade of his uncle was avenged, if it can be supposed that such feelings will affect the eternal rest of a dead Marquis. There grew up a young Lord Hampstead, the son and heir of the Radical Marquis, promising in intelligence and satisfactory in externals, but very difficult to deal with as to the use of his thoughts. They could not keep him at Harrow or at Oxford, because he not only rejected, but would talk openly against, Christian doctrines; a religious boy, but determined not to believe in revealed mysteries. And at twenty-one he declared himself a Republican, – explaining thereby that he disapproved altogether of hereditary honours. He was quite as bad to this Marquis as had been this Marquis to the other. The tailor kept his seat because Lord Hampstead would not even condescend to sit for the family borough. He explained to his father that he had doubts about a Parliament of which one section was hereditary, but was sure that at present he was too young for it. There must surely have been gratification in this to the shade of the departed Marquis.

But there was worse than this, – infinitely worse. Lord Hampstead formed a close friendship with a young man, five years older than himself, who was but a clerk in the Post Office. In George Roden, as a man and a companion, there was no special fault to be found. There may be those who think that a Marquis's heir should look for his most intimate friend in a somewhat higher scale of social rank, and that he would more probably serve the purposes of his future life by associating with his equals; – that like to like in friendship is advantageous. The Marquis, his father, certainly thought so in spite of his Radicalism. But he might have been pardoned on the score of Roden's general

good gifts, – might have been pardoned even though it were true, as supposed, that to Roden's strong convictions Lord Hampstead owed much of the ultra virus of his political convictions, – might have been pardoned had not there been worse again. At Hendon Hall, the Marquis's lovely suburban seat, the Post Office clerk was made acquainted with Lady Frances Trafford, and they became lovers.

The radicalism of a Marquis is apt to be tainted by special considerations in regard to his own family. This Marquis, though he had his exoteric politics, had his esoteric feelings. With him, Liberal as he was, his own blood possessed a peculiar ichor. Though it might be well that men in the mass should be as nearly equal as possible, yet, looking at the state of possibilities and realities as existent, it was clear to him that a Marquis of Kingsbury had been placed on a pedestal. It might be that the state of things was matter for regret. In his grander moments he was certain that it was so. Why should there be a ploughboy unable to open his mouth because of his infirmity, and a Marquis with his own voice very resonant in the House of Lords, and a deputy voice dependent on him in the House of Commons? He had said so very frequently before his son, not knowing then what might be the effect of his own teaching. There had been a certain pride in his heart as he taught these lessons, wrong though it might be that there should be a Marquis and a ploughboy so far reversed by the injustice of Fate. There had been a comfort to him in feeling that Fate had made him the Marquis, and had made some one else the ploughboy. He knew what it was to be a Marquis down to the last inch of aristocratic admeasurement. He would fain that his children should have understood this also. But his lesson had gone deeper than he had intended, and great grief had come of it.

The Marquis had been first married to a lady altogether unconnected with noble blood, but whose father had held a position of remarkable ascendancy in the House of Commons. He had never been a Cabinet Minister, because he had persisted in thinking that he could better serve his country by independence. He had been possessed of wealth, and had filled a great place in the social world. In marrying the only daughter of this gentleman the Marquis of Kingsbury had indulged his peculiar taste in regard to Liberalism, and was at the same time held not to have derogated from his rank. She had been a woman of great beauty and of many intellectual gifts, – thoroughly imbued with her father's views, but altogether free from feminine pedantry and that ambition which begrudges to men the rewards of male labour. Had she lived, Lady Frances might probably not have fallen in with the Post Office clerk; nevertheless, had she lived, she would have known the Post Office clerk to be a worthy gentleman.

But she had died when her son was about sixteen and her daughter no more than fifteen. Two years afterwards our Marquis had gone among the dukes, and had found for himself another wife. Perhaps the freshness and edge of his political convictions had been blunted by that gradual sinking down among the great peers in general which was natural to his advanced years. A man who has spouted at twenty-five becomes tired of spouting at fifty, if nothing special has come from his spouting. He had been glad when he married Lady Clara Mountressor to think that circumstances as they had occurred at the last election would not make it necessary for him to deliver up the borough to the tailor on any further occasion. The tailor had been drunk at the hustings, and he ventured to hope that before six months were over Lord Hampstead would have so far rectified his frontiers as to be able to take a seat in the House of Commons.

Then very quickly there were born three little flaxen-haired boys, – who became at least flaxen-haired as they emerged from their cradles, – Lord Frederic, Lord Augustus, and Lord Gregory. That they must be brought up with ideas becoming the scions of a noble House there could be no doubt. Their mother was every inch a duke's daughter. But, alas, not one of them was likely to become Marquis of Kingsbury. Though born so absolutely in the purple they were but younger sons. This was a silent sorrow; – but when their half sister Lady Frances told their mother openly that she had plighted her troth to the Post Office clerk, that was a sorrow which did not admit of silence.

When Lord Hampstead had asked permission to bring his friend to the house there seemed to be no valid reason for refusing him. Low as he had descended amidst the depths of disreputable

opinion, it was not supposed that even he would countenance anything so horrible as this. And was there not ground for security in the reticence and dignity of Lady Frances herself? The idea never presented itself to the Marchioness. When she heard that the Post Office clerk was coming she was naturally disgusted. All Lord Hampstead's ideas, doings, and ways were disgusting to her. She was a woman full of high-bred courtesy, and had always been gracious to her son-in-law's friends, – but it had been with a cold grace. Her heart rejected them thoroughly, – as she did him, and, to tell the truth, Lady Frances also. Lady Frances had all her mother's dignity, all her mother's tranquil manner, but something more than her mother's advanced opinions. She, too, had her ideas that the world should gradually be taught to dispense with the distances which separate the dukes and the ploughboys, – gradually, but still with a progressive motion, always tending in that direction. This to her stepmother was disgusting.

The Post Office clerk had never before been received at Hendon Hall, though he had been introduced in London by Lord Hampstead to his sister. The Post Office clerk had indeed abstained from coming, having urged his own feelings with his friend as to certain unfitnesses. "A Marquis is as absurd to me as to you," he had said to Lord Hampstead, "but while there are Marquises they should be indulged, – particularly Marchionesses. An over-delicate skin is a nuisance; but if skins have been so trained as not to bear the free air, veils must be allowed for their protection. The object should be to train the skin, not to punish it abruptly. An unfortunate Sybarite Marchioness ought to have her rose leaves. Now I am not a rose leaf." And so he had stayed away.

But the argument had been carried on between the friends, and the noble heir had at last prevailed. George Roden was not a rose leaf, but he was found at Hendon to have flowers of beautiful hues and with a sweet scent. Had he not been known to be a Post Office clerk, – could the Marchioness have been allowed to judge of him simply from his personal appearance, – he might have been taken to be as fine a rose leaf as any. He was a tall, fair, strongly-built young man, with short light hair, pleasant grey eyes, an aquiline nose, and small mouth. In his gait and form and face nothing was discernibly more appropriate to Post Office clerks than to the nobility at large. But he was a clerk, and he himself, as he himself declared, knew nothing of his own family, – remembered no relation but his mother.

It had come to pass that the house at Hendon had become specially the residence of Lord Hampstead, who would neither have lodgings of his own in London or make part of the family when it occupied Kingsbury House in Park Lane. He would sometimes go abroad, would sometimes appear for a week or two at Trafford Park, the grand seat in Yorkshire. But he preferred the place, half town half country, in the neighbourhood of London, and here George Roden came frequently backwards and forwards after the ice had been broken by a first visit. Sometimes the Marquis would be there, and with him his daughter, – rarely the Marchioness. Then came the time when Lady Frances declared boldly to her stepmother that she had pledged her troth to the Post Office clerk. That happened in June, when Parliament was sitting, and when the flowers at Hendon were at their best. The Marchioness came there for a day or two, and the Post Office clerk on that morning had left the house for his office work, not purposing to come back. Some words had been said which had caused annoyance, and he did not intend to return. When he had been gone about an hour Lady Frances revealed the truth.

Her brother at that time was two-and-twenty. She was a year younger. The clerk might perhaps be six years older than the young lady. Had he only been the eldest son of a Marquis, or Earl, or Viscount; had he been but an embryo Baron, he might have done very well. He was a well-spoken youth, yet with a certain modesty, such a one as might easily take the eye of a wished-for though ever so noble a mother-in-law. The little lords had learned to play with him, and it had come about that he was at his ease in the house. The very servants had seemed to forget that he was no more than a clerk, and that he went off by railway into town every morning that he might earn ten shillings by sitting for six hours at his desk. Even the Marchioness had almost trained herself to like him, – as one of those

excrescences which are sometimes to be found in noble families, some governess, some chaplain or private secretary, whom chance or merit has elevated in the house, and who thus becomes a trusted friend. Then by chance she heard the name "Frances" without the prefix "Lady," and said a word in haughty anger. The Post Office clerk packed up his portmanteau, and Lady Frances told her story.

Lord Hampstead's name was John. He was the Honourable John Trafford, called by courtesy Earl of Hampstead. To the world at large he was Lord Hampstead, – to his friends in general he was Hampstead; to his stepmother he was especially Hampstead, – as would have been her own eldest son the moment he was born had he been born to such good luck. To his father he had become Hampstead lately. In early days there had been some secret family agreement that in spite of conventionalities he should be John among them. The Marquis had latterly suggested that increasing years made this foolish; but the son himself attributed the change to step-maternal influences. But still he was John to his sister, and John to some half-dozen sympathising friends, – and among others to the Post Office clerk.

"He has not said a word to me," the sister replied when she was taxed by her brother with seeming partiality for their young visitor.

"But he will?"

"No girl will ever admit as much as that, John."

"But if he should?"

"No girl will have an answer ready for such a suggestion."

"I know he will."

"If so, and if you have wishes to express, you should speak to him."

All this made the matter quite clear to her brother. A girl such as was his sister would not so receive a brother's notice as to a proposed overture of love from a Post Office clerk, unless she had brought herself to look at the possibility without abhorrence.

"Would it go against the grain with you, John?" This was what the clerk said when he was interrogated by his friend.

"There would be difficulties."

"Very great difficulties, – difficulties even with you."

"I did not say so."

"They would come naturally. The last thing that a man can abandon of his social idolatries is the sanctity of the women belonging to him."

"God forbid that I should give up anything of the sanctity of my sister."

"No; but the idolatry attached to it! It is as well that even a nobleman's daughter should be married if she can find a nobleman or such like to her taste. There is no breach of sanctity in the love, – but so great a wound to the idolatry in the man! Things have not changed so quickly that even you should be free from the feeling. Three hundred years ago, if the man could not be despatched out of the country or to the other world, the girl at least would be locked up. Three hundred years hence the girl and the man will stand together on their own merits. Just in this period of transition it is very hard for such a one as you to free himself altogether from the old trammels."

"I make the endeavour."

"Most bravely. But, my dear fellow, let this individual thing stand separately, away from politics and abstract ideas. I mean to ask your sister whether I can have her heart, and, as far as her will goes, her hand. If you are displeased I suppose we shall have to part, – for a time. Let theories run ever so high, Love will be stronger than them all." Lord Hampstead at this moment gave no assurance of his good will; but when it came to pass that his sister had given her assurance, then he ranged himself on the side of his friend the clerk.

So it came to pass that there was great trouble in the household of the Marquis of Kingsbury. The family went abroad before the end of July, on account of the health of the children. So said the *Morning Post.* Anxious friends inquired in vain what could have befallen those flaxen-haired young

Herculeses. Why was it necessary that they should be taken to the Saxon Alps when the beauties and comforts of Trafford Park were so much nearer and so superior? Lady Frances was taken with them, and there were one or two noble intimates among the world of fashion who heard some passing whispers of the truth. When passing whispers creep into the world of fashion they are heard far and wide.

CHAPTER II

LORD HAMPSTEAD

Lord Hampstead, though he would not go into Parliament or belong to any London Club, or walk about the streets with a chimney-pot hat, or perform any of his public functions as a young nobleman should do, had, nevertheless, his own amusements and his own extravagances. In the matter of money he was placed outside his father's liberality, – who was himself inclined to be liberal enough, – by the fact that he had inherited a considerable portion of his maternal grandfather's fortune. It might almost be said truly of him that money was no object to him. It was not that he did not often talk about money and think about money. He was very prone to do so, saying that money was the most important factor in the world's justices and injustices. But he was so fortunately circumstanced as to be able to leave money out of his own personal consideration, never being driven by the want of it to deny himself anything, or tempted by a superabundance to expenditure which did not otherwise approve itself to him. To give 10*s.* or 20*s.* a bottle for wine because somebody pretended that it was very fine, or £300 for a horse when one at a £100 would do his work for him, was altogether below his philosophy. By his father's lodge gate there ran an omnibus up to town which he would often use, saying that an omnibus with company was better than a private carriage with none. He was wont to be angry with himself in that he employed a fashionable tailor, declaring that he incurred unnecessary expense merely to save himself the trouble of going elsewhere. In this, however, it may be thought that there was something of pretence, as he was no doubt conscious of good looks, and aware probably that a skilful tailor might add a grace.

In his amusements he affected two which are especially expensive. He kept a yacht, in which he was accustomed to absent himself in the summer and autumn, and he had a small hunting establishment in Northamptonshire. Of the former little need be said here, as he spent his time on board much alone, or with friends with whom we need not follow him; but it may be said that everything about the *Free Trader* was done well, – for such was the name of the vessel. Though he did not pay 10*s.* a bottle for his wine, he paid the best price for sails and cordage, and hired a competent skipper to look after himself and his boat. His hunting was done very much in the same way, – unless it be that in his yachting he was given to be tranquil, and in his hunting he was very fond of hard riding. At Gorse Hall, as his cottage was called, he had all comforts, we may perhaps say much of luxury, around him. It was indeed hardly more than a cottage, having been an old farm-house, and lately converted to its present purpose. There were no noble surroundings, no stately hall, no marble staircases, no costly salon. You entered by a passage which deserved no auguster name, on the right of which was the dining-room; on the left a larger chamber, always called the drawing-room because of the fashion of the name. Beyond that was a smaller retreat in which the owner kept his books. Leading up from the end of the passage there was a steep staircase, a remnant of the old farm-house, and above them five bed-rooms, so that his lordship was limited to the number of four guests. Behind this was the kitchen and the servants' rooms – sufficient, but not more than sufficient, for such a house. Here our young democrat kept half-a-dozen horses, all of them – as men around were used to declare – fit to go, although they were said to have been bought at not more than £100 each. It was supposed to be a crotchet on the part of Lord Hampstead to assert that cheap things were as good as dear, and there were some who believed that he did in truth care as much for his horses as other people. It was certainly a fact that he never would have but one out in a day, and he was wont to declare that Smith took out his second horse chiefly that Jones might know that he did so. Down here, at Gorse Hall, the Post Office clerk had often been received as a visitor, – but not at Gorse Hall had he ever seen Lady Frances.

This lord had peculiar ideas about hunting, in reference to sport in general. It was supposed of him, and supposed truly, that no young man in England was more devotedly attached to fox-hunting than he, – and that in want of a fox he would ride after a stag, and in want of a stag after a drag. If everything else failed he would go home across the country, any friend accompanying him, or else alone. Nevertheless, he entertained a vehement hostility against all other sports.

Of racing he declared that it had become simply a way of making money, and of all ways the least profitable to the world and the most disreputable. He was never seen on a racecourse. But his enemies declared of him, that though he loved riding he was no judge of an animal's pace, and that he was afraid to bet lest he should lose his money.

Against shooting he was still louder. If there was in his country any tradition, any custom, any law hateful to him, it was such as had reference to the preservation of game. The preservation of a fox, he said, stood on a perfectly different basis. The fox was not preserved by law, and when preserved was used for the advantage of all who chose to be present at the amusement. One man in one day would shoot fifty pheasants which had eaten up the food of half-a-dozen human beings. One fox afforded in one day amusement to two hundred sportsmen, and was – or more generally was not – killed during the performance. And the fox during his beneficial life had eaten no corn, nor for the most part geese, – but chiefly rats and such like. What infinitesimal sum had the fox cost the country for every man who rushed after him? Then, what had been the cost of all those pheasants which one shooting cormorant crammed into his huge bag during one day's greedy sport?

But it was the public nature of the one amusement and the thoroughly private nature of the other which chiefly affected him. In the hunting-field the farmer's son, if he had a pony, or the butcher-boy out of the town, could come and take his part; and if the butcher-boy could go ahead and keep his place while the man with a red coat and pink boots and with two horses fell behind, the butcher-boy would have the best of it, and incur the displeasure of no one. And the laws, too, by which hunting is governed, if there be laws, are thoroughly democratic in their nature. They are not, he said, made by any Parliament, but are simply assented to on behalf of the common need. It was simply in compliance with opinion that the lands of all men are open to be ridden over by the men of the hunt. In compliance with opinion foxes are preserved. In compliance with opinion coverts are drawn by this or the other pack of hounds. The Legislature had not stepped in to defile the statute book by bye-laws made in favour of the amusements of the rich. If injury were done, the ordinary laws of the country were open to the injured party. Anything in hunting that had grown to be beyond the reach of the law had become so by the force of popular opinion.

All of this was reversed in shooting, from any participation in which the poor were debarred by enactments made solely on behalf of the rich. Four or five men in a couple of days would offer up hecatombs of slaughtered animals, in doing which they could only justify themselves by the fact that they were acting as poultry-butchers for the supply of the markets of the country. There was no excitement in it, – simply the firing off of many guns with a rapidity which altogether prevents that competition which is essential to the enjoyment of sport. Then our noble Republican would quote Teufelsdröckh and the memorable epitaph of the partridge-slayer. But it was on the popular and unpopular elements of the two sports that he would most strongly dilate, and on the iniquity of the game-laws as applying to the more aristocratic of the two. It was, however, asserted by the sporting world at large that Hampstead could not hit a haystack.

As to fishing, he was almost equally violent, grounding his objection on the tedium and cruelty incident to the pursuit. The first was only a matter of taste, he would allow. If a man could content himself and be happy with an average of one fish to every three days' fishing, that was the man's affair. He could only think that in such case the man himself must be as cold-blooded as the fish which he so seldom succeeded in catching. As to the cruelty, he thought there could be no doubt. When he heard that bishops and ladies delighted themselves in hauling an unfortunate animal about by the gills for more than an hour at a stretch, he was inclined to regret the past piety of the Church

and the past tenderness of the sex. When he spoke in this way the cruelty of fox-hunting was of course thrown in his teeth. Did not the poor hunted quadrupeds, when followed hither and thither by a pack of fox-hounds, endure torments as sharp and as prolonged as those inflicted on the fish? In answer to this Lord Hampstead was eloquent and argumentative. As far as we could judge from Nature the condition of the two animals during the process was very different. The salmon with the hook in its throat was in a position certainly not intended by Nature. The fox, using all its gifts to avoid an enemy, was employed exactly as Nature had enjoined. It would be as just to compare a human being impaled alive on a stake with another overburdened with his world's task. The overburdened man might stumble and fall, and so perish. Things would have been hard to him. But not, therefore, could you compare his sufferings with the excruciating agonies of the poor wretch who had been left to linger and starve with an iron rod through his vitals. This argument was thought to be crafty rather than cunning by those who were fond of fishing. But he had another on which, when he had blown off the steam of his eloquence by his sensational description of a salmon impaled by a bishop, he could depend with greater confidence. He would grant, – for the moment, though he was by no means sure of the fact, – but for the moment he would grant that the fox did not enjoy the hunt. Let it be acknowledged – for the sake of the argument – that he was tortured by the hounds rather than elated by the triumphant success of his own manœuvres. Lord Hampstead "ventured to say," – this he would put forward in the rationalistic tone with which he was wont to prove the absurdity of hereditary honours, – "that in the infliction of all pain the question as to cruelty or no cruelty was one of relative value." Was it "tanti?" Who can doubt that for a certain maximum of good a certain minimum of suffering may be inflicted without slur to humanity? In hunting, one fox was made to finish his triumphant career, perhaps prematurely, for the advantage of two hundred sportsmen. "Ah, but only for their amusement!" would interpose some humanitarian averse equally to fishing and to hunting. Then his lordship would arise indignantly and would ask his opponent, whether what he called amusement was not as beneficial, as essential, as necessary to the world as even such material good things as bread and meat. Was poetry less valuable than the multiplication table? Man could exist no doubt without fox-hunting. So he could without butter, without wine, or other so-called necessaries; – without ermine tippets, for instance, the original God-invested wearer of which had been doomed to lingering starvation and death when trapped amidst the snow, in order that one lady might be made fine by the agonies of a dozen little furry sufferers. It was all a case of "tanti," he said, and he said that the fox who had saved himself half-a-dozen times and then died nobly on behalf of those who had been instrumental in preserving an existence for him, ought not to complain of the lot which Fate had provided for him among the animals of the earth. It was said, however, in reference to this comparison between fishing and fox-hunting, that Lord Hampstead was altogether deficient in that skill and patience which is necessary for the landing of a salmon.

But men, though they laughed at him, still they liked him. He was good-humoured and kindly-hearted. He was liberal in more than his politics. He had, too, a knack of laughing at himself, and his own peculiarities, which went far to redeem them. That a young Earl, an embryo Marquis, the heir of such a house as that of Trafford, should preach a political doctrine which those who heard ignorantly called Communistic, was very dreadful; but the horror of it was mitigated when he declared that no doubt as he got old he should turn Tory like any other Radical. In this there seemed to be a covert allusion to his father. And then they could perceive that his "Communistic" principles did not prevent him from having a good eye to the value of land. He knew what he was about, as an owner of property should do, and certainly rode to hounds as well as any one of the boys of the period.

When the idea first presented itself to him that his sister was on the way to fall in love with George Roden, it has to be acknowledged that he was displeased. It had not occurred to him that this peculiar breach would be made on the protected sanctity of his own family. When Roden had spoken to him of this sanctity as one of the "social idolatries," he had not quite been able to contradict him. He had wished to do so both in defence of his own consistency, and also, if it were possible,

so as to maintain the sanctity. The "divinity" which "does hedge a king," had been to him no more than a social idolatry. The special respect in which dukes and such like were held was the same. The judge's ermine and the bishop's apron were idolatries. Any outward honour, not earned by the deeds or words of him so honoured, but coming from birth, wealth, or from the doings of another, was an idolatry. Carrying on his arguments, he could not admit the same thing in reference to his sister; – or rather, he would have to admit it if he could not make another plea in defence of the sanctity. His sister was very holy to him; – but that should be because of her nearness to him, because of her sweetness, because of her own gifts, because as her brother he was bound to be her especial knight till she should have chosen some other special knight for herself. But it should not be because she was the daughter, granddaughter, and great-granddaughter of dukes and marquises. It should not be because she was Lady Frances Trafford. Had he himself been a Post Office clerk, then would not this chosen friend have been fit to love her? There were unfitnesses, no doubt, very common in this world, which should make the very idea of love impossible to a woman, – unfitness of character, of habits, of feelings, of education, unfitnesses as to inward personal nobility. He could not say that there were any such which ought to separate his sister and his friend. If it was to be that this sweet sister should some day give her heart to a lover, why not to George Roden as well as to another? There were no such unfitnesses as those of which he would have thought in dealing with the lives of some other girl and some other young man.

And yet he was, if not displeased, at any rate dissatisfied. There was something which grated against either his taste, or his judgment, – or perhaps his prejudices. He endeavoured to inquire into himself fairly on this matter, and feared that he was yet the victim of the prejudices of his order. He was wounded in his pride to think that his sister should make herself equal to a clerk in the Post Office. Though he had often endeavoured, only too successfully, to make her understand how little she had in truth received from her high birth, yet he felt that she had received something which should have made the proposal of such a marriage distasteful to her. A man cannot rid himself of a prejudice because he knows or believes it to be a prejudice. That the two, if they continued to wish it, must become man and wife he acknowledged to himself; – but he could not bring himself not to be sorry that it should be so.

There were some words on the subject between himself and his father before the Marquis went abroad with his family, which, though they did not reconcile him to the match, lessened the dissatisfaction. His father was angry with him, throwing the blame of this untoward affair on his head, and he was always prone to resent censure thrown by any of his family on his own peculiar tenets. Thus it came to pass that in defending himself he was driven to defend his sister also. The Marquis had not been at Hendon when the revelation was first made, but had heard it in the course of the day from his wife. His Radical tendencies had done very little towards reconciling him to such a proposal. He had never brought his theories home into his own personalities. To be a Radical peer in the House of Lords, and to have sent a Radical tailor to the House of Commons, had been enough, if not too much, to satisfy his own political ideas. To himself and to his valet, to all those immediately touching himself, he had always been the Marquis of Kingsbury. And so also, in his inner heart, the Marchioness was the Marchioness, and Lady Frances Lady Frances. He had never gone through any process of realizing his convictions as his son had done. "Hampstead," he said, "can this possibly be true what your mother has told me?" This took place at the house in Park Lane, to which the Marquis had summoned his son.

"Do you mean about Frances and George Roden?"

"Of course I mean that."

"I supposed you did, sir. I imagined that when you sent for me it was in regard to them. No doubt it is true."

"What is true? You speak as though you absolutely approved it."

"Then my voice has belied me, for I disapprove of it."

"You feel, I hope, how utterly impossible it is."

"Not that."

"Not that?"

"I cannot say that I think it to be impossible, – or even improbable. Knowing the two, as I do, I feel the probability to be on their side."

"That they – should be married?"

"That is what they intend. I never knew either of them to mean anything which did not sooner or later get itself accomplished."

"You'll have to learn it on this occasion. How on earth can it have been brought about?" Lord Hampstead shrugged his shoulders. "Somebody has been very much to blame."

"You mean me, sir?"

"Somebody has been very much to blame."

"Of course, you mean me. I cannot take any blame in the matter. In introducing George Roden to you, and to my mother, and to Frances, I brought you to the knowledge of a highly-educated and extremely well-mannered young man."

"Good God!"

"I did to my friend what every young man, I suppose, does to his. I should be ashamed of myself to associate with any one who was not a proper guest for my father's table. One does not calculate before that a young man and a young woman shall fall in love with each other."

"You see what has happened."

"It was extremely natural, no doubt, – though I had not anticipated it. As I told you, I am very sorry. It will cause many heartburns, and some unhappiness."

"Unhappiness! I should think so. I must go away, – in the middle of the Session."

"It will be worse for her, poor girl."

"It will be very bad for her," said the Marquis, speaking as though his mind were quite made up on that matter.

"But nobody, as far as I can see, has done anything wrong," continued Lord Hampstead. "When two young people get together whose tastes are similar, and opinions, – whose educations and habits of thought have been the same – "

"Habits the same!"

"Habits of thought, I said, sir."

"You would talk the hind legs off a dog," said the Marquis, bouncing out of the room. It was not unusual with him, in the absolute privacy of his own circle, to revert to language which he would have felt to be unbecoming to him as Marquis of Kingsbury among ordinary people.

CHAPTER III

THE MARCHIONESS

Though the departure of the Marquis was much hurried, there were other meetings between Hampstead and the family before the flitting was actually made.

"No doubt I will. I am quite with you there," the son said to the father, who had desired him to explain to the young man the impossibility of such a marriage. "I think it would be a misfortune to them both, which should be avoided, – if they can get over their present feelings."

"Feelings!"

"I suppose there are such feelings, sir?"

"Of course he is looking for position – and money."

"Not in the least. That might probably be the idea with some young nobleman who would wish to marry into his own class, and to improve his fortune at the same time. With such a one that would be fair enough. He would give and take. With George that would not be honest; – nor would such accusation be true. The position, as you call it, he would feel to be burdensome. As to money, he does not know whether Frances has a shilling or not."

"Not a shilling, – unless I give it to her."

"He would not think of such a matter."

"Then he must be a very imprudent young man, and unfit to have a wife at all."

"I cannot admit that, – but suppose he is?"

"And yet you think – ?"

"I think, sir, that it is unfortunate. I have said so ever since I first heard it. I shall tell him exactly what I think. You will have Frances with you, and will of course express your own opinion."

The Marquis was far from satisfied with his son, but did not dare to go on further with the argument. In all such discussions he was wont to feel that his son was "talking the hind legs off a dog." His own ideas on concrete points were clear enough to him, – as this present idea that his daughter, Lady Frances Trafford, would outrage all propriety, all fitness, all decency, if she were to give herself in marriage to George Roden, the Post Office clerk. But words were not plenty with him, – or, when plenty, not efficacious, – and he was prone to feel, when beaten in argument, that his opponent was taking an unfair advantage. Thus it was that he often thought, and sometimes said, that those who oppressed him with words would "talk the hind legs off a dog."

The Marchioness also expressed her opinion to Hampstead. She was a lady stronger than her husband; – stronger in this, that she never allowed herself to be worsted in any encounter. If words would not serve her occasion at the moment, her countenance would do so, – and if not that, her absence. She could be very eloquent with silence, and strike an adversary dumb by the way in which she would leave a room. She was a tall, handsome woman, with a sublime gait. – "Vera incessu patuit Dea." She had heard, if not the words, then some translation of the words, and had taken them to heart, and borne them with her as her secret motto. To be every inch an aristocrat, in look as in thought, was the object of her life. That such was her highest duty was quite fixed in her mind. It had pleased God to make her a Marchioness, – and should she derogate from God's wish? It had been her one misfortune that God should not also have made her the mother of a future Marquis. Her face, though handsome, was quite impassive, showing nothing of her sorrows or her joys; and her voice was equally under control. No one had ever imagined, not even her husband, that she felt acutely that one blow of fortune. Though Hampstead's politics had been to her abominable, treasonable, blasphemous, she treated him with an extreme courtesy. If there were anything that he wished about the house she would have it done for him. She would endeavour to interest herself about his hunting. And she

would pay him a great respect, – to him most onerous, – as being second in all things to the Marquis. Though a Republican blasphemous rebel, – so she thought of him, – he was second to the Marquis. She would fain have taught her little boys to respect him, – as the future head of the family, – had he not been so accustomed to romp with them, to pull them out of their little beds, and toss them about in their night-shirts, that they loved him much too well for respect. It was in vain that their mother strove to teach them to call him Hampstead.

Lady Frances had never been specially in her way, but to Lady Frances the stepmother had been perhaps harder than to the stepson, of whose presence as an absolute block to her ambition she was well aware. Lady Frances had no claim to a respect higher than that which was due to her own children. Primogeniture had done nothing for her. She was a Marquis's daughter, but her mother had been only the offspring of a commoner. There was perhaps something of conscience in her feelings towards the two. As Lord Hampstead was undoubtedly in her way, it occurred to her to think that she should not on that account be inimical to him. Lady Frances was not in her way, – and therefore was open to depreciation and dislike without wounds to her conscience; and then, though Hampstead was abominable because of his Republicanism, his implied treason, and blasphemy, yet he was entitled to some excuse as being a man. These things were abominable no doubt in him, but more pardonably abominable than they would be in a woman. Lady Frances had never declared herself to be a Republican or a disbeliever, much less a rebel, – as, indeed, had neither Lord Hampstead. In the presence of her stepmother she was generally silent on matters of political or religious interest. But she was supposed to sympathise with her brother, and was known to be far from properly alive to aristocratic interests. There was never quarrelling between the two, but there was a lack of that friendship which may subsist between a stepmother of thirty-eight and a stepdaughter of twenty-one. Lady Frances was tall and slender, with quiet speaking features, dark in colour, with blue eyes, and hair nearly black. In appearance she was the very opposite of her stepmother, moving quickly and achieving grace as she did so, without a thought, by the natural beauty of her motions. The dignity was there, but without a thought given to it. Not even did the little lords, her brothers, chuck their books and toys about with less idea of demeanour. But the Marchioness never arranged a scarf or buttoned a glove without feeling that it was her duty to button her glove and arrange her scarf as became the Marchioness of Kingsbury.

The stepmother wished no evil to Lady Frances, – only that she should be married properly and taken out of the way. Any stupid Earl or mercurial Viscount would have done, so long as the blood and the money had been there. Lady Frances had been felt to be dangerous, and the hope was that the danger might be got rid of by a proper marriage. But not by such a marriage as this!

When that accidental calling of the name was first heard and the following avowal made, the Marchioness declared her immediate feelings by a look. It was so that Arthur may have looked when he first heard that his Queen was sinful, – so that Cæsar must have felt when even Brutus struck him. For though Lady Frances had been known to be blind to her own greatness, still this, – this at any rate was not suspected. "You cannot mean it!" the Marchioness had at last said.

"I certainly mean it, mamma." Then the Marchioness, with one hand guarding her raiment, and with the other raised high above her shoulder, in an agony of supplication to those deities who arrange the fates of ducal houses, passed slowly out of the room. It was necessary that she should bethink herself before another word was spoken.

For some time after that very few words passed between her and the sinner. A dead silence best befitted the occasion; – as, when a child soils her best frock, we put her in the corner with a scolding; but when she tells a fib we quell her little soul within her by a terrible quiescence. To be eloquently indignant without a word is within the compass of the thoughtfully stolid. It was thus that Lady Frances was at first treated by her stepmother. She was, however, at once taken up to London, subjected to the louder anger of her father, and made to prepare for the Saxon Alps. At first, indeed, her immediate destiny was not communicated to her. She was to be taken abroad; – and, in so taking

her, it was felt to be well to treat her as the policeman does his prisoner, whom he thinks to be the last person who need be informed as to the whereabouts of the prison. It did leak out quickly, because the Marquis had a castle or château of his own in Saxony; – but that was only an accident.

The Marchioness still said little on the matter, – unless in what she might say to her husband in the secret recesses of marital discussion; but before she departed she found it expedient to express herself on one occasion to Lord Hampstead. "Hampstead," she said, "this is a terrible blow that has fallen upon us."

"I was surprised myself. I do not know that I should call it exactly a blow."

"Not a blow! But of course you mean that it will come to nothing."

"What I meant was, that though I regard the proposition as inexpedient – "

"Inexpedient!"

"Yes; – I think it inexpedient certainly; but there is nothing in it that shocks me."

"Nothing that shocks you!"

"Marriage in itself is a good thing."

"Hampstead, do not talk to me in that way."

"But I think it is. If it be good for a young man to marry it must be good for a young woman also. The one makes the other necessary."

"But not for such as your sister, – and him – together. You are speaking in that way simply to torment me."

"I can only speak as I think. I do agree that it would be inexpedient. She would to a certain extent lose the countenance of her friends – "

"Altogether!"

"Not altogether, – but to some extent. A certain class of people, – not the best worth knowing, – might be inclined to drop her. However foolish her own friends may be we owe something – even to their folly."

"Her friends are not foolish, – her proper friends."

"I quite agree with that; but then so many of them are improper."

"Hampstead!"

"I am afraid that I don't make myself quite clear. But never mind. It would be inexpedient. It would go against the grain with my father, who ought to be consulted."

"I should think so."

"I quite agree with you. A father ought to be consulted, even though a daughter be of age, so as to be enabled by law to do as she likes with herself. And then there would be money discomforts."

"She would not have a shilling."

"Not but what I should think it my duty to put that right if there were any real distress." Here spoke the heir, who was already in possession of much, and upon whom the whole property of the family was entailed. "Nevertheless if I can prevent it, – without quarrelling either with one or the other, without saying a hard word, – I shall do so."

"It will be your bounden duty."

"It is always a man's bounden duty to do what is right. The difficulty is in seeing the way." After this the Marchioness was silent. What she had gained by speaking was very little, – little or nothing. The nature of the opposition he proposed was almost as bad as a sanction, and the reasons he gave for agreeing with her were as hurtful to her feelings as though they had been advanced on the other side. Even the Marquis was not sufficiently struck with horror at the idea that a daughter of his should have condescended to listen to love from a Post Office clerk!

On the day before they started Hampstead was enabled to be alone with his sister for a few minutes. "What an absurdity it is," she said, laughing, – "this running away."

"It is what you must have expected."

"But not the less absurd. Of course I shall go. Just at the moment I have no alternative; as I should have none if they threatened to lock me up, till I got somebody to take my case in hand. But I am as free to do what I please with myself as is papa."

"He has got money."

"But he is not, therefore, to be a tyrant."

"Yes he is; – over an unmarried daughter who has got none. We cannot but obey those on whom we are dependent."

"What I mean is, that carrying me away can do no good. You don't suppose, John, that I shall give him up after having once brought myself to say the word! It was very difficult to say; – but ten times harder to be unsaid. I am quite determined, – and quite satisfied."

"But they are not."

"As regards my father, I am very sorry. As to mamma, she and I are so different in all our thinking that I know beforehand that whatever I might do would displease her. It cannot be helped. Whether it be good or bad I cannot be made such as she is. She came too late. You will not turn against me, John?"

"I rather think I shall."

"John!"

"I may rather say that I have. I do not think your engagement to be wise."

"But it has been made," said she.

"And may be unmade."

"No; – unless by him."

"I shall tell him that it ought to be unmade, – for the happiness of both of you."

"He will not believe you."

Then Lord Hampstead shrugged his shoulders, and thus the conversation was finished.

It was now about the end of June, and the Marquis felt it to be a grievance that he should be carried away from the charm of political life in London. In the horror of the first revelation he had yielded, but had since begun to feel that too much was being done in withdrawing him from Parliament. The Conservatives were now in; but during the last Liberal Government he had consented so far to trammel himself with the bonds of office as to become Privy Seal for the concluding six months of its existence, and therefore felt his own importance in a party point of view. But having acceded to his wife he could not now go back, and was sulky. On the evening before their departure he was going to dine out with some of the party. His wife's heart was too deep in the great family question for any gaiety, and she intended to remain at home, – and to look after the final packings-up for the little lords.

"I really do not see why you should not have gone without me," the Marquis said, poking his head out of his dressing-room.

"Impossible," said the Marchioness.

"I don't see it at all."

"If he should appear on the scene ready to carry her off, what should I have done?"

Then the Marquis drew his head in again, and went on with his dressing. What, indeed, could he do himself if the man were to appear on the scene, and if his daughter should declare herself willing to go off with him?

When the Marquis went to his dinner party the Marchioness dined with Lady Frances. There was no one else present but the two servants who waited on them, and hardly a word was spoken. The Marchioness felt that an awful silence was becoming in the situation. Lady Frances merely determined more strongly than ever that the situation should not last very long. She would go abroad now, but would let her father understand that the kind of life planned out for her was one that she could not endure. If she was supposed to have disgraced her position, let her be sent away.

As soon as the melancholy meal was over the two ladies separated, the Marchioness going up-stairs among her own children. A more careful, more affectionate, perhaps, I may say, a more idolatrous mother never lived. Every little want belonging to them, – for even little lords have wants, – was a care to her. To see them washed and put in and out of their duds was perhaps the greatest pleasure of her life. To her eyes they were pearls of aristocratic loveliness; and, indeed, they were fine healthy bairns, clean-limbed, bright-eyed, with grand appetites, and never cross as long as they were allowed either to romp and make a noise, or else to sleep. Lord Frederic, the eldest, was already in words of two syllables, and sometimes had a bad time with them. Lord Augustus was the owner of great ivory letters of which he contrived to make playthings. Lord Gregory had not as yet been introduced to any of the torments of education. There was an old English clergyman attached to the family who was supposed to be their tutor, but whose chief duty consisted in finding conversation for the Marquis when there was no one else to talk to him. There was also a French governess and a Swiss maid. But as they both learned English quicker than the children learned French, they were not serviceable for the purpose at first intended. The Marchioness had resolved that her children should talk three or four languages as fluently as their own, and that they should learn them without any of the agonies generally incident to tuition. In that she had not as yet succeeded.

She seated herself for a few minutes among the boxes and portmanteaus in the midst of which the children were disporting themselves prior to their final withdrawal to bed. No mother was ever so blessed, – if only, if only! "Mamma," said Lord Frederic, "where's Jack?" "Jack" absolutely was intended to signify Lord Hampstead.

"Fred, did not I say that you should not call him Jack?"

"He say he is Jack," declared Lord Augustus, rolling up in between his mother's knees with an impetus which would have upset her had she not been a strong woman and accustomed to these attacks.

"That is only because he is good-natured, and likes to play with you. You should call him Hampstead."

"Mamma, wasn't he christianed?" asked the eldest.

"Yes, of course he was christened, my dear," said the mother, sadly, – thinking how very much of the ceremony had been thrown away upon the unbelieving, godless young man. Then she superintended the putting to bed, thinking what a terrible bar to her happiness had been created by that first unfortunate marriage of her husband's. Oh, that she should be stepmother to a daughter who desired to fling herself into the arms of a clerk in the Post Office! And then that an "unchristianed," that an infidel, republican, un-English, heir should stand in the way of her darling boy! She had told herself a thousand times that the Devil was speaking to her when she had dared to wish that, – that Lord Hampstead was not there! She had put down the wish in her heart very often, telling herself that it came from the Devil. She had made a faint struggle to love the young man, – which had resulted in constrained civility. It would have been unnatural to her to love any but her own. Now she thought how glorious her Frederic would have been as Lord Hampstead, – and how infinitely better it would have been, how infinitely better it would be, for all the Traffords, for all the nobles of England, and for the country at large! But in thinking this she knew that she was a sinner, and she endeavoured to crush the sin. Was it not tantamount to wishing that her husband's son was – dead?

CHAPTER IV

LADY FRANCES

There is something so sad in the condition of a girl who is known to be in love, and has to undergo the process of being made ashamed of it by her friends, that one wonders that any young woman can bear it. Most young women cannot bear it, and either give up their love or say that they do. A young man who has got into debt, or been plucked, – or even when he has declared himself to be engaged to a penniless young lady, which is worse, – is supposed merely to have gone after his kind, and done what was to be expected of him. The mother never looks at him with that enduring anger by which she intends to wear out the daughter's constancy. The father frets and fumes, pays the debts, prepares the way for a new campaign, and merely shrugs his shoulders about the proposed marriage, which he regards simply as an impossibility. But the girl is held to have disgraced herself. Though it is expected of her, or at any rate hoped, that she will get married in due time, yet the falling in love with a man, – which is, we must suppose, a preliminary step to marriage, – is a wickedness. Even among the ordinary Joneses and Browns of the world we see that it is so. When we are intimate enough with the Browns to be aware of Jane Brown's passion, we understand the father's manner and the mother's look. The very servants about the house are aware that she has given way to her feelings, and treat her accordingly. Her brothers are ashamed of her. Whereas she, if her brother be in love with Jemima Jones, applauds him, sympathizes with him, and encourages him.

There are heroines who live through it all, and are true to the end. There are many pseudo-heroines who intend to do so, but break down. The pseudo-heroine generally breaks down when young Smith, – not so very young, – has been taken in as a partner by Messrs. Smith and Walker, and comes in her way, in want of a wife. The persecution is, at any rate, so often efficacious as to make fathers and mothers feel it to be their duty to use it. It need not be said here how high above the ways of the Browns soared the ideas of the Marchioness of Kingsbury. But she felt that it would be her duty to resort to the measures which they would have adopted, and she was determined that the Marquis should do the same. A terrible evil, an incurable evil, had already been inflicted. Many people, alas, would know that Lady Frances had disgraced herself. She, the Marchioness, had been unable to keep the secret from her own sister, Lady Persiflage, and Lady Persiflage would undoubtedly tell it to others. Her own lady's maid knew it. The Marquis himself was the most indiscreet of men. Hampstead would see no cause for secrecy. Roden would, of course, boast of it all through the Post Office. The letter-carriers who attended upon Park Lane would have talked the matter over with the footmen at the area gate. There could be no hope of secrecy. All the young marquises and unmarried earls would know that Lady Frances Trafford was in love with the "postman." But time, and care, and strict precaution might prevent the final misery of a marriage. Then, if the Marquis would be generous, some young Earl, or at least a Baron, might be induced to forget the "postman," and to take the noble lily, soiled, indeed, but made gracious by gilding. Her darlings must suffer. Any excess of money given would be at their cost. But anything would be better than a Post Office clerk for a brother-in-law.

Such were the views as to their future life with which the Marchioness intended to accompany her stepdaughter to their Saxon residence. The Marquis, with less of a fixed purpose, was inclined in the same way. "I quite agree that they should be separated; – quite," he said. "It mustn't be heard of; – certainly not; certainly not. Not a shilling, – unless she behaves herself properly. Of course she will have her fortune, but not to bestow it in such a manner as that."

His own idea was to see them all settled in the château, and then, if possible, to hurry back to London before the season was quite at an end. His wife laid strong injunctions on him as to absolute secrecy, having forgotten, probably, that she herself had told the whole story to Lady Persiflage. The

Marquis quite agreed. Secrecy was indispensable. As for him, was it likely that he should speak of a matter so painful and so near to his heart! Nevertheless he told it all to Mr. Greenwood, the gentleman who acted as tutor, private secretary, and chaplain in the house.

Lady Frances had her own ideas, as to this going away and living abroad, very strongly developed in her mind. They intended to persecute her till she should change her purpose. She intended to persecute them till they should change theirs. She knew herself too well, she thought, to have any fear as to her own persistency. That the Marchioness should persuade, or even persecute, her out of an engagement to which she had assented, she felt to be quite out of the question. In her heart she despised the Marchioness, – bearing with her till the time should come in which she would be delivered from the nuisance of surveillance under such a woman. In her father she trusted much, knowing him to be affectionate, believing him to be still opposed to those aristocratic dogmas which were a religion to the Marchioness, – feeling probably that in his very weakness she would find her best strength. If her stepmother should in truth become cruel, then her father would take her part against his wife. There must be a period of discomfort, – say, six months; and then would come the time in which she would be able to say, "I have tried myself, and know my own mind, and I intend to go home and get myself married." She would take care that her declaration to this effect should not come as a sudden blow. The six months should be employed in preparing for it. The Marchioness might be persistent in preaching her views during the six months, but so would Lady Frances be persistent in preaching hers.

She had not accepted the man's love when he had offered it, without thinking much about it. The lesson which she had heard in her earlier years from her mother had sunk deep into her very soul, – much more deeply than the teacher of those lessons had supposed. That teacher had never intended to inculcate as a doctrine that rank is a mistake. No one had thought more than she of the incentives provided by rank to high duty. "Noblesse oblige." The lesson had been engraved on her heart, and might have been read in all the doings of her life. But she had endeavoured to make it understood by her children that they should not be over-quick to claim the privileges of rank. Too many such would be showered on them, – too many for their own welfare. Let them never be greedy to take with outstretched hands those good things of which Chance had provided for them so much more than their fair share. Let them remember that after all there was no virtue in having been born a child to a Marquis. Let them remember how much more it was to be a useful man, or a kind woman. So the lessons had been given, – and had gone for more than had been intended. Then all the renown of their father's old politics assisted, – the re-election of the drunken tailor, – the jeerings of friends who were high enough and near enough to dare to jeer, – the convictions of childhood that it was a fine thing, because peculiar for a Marquis and his belongings, to be Radical; – and, added to this, there was contempt for the specially noble graces of their stepmother. Thus it was that Lord Hampstead was brought to his present condition of thinking, – and Lady Frances.

Her convictions were quite as strong as his, though they did not assume the same form. With a girl, at an early age, all her outlookings into the world have something to do with love and its consequences. When a young man takes his leaning either towards Liberalism or Conservatism he is not at all actuated by any feeling as to how some possible future young woman may think on the subject. But the girl, if she entertains such ideas at all, dreams of them as befitting the man whom she may some day hope to love. Should she, a Protestant, become a Roman Catholic and then a nun, she feels that in giving up her hope for a man's love she is making the greatest sacrifice in her power for the Saviour she is taking to her heart. If she devotes herself to music, or the pencil, or to languages, the effect which her accomplishments may have on some beau ideal of manhood is present to her mind. From the very first she is dressing herself unconsciously in the mirror of a man's eyes. Quite unconsciously, all this had been present to Lady Frances as month after month and year after year she had formed her strong opinions. She had thought of no man's love, – had thought but little of loving any man, – but in her meditations as to the weaknesses and vanity of rank there had always

been present that idea, – how would it be with her if such a one should ask for her hand, such a one as she might find among those of whom she dreamed as being more noble than Dukes, even though they were numbered among the world's proletaries? Then she had told herself that if any such a one should come, – if at any time any should be allowed by herself to come, – he should be estimated by his merits, whether Duke or proletary. With her mind in such a state she had of course been prone to receive kindly the overtures of her brother's friend.

What was there missing in him that a girl should require? It was so that she had asked herself the question. As far as manners were concerned, this man was a gentleman. She was quite sure of that. Whether proletary or not, there was nothing about him to offend the taste of the best-born of ladies. That he was better educated than any of the highly-bred young men she saw around her, she was quite sure. He had more to talk about than others. Of his birth and family she knew nothing, but rather prided herself in knowing nothing, because of that doctrine of hers that a man is to be estimated only by what he is himself, and not at all by what he may derive from others. Of his personal appearance, which went far with her, she was very proud. He was certainly a handsome young man, and endowed with all outward gifts of manliness: easy in his gait, but not mindful of it, with motions of his body naturally graceful but never studied, with his head erect, with a laugh in his eye, well-made as to his hands and feet. Neither his intellect nor his political convictions would have recommended a man to her heart, unless there had been something in the outside to please her eye, and from the first moment in which she had met him he had never been afraid of her, – had ventured when he disagreed from her to laugh at her, and even to scold her. There is no barrier in a girl's heart so strong against love as the feeling that the man in question stands in awe of her.

She had taken some time before she had given him her answer, and had thought much of the perils before her. She had known that she could not divest herself of her rank. She had acknowledged to herself that, whether it was for good or bad, a Marquis's daughter could not be like another girl. She owed much to her father, much to her brothers, something even to her stepmother. But was the thing she proposed to do of such a nature as to be regarded as an evil to her family? She could see that there had been changes in the ways of the world during the last century, – changes continued from year to year. Rank was not so high as it used to be, – and in consequence those without rank not so low. The Queen's daughter had married a subject. Lords John and Lords Thomas were every day going into this and the other business. There were instances enough of ladies of title doing the very thing which she proposed to herself. Why should a Post Office clerk be lower than another?

Then came the great question, whether it behoved her to ask her father. Girls in general ask their mother, and send the lover to the father. She had no mother. She was quite sure that she would not leave her happiness in the hands of the present Marchioness. Were she to ask her father she knew that the matter would be at once settled against her. Her father was too much under the dominion of his wife to be allowed to have an opinion of his own on such a matter. So she declared to herself, and then determined that she would act on her own responsibility. She would accept the man, and then take the first opportunity of telling her stepmother what she had done. And so it was. It was only early on that morning that she had given her answer to George Roden, – and early on that morning she had summoned up her courage, and told her whole story.

The station to which she was taken was a large German schloss, very comfortably arranged, with the mountain as a background and the River Elbe running close beneath its terraces, on which the Marquis had spent some money, and made it a residence to be envied by the eyes of all passers-by. It had been bought for its beauty in a freak, but had never been occupied for more than a week at a time till this occasion. Under other circumstances Lady Frances would have been as happy here as the day was long, and had often expressed a desire to be allowed to stay for a while at Königsgraaf. But now, though she made an attempt to regard their sojourn in the place as one of the natural events of their life, she could not shake off the idea of a prison. The Marchioness was determined that the idea of a prison should not be shaken off. In the first few days she said not a word about the objectionable

lover, nor did the Marquis. That had been settled between them. But neither was anything said on any other subject. There was a sternness in every motion, and a grim silence seemed to preside in the château, except when the boys were present, – and an attempt was made to separate her from her brothers as much as possible, which she was more inclined to resent than any other ill usage which was adopted towards her. After about a fortnight it was announced that the Marquis was to return to London. He had received letters from "the party" which made it quite necessary that he should be there. When this was told to Lady Frances not a word was said as to the probable duration of their own stay at the château.

"Papa," she said, "you are going back to London?"

"Yes, my dear. My presence in town is imperatively necessary."

"How long are we to stay here?"

"How long?"

"Yes, papa. I like Königsgraaf very much. I always thought it the prettiest place I know. But I do not like looking forward to staying here without knowing when I am to go away."

"You had better ask your mamma, my dear."

"Mamma never says anything to me. It would be no good my asking her. Papa, you ought to tell me something before you go away."

"Tell you what?"

"Or let me tell you something."

"What do you want to tell me, Frances?" In saying this he assumed his most angry tone and sternest countenance, – which, however, were not very angry or very stern, and had no effect in frightening his daughter. He did not, in truth, wish to say a word about the Post Office clerk before he made his escape, and would have been very glad to frighten her enough to make her silent had that been possible.

"Papa, I want you to know that it will do no good shutting me up there."

"Nobody shuts you up."

"I mean here in Saxony. Of course I shall stay for some time, but you cannot expect that I shall remain here always."

"Who has talked about always?"

"I understand that I am brought here to be – out of Mr. Roden's way."

"I would rather not speak of that young man."

"But, papa, – if he is to be my husband – "

"He is not to be your husband."

"It will be so, papa, though I should be kept here ever so long. That is what I want you to understand. Having given my word, – and so much more than my word, – I certainly shall not go back from it. I can understand that you should carry me off here so as to try and wean me from it – "

"It is quite out of the question; impossible!"

"No, papa. If he choose, – and I choose, – no one can prevent us." As she said this she looked him full in the face.

"Do you mean to say that you owe no obedience to your parents?"

"To you, papa, of course I owe obedience, – to a certain extent. There does come a time, I suppose, in which a daughter may use her own judgment as to her own happiness."

"And disgrace all her family?"

"I do not think that I shall disgrace mine. What I want you to understand, papa, is this, – that you will not ensure my obedience by keeping me here. I think I should be more likely to be submissive at home. There is an idea in enforced control which is hardly compatible with obedience. I don't suppose you will lock me up."

"You have no right to talk to me in that way."

"I want to explain that our being here can do no good. When you are gone mamma and I will only be very unhappy together. She won't talk to me, and will look at me as though I were a poor lost creature. I don't think that I am a lost creature at all, but I shall be just as much lost here as though I were at home in England."

"When you come to talking you are as bad as your brother," said the Marquis as he left her. Only that the expression was considered to be unfit for female ears, he would have accused her of "talking the hind legs off a dog."

When he was gone the life at Königsgraaf became very sombre indeed. Mr. George Roden's name was never mentioned by either of the ladies. There was the Post Office, no doubt, and the Post Office was at first left open to her; but there soon came a time in which she was deprived of this consolation. With such a guardian as the Marchioness, it was not likely that free correspondence should be left open to her.

CHAPTER V

MRS. RODEN

George Roden, the Post Office clerk, lived with his mother at Holloway, about three miles from his office. There they occupied a small house which had been taken when their means were smaller even than at present; – for this had been done before the young man had made his way into the official elysium of St. Martin's-le-Grand. This had been effected about five years since, during which time he had risen to an income of £170. As his mother had means of her own amounting to about double as much, and as her personal expenses were small, they were enabled to live in comfort. She was a lady of whom none around knew anything, but there had gone abroad a rumour among her neighbours that there was something of a mystery attached to her, and there existed a prevailing feeling that she was at any rate a well-born lady. Few people at Holloway knew either her or her son. But there were some who condescended to watch them, and to talk about them. It was ascertained that Mrs. Roden usually went to church on Sunday morning, but that her son never did so. It was known, too, that a female friend called upon her regularly once a week; and it was noted in the annals of Holloway that this female friend came always at three o'clock on a Monday. Intelligent observers had become aware that the return visit was made in the course of the week, but not always made on one certain day; – from which circumstances various surmises arose as to the means, whereabouts, and character of the visitor. Mrs. Roden always went in a cab. The lady, whose name was soon known to be Mrs. Vincent, came in a brougham, which for a time was supposed to be her own peculiar property. The man who drove it was so well arrayed as to hat, cravat, and coat, as to leave an impression that he must be a private servant; but one feminine observer, keener than others, saw the man on an unfortunate day descend from his box at a public-house, and knew at once that the trousers were the trousers of a hired driver from a livery-stable. Nevertheless it was manifest that Mrs. Vincent was better to do in the world than Mrs. Roden, because she could afford to hire a would-be private carriage; and it was imagined also that she was a lady accustomed to remain at home of an afternoon, probably with the object of receiving visitors, because Mrs. Roden made her visits indifferently on Thursday, Friday, or Saturday. It was suggested also that Mrs. Vincent was no friend to the young clerk, because it was well known that he was never there when the lady came, and it was supposed that he never accompanied his mother on the return visits. He had, indeed, on one occasion been seen to get out of the cab with his mother at their own door, but it was strongly surmised that she had then picked him up at the Post Office. His official engagements might, indeed, have accounted for all this naturally; but the ladies of Holloway were well aware that the humanity of the Postmaster-General allowed a Saturday half-holiday to his otherwise overworked officials, and they were sure that so good a son as George Roden would occasionally have accompanied his mother, had there been no especial reason against it. From this further surmises arose. Some glance had fallen from the eye of the visitor lady, or perhaps some chance word had been heard from her lips, which created an opinion that she was religious. She probably objected to George Roden because he was anti-religious, or at any rate anti-church, meeting, or chapel-going. It had become quite decided at Holloway that Mrs. Vincent would not put up with the young clerk's infidelity. And it was believed that there had been "words" between the two ladies themselves on the subject of religion, – as to which probably there was no valid foundation, it being an ascertained fact that the two maids who were employed by Mrs. Roden were never known to tell anything of their mistress.

It was decided at Holloway that Mrs. Roden and Mrs. Vincent were cousins. They were like enough in face and near enough in age to have been sisters; but old Mrs. Demijohn, of No. 10, Paradise Row, had declared that had George been a nephew his aunt would not have wearied in her

endeavour to convert him. In such a case there would have been intimacy in spite of disapproval. But a first cousin once removed might be allowed to go to the Mischief in his own way. Mrs. Vincent was supposed to be the elder cousin, – perhaps three or four years the elder, – and to have therefore something of an authority, but not much. She was stouter, too, less careful to hide what grey hairs years might have produced, and showing manifestly by the nature of her bonnets and shawls that she despised the vanities of the world. Not but that she was always handsomely dressed, as Mrs. Demijohn was very well aware. Less than a hundred a year could not have clothed Mrs. Vincent, whereas Mrs. Roden, as all the world perceived, did not spend half the money. But who does not know that a lady may repudiate vanity in rich silks and cultivate the world in woollen stuffs, or even in calico? Nothing was more certain to Mrs. Demijohn than that Mrs. Vincent was severe, and that Mrs. Roden was soft and gentle. It was assumed also that the two ladies were widows, as no husband or sign of a husband had appeared on the scene. Mrs. Vincent showed manifestly from her deportment, as well as from her title, that she had been a married woman. As to Mrs. Roden, of course, there was no doubt.

In regard to all this the reader may take the settled opinions of Mrs. Demijohn and of Holloway as being nearly true. Riddles may be read very accurately by those who will give sufficient attention and ample time to the reading of them. They who will devote twelve hours a day to the unravelling of acrostics, may discover nearly all the enigmas of a weekly newspaper with a separate editor for such difficulties. Mrs. Demijohn had almost arrived at the facts. The two ladies were second cousins. Mrs. Vincent was a widow, was religious, was austere, was fairly well off, and had quarrelled altogether with her distant relative George of the Post Office. Mrs. Roden, though she went to church, was not so well given to religious observances as her cousin would have her. Hence words had come which Mrs. Roden had borne with equanimity, but had received without effect. Nevertheless the two women loved each other dearly, and it was a great part of the life of each of them that these weekly visits should be made. There was one great fact, as to which Mrs. Demijohn and Holloway were in the wrong. Mrs. Roden was not a widow.

It was not till the Kingsburys had left London that George told his mother of his engagement. She was well acquainted with his intimacy with Lord Hampstead, and knew that he had been staying at Hendon Hall with the Kingsbury family. There had been no reticence between the mother and son as to these people, in regard to whom she had frequently cautioned him that there was danger in such associations with people moving altogether in a different sphere. In answer to this the son had always declared that he did not see the danger. He had not run after Lord Hampstead. Circumstances had thrown them together. They had originally met each other in a small political debating society, and gradually friendship had grown. The lord had sought him, and not he the lord. That, according to his own idea, had been right. Difference in rank, difference in wealth, difference in social regard required as much as that. He, when he had discovered who was the young man whom he had met, stood off somewhat, and allowed the friendship to spring from the other side. He had been slow to accept favour, – even at first to accept hospitality. But whenever the ice had, as he said, been thoroughly broken, then he thought that there was no reason why they should not pull each other out of the cold water together. As for danger, what was there to fear? The Marchioness would not like it? Very probably. The Marchioness was not very much to Hampstead, and was nothing at all to him. The Marquis would not really like it. Perhaps not. But in choosing a friend a young man is not supposed to follow altogether his father's likings, – much less need the chosen friend follow them. But the Marquis, as George pointed out to his mother, was hardly more like other marquises than the son was like other marquis's sons. There was a Radical strain in the family, as was made clear by that tailor who was still sitting for the borough of Edgeware. Mrs. Roden, however, though she lived so much alone, seeing hardly anything of the world except as Mrs. Vincent might be supposed to represent the world, had learned that the feelings and political convictions of the Marquis were hardly what they had been before he had married his present wife. "You may be sure, George," she had said, "that like to like is as safe a motto for friendship as it is for love."

"Not a doubt, mother," he replied; "but before you act upon it you must define 'like.' What makes two men like – or a man and a woman?"

"Outside circumstances of the world more than anything else," she answered, boldly.

"I would fancy that the inside circumstances of the mind would have more to do with it." She shook her head at him, pleasantly, softly, and lovingly, – but still with a settled purpose of contradiction. "I have admitted all along," he continued, "that low birth – "

"I have said nothing of low birth!" Here was a point on which there did not exist full confidence between the mother and son, but in regard to which the mother was always attempting to reassure the son, while he would assume something against himself which she would not allow to pass without an attempt of faint denial.

"That birth low by comparison," he continued, going on with his sentence, "should not take upon itself as much as may be allowed to nobility by descent is certain. Though the young prince may be superior in his gifts to the young shoeblack, and would best show his princeliness by cultivating the shoeblack, still the shoeblack should wait to be cultivated. The world has created a state of things in which the shoeblack cannot do otherwise without showing an arrogance and impudence by which he could achieve nothing."

"Which, too, would make him black his shoes very badly."

"No doubt. That will have to come to pass any way, because the nobler employments to which he will be raised by the appreciating prince will cause him to drop his shoes."

"Is Lord Hampstead to cause you to drop the Post Office?"

"Not at all. He is not a prince nor am I a shoeblack. Though we are far apart, we are not so far apart as to make such a change essential to our acquaintance. But I was saying – I don't know what I was saying."

"You were defining what 'like' means. But people always get muddled when they attempt definitions," said the mother.

"Though it depends somewhat on externals, it has more to do with internals. That is what I mean. A man and woman might live together with most enduring love, though one had been noble and wealthy and the other poor and a nobody. But a thorough brute and a human being of fine conditions can hardly live together and love each other."

"That is true," she said. "That I fear is true."

"I hope it is true."

"It has often to be tried, generally to the great detriment of the better nature."

All this, however, had been said before George Roden had spoken a word to Lady Frances, and had referred only to the friendship as it was growing between her son and the young lord.

The young lord had come on various occasions to the house at Holloway, and had there made himself thoroughly pleasant to his friend's mother. Lord Hampstead had a way of making himself pleasant in which he never failed when he chose to exercise it. And he did exercise it almost always, – always, indeed, unless he was driven to be courteously disagreeable by opposition to his own peculiar opinion. In shooting, fishing, and other occupations not approved of, he would fall into a line of argument, seemingly and indeed truly good-humoured, which was apt, however, to be aggravating to his opponent. In this way he would make himself thoroughly odious to his stepmother, with whom he had not one sentiment in common. In other respects his manners were invariably sweet, with an assumption of intimacy which was not unbecoming; and thus he had greatly recommended himself to Mrs. Roden. Who does not know the fashion in which the normal young man conducts himself when he is making a morning call? He has come there because he means to be civil. He would not be there unless he wished to make himself popular. He is carrying out some recognized purpose of society. He would fain be agreeable if it were possible. He would enjoy the moment if he could. But it is clearly his conviction that he is bound to get through a certain amount of altogether uninteresting conversation, and then to get himself out of the room with as little awkwardness as may be. Unless there be a pretty

girl, and chance favour him with her special companionship, he does not for a moment suppose that any social pleasure is to be enjoyed. That rational amusement can be got out of talking to Mrs. Jones does not enter into his mind. And yet Mrs. Jones is probably a fair specimen of that general society in which every one wishes to mingle. Society is to him generally made up of several parts, each of which is a pain, though the total is deemed to be desirable. The pretty girl episode is no doubt an exception, – though that also has its pains when matter for conversation does not come readily, or when conversation, coming too readily, is rebuked. The morning call may be regarded as a period of unmitigated agony. Now it has to be asserted on Lord Hampstead's behalf that he could talk with almost any Mrs. Jones freely and pleasantly while he remained, and take his departure without that dislocating struggle which is too common. He would make himself at ease, and discourse as though he had known the lady all his life. There is nothing which a woman likes so much as this, and by doing this Lord Hampstead had done much, if not to overcome, at any rate to quiet the sense of danger of which Mrs. Roden had spoken.

But this refers to a time in which nothing was known at Holloway as to Lady Frances. Very little had been said of the family between the mother and son. Of the Marquis George Roden had wished to think well, but had hardly succeeded. Of the stepmother he had never even wished to do so. She had from the first been known to him as a woman thoroughly wedded to aristocratic prejudices, – who regarded herself as endowed with certain privileges which made her altogether superior to other human beings. Hampstead himself could not even pretend to respect her. Of her Roden had said very little to his mother, simply speaking of her as the Marchioness, who was in no way related to Hampstead. Of Lady Frances he had simply said that there was a girl there endowed with such a spirit, that of all girls of her class she must surely be the best and noblest. Then his mother had shuddered inwardly, thinking that here too there might be possible danger; but she had shrunk from speaking of the special danger even to her son.

"How has the visit gone?" Mrs. Roden asked, when her son had already been some hours in the house. This was after that last visit to Hendon Hall, in which Lady Frances had promised to become his wife.

"Pretty well, taking it altogether."

"I know that something has disappointed you."

"No, indeed, nothing. I have been somewhat abashed."

"What have they said to you?" she asked.

"Very little but what was kind, – just one word at the last."

"Something, I know, has hurt you," said the mother.

"Lady Kingsbury has made me aware that she dislikes me thoroughly. It is very odd how one person can do that to another almost without a word spoken."

"I told you, George, that there would be danger in going there."

"There would be no danger in that if there were nothing more."

"What more is there then?"

"There would be no danger in that if Lady Kingsbury was simply Hampstead's stepmother."

"What more is she?"

"She is stepmother also to Lady Frances. Oh, mother!"

"George, what has happened?" she asked.

"I have asked Lady Frances to be my wife."

"Your wife?"

"And she has promised."

"Oh, George!"

"Yes, indeed, mother. Now you can perceive that she indeed may be a danger. When I think of the power of tormenting her stepdaughter which may rest in her hands I can hardly forgive myself for doing as I have done."

"And the Marquis?" asked the mother.

"I know nothing as yet as to what his feelings may be. I have had no opportunity of speaking to him since the little occurrence took place. A word escaped me, an unthought-of word, which her ladyship overheard, and for which she rebuked me. Then I left the house."

"What word?"

"Just a common word of greeting, a word that would be common among dear friends, but which, coming from me to her, told all the story. I forgot the prefix which was due from such a one as I am to such as she is. I can understand with what horror I must henceforward be regarded by Lady Kingsbury."

"What will the Marquis say?"

"I shall be a horror to him also, – an unutterable horror. The idea of contact so vile will cure him at once of all his little Radical longings."

"And Hampstead?"

"Nothing, I think, can cure Hampstead of his convictions; – but even he is not well pleased."

"Has he quarrelled with you?"

"No, not that. He is too noble to quarrel on such offence. He is too noble even to take offence on such a cause. But he refuses to believe that good will come of it. And you, mother?"

"Oh, George, I doubt, I doubt."

"You will not congratulate me?"

"What am I to say? I fear more than I can hope."

"When I tell you that she is noble at all points, noble in heart, noble in beauty, noble in that dignity which a woman should always carry with her, that she is as sweet a creature as God ever created to bless a man with, will you not then congratulate me?"

"I would her birth were other than it is," said the mother.

"I would have her altered in nothing," said the son. "Her birth is the smallest thing about her, but such as she is I would have her altered in nothing."

CHAPTER VI

PARADISE ROW

About a fortnight after George Roden's return to Holloway, – a fortnight passed by the mother in meditation as to her son's glorious but dangerous love, – Lord Hampstead called at No. 11, Paradise Row. Mrs. Roden lived at No. 11, and Mrs. Demijohn lived at No. 10, the house opposite. There had already been some discussion in Holloway about Lord Hampstead, but nothing had as yet been discovered. He might have been at the house on various previous occasions, but had come in so unpretending a manner as hardly to have done more than to cause himself to be regarded as a stranger in Holloway. He was known to be George's friend, because he had been first seen coming with George on a Saturday afternoon. He had also called on a Sunday and walked away, down the Row, with George. Mrs. Demijohn concluded that he was a brother clerk in the Post Office, and had expressed an opinion that "it did not signify," meaning thereby to imply that Holloway need not interest itself about the stranger. A young Government clerk would naturally have another young Government clerk for his friend. Twice Lord Hampstead had come down in an omnibus from Islington; on which occasion it was remarked that as he did not come on Saturday there must be something wrong. A clerk, with Saturday half-holidays, ought not to be away from his work on Mondays and Tuesdays. Mrs. Duffer, who was regarded in Paradise Row as being very inferior to Mrs. Demijohn, suggested that the young man might, perhaps, not be a Post Office clerk. This, however, was ridiculed. Where should a Post Office clerk find his friends except among Post Office clerks? "Perhaps he is coming after the widow," suggested Mrs. Duffer. But this also was received with dissent. Mrs. Demijohn declared that Post Office clerks knew better than to marry widows with no more than two or three hundred a year, and old enough to be their mothers. "But why does he come on a Tuesday?" asked Mrs. Duffer; "and why does he come alone?" "Oh you dear old Mrs. Duffer!" said Clara Demijohn, the old lady's niece, naturally thinking that it might not be unnatural that handsome young men should come to Paradise Row.

All this, however, had been as nothing to what occurred in the Row on the occasion which is now about to be described.

"Aunt Jemima," exclaimed Clara Demijohn, looking out of the window, "there's that young man come again to Number Eleven, riding on horseback, with a groom behind to hold him!"

"Groom to hold him!" exclaimed Mrs. Demijohn, jumping, with all her rheumatism, quickly from her seat, and trotting to the window.

"You look if there aint, – with boots and breeches."

"It must be another," said Mrs. Demijohn, after a pause, during which she had been looking intently at the empty saddle of the horse which the groom was leading slowly up and down the Row.

"It's the same that came with young Roden that Saturday," said Clara; "only he hadn't been walking, and he looked nicer than ever."

"You can hire them all, horses and groom," said Mrs. Demijohn; "but he'd never make his money last till the end of the month if he went on in that way."

"They aint hired. They're his own," said Clara.

"How do you know, Miss?"

"By the colour of his boots, and the way he touched his hat, and because his gloves are clean. He aint a Post Office clerk at all, Aunt Jemima."

"I wonder whether he can be coming after the widow," said Mrs. Demijohn. After this Clara escaped out of the room, leaving her aunt fixed at the window. Such a sight as that groom and those two horses moving up and down together had never been seen in the Row before. Clara put on her

hat and ran across hurriedly to Mrs. Duffer, who lived at No. 15, next door but one to Mrs. Roden. But she was altogether too late to communicate the news as news.

"I knew he wasn't a Post Office clerk," said Mrs. Duffer, who had seen Lord Hampstead ride up the street; "but who he is, or why, or wherefore, it is beyond me to conjecture. But I never will give up my opinion again, talking to your aunt. I suppose she holds out still that he's a Post Office clerk."

"She thinks he might have hired them."

"Oh my! Hired them!"

"But did you ever see anything so noble as the way he got off his horse? As for hire, that's nonsense. He's been getting off that horse every day of his life." Thus it was that Paradise Row was awe-stricken by this last coming of George Roden's friend.

It was an odd thing to do, – this riding down to Holloway. No one else would have done it, either lord or Post Office clerk; – with a hired horse or with private property. There was a hot July sunshine, and the roads across from Hendon Hall consisted chiefly of paved streets. But Lord Hampstead always did things as others would not do them. It was too far to walk in the midday sun, and therefore he rode. There would be no servant at Mrs. Roden's house to hold his horse, and therefore he brought one of his own. He did not see why a man on horseback should attract more attention at Holloway than at Hyde Park Corner. Had he guessed the effect which he and his horse would have had in Paradise Row he would have come by some other means.

Mrs. Roden at first received him with considerable embarrassment, – which he probably observed, but in speaking to her seemed not to observe. "Very hot, indeed," he said; – "too hot for riding, as I found soon after I started. I suppose George has given up walking for the present."

"He still walks home, I think."

"If he had declared his purpose of doing so, he'd go on though he had sunstroke every afternoon."

"I hope he is not so obstinate as that, my lord."

"The most obstinate fellow I ever knew in my life! Though the world were to come to an end, he'd let it come rather than change his purpose. It's all very well for a man to keep his purpose, but he may overdo it."

"Has he been very determined lately in anything?"

"No; – nothing particular. I haven't seen him for the last week. I want him to come over and dine with me at Hendon one of these days. I'm all alone there." From this Mrs. Roden learnt that Lord Hampstead at any rate did not intend to quarrel with her son, and she learnt also that Lady Frances was no longer staying at the Hall. "I can send him home," continued the lord, "if he can manage to come down by the railway or the omnibus."

"I will give him your message, my lord."

"Tell him I start on the 21st. My yacht is at Cowes, and I shall go down there on that morning. I shall be away Heaven knows how long; – probably for a month. Vivian will be with me, and we mean to bask away our time in the Norway and Iceland seas, till he goes, like an idiot that he is, to his grouse-shooting. I should like to see George before I start. I said that I was all alone; but Vivian will be with me. George has met him before, and as they didn't cut each other's throats then I suppose they won't now."

"I will tell him all that," said Mrs. Roden.

Then there was a pause for a moment, after which Lord Hampstead went on in an altered voice. "Has he said anything to you since he was at Hendon; – as to my family, I mean?"

"He has told me something."

"I was sure he had. I should not have asked unless I had been quite sure. I know that he would tell you anything of that kind. Well?"

"What am I to say, Lord Hampstead?"

"What has he told you, Mrs. Roden?"

"He has spoken to me of your sister."

"But what has he said?"

"That he loves her."

"And that she loves him?"

"That he hopes so."

"He has said more than that, I take it. They have engaged themselves to each other."

"So I understand."

"What do you think of it, Mrs. Roden?"

"What can I think of it, Lord Hampstead? I hardly dare to think of it at all."

"Was it wise?"

"I suppose where love is concerned wisdom is not much considered."

"But people have to consider it. I hardly know how to think of it. To my idea it was not wise. And yet there is no one living whom I esteem so much as your son."

"You are very good, my lord."

"There is no goodness in it, – any more than in his liking for me. But I can indulge my fancy without doing harm to others. Lady Kingsbury thinks that I am an idiot because I do not live exclusively with counts and countesses; but in declining to take her advice I do not injure her much. She can talk about me and my infatuations among her friends with a smile. She will not be tortured by any feeling of disgrace. So with my father. He has an idea that I am out-Heroding Herod, he having been Herod; – but there is nothing bitter in it to him. Those fine young gentlemen, my brothers, who are the dearest little chicks in the world, five and six and seven years old, will be able to laugh pleasantly at their elder brother when they grow up, as they will do, among the other idle young swells of the nation. That their brother and George Roden should be always together will not even vex them. They may probably receive some benefit themselves, may achieve some diminution of the folly natural to their position, by their advantage in knowing him. In looking at it all round, as far as that goes, there is not only satisfaction to me, but a certain pride. I am doing no more than I have a right to do. Whatever counter-influence I may introduce among my own people, will be good and wholesome. Do you understand me, Mrs. Roden?"

"I think so; – very clearly. I should be dull, if I did not."

"But it becomes different when one's sister is concerned. I am thinking of the happiness of other people."

"She, I suppose, will think of her own."

"Not exclusively, I hope."

"No; not that I am sure. But a girl, when she loves – "

"Yes; that is all true. But a girl situated like Frances is bound not to, – not to sacrifice those with whom Fame and Fortune have connected her. I can speak plainly to you, Mrs. Roden, because you know what are my own opinions about many things."

"George has no sister, no girl belonging to him; but if he had, and you loved her, would you abstain from marrying her lest you should sacrifice your – connections?"

"The word has offended you?"

"Not in the least. It is a word true to the purpose in hand. I understand the sacrifice you mean. Lady Kingsbury's feelings would be – sacrificed were her daughter, – even her stepdaughter, – to become my boy's husband. She supposes that her girl's birth is superior to my boy's."

"There are so many meanings to that word 'birth.'"

"I will take it all as you mean, Lord Hampstead, and will not be offended. My boy, as he is, is no match for your sister. Both Lord and Lady Kingsbury would think that there had been – a sacrifice. It might be that those little lords would not in future years be wont to talk at their club of their brother-in-law, the Post Office clerk, as they would of some earl or some duke with whom they might have become connected. Let us pass it by, and acknowledge that there would be – a sacrifice. So there will

be should you marry below your degree. The sacrifice would be greater because it would be carried on to some future Marquis of Kingsbury. Would you practise such self-denial as that you demand from your sister?"

Lord Hampstead considered the matter a while, and then answered the question. "I do not think that the two cases would be quite analogous."

"Where is the difference?"

"There is something more delicate, more nice, requiring greater caution in the conduct of a girl than of a man."

"Quite so, Lord Hampstead. Where conduct is in question, the girl is bound to submit to stricter laws. I may explain that by saying that the girl is lost for ever who gives herself up to unlawful love, – whereas, for the man, the way back to the world's respect is only too easy, even should he, on that score, have lost aught of the world's respect. The same law runs through every act of a girl's life, as contrasted with the acts of men. But in this act, – the act now supposed of marrying a gentleman whom she loves, – your sister would do nothing which should exclude her from the respect of good men or the society of well-ordered ladies. I do not say that the marriage would be well-assorted. I do not recommend it. Though my boy's heart is dearer to me than anything else can be in the world, I can see that it may be fit that his heart should be made to suffer. But when you talk of the sacrifice which he and your sister are called on to make, so that others should be delivered from lesser sacrifices, I think you should ask what duty would require from yourself. I do not think she would sacrifice the noble blood of the Traffords more effectually than you would by a similar marriage." As she thus spoke she leant forward from her chair on the table, and looked him full in the face. And he felt, as she did so, that she was singularly handsome, greatly gifted, a woman noble to the eye and to the ear. She was pleading for her son, – and he knew that. But she had condescended to use no mean argument.

"If you will say that such a law is dominant among your class, and that it is one to which you would submit yourself, I will not repudiate it. But you shall not induce me to consent to it, by even a false idea as to the softer delicacy of the sex. That softer delicacy, with its privileges and duties, shall be made to stand for what it is worth, and to occupy its real ground. If you use it for other mock purposes, then I will quarrel with you." It was thus that she had spoken, and he understood it all.

"I am not brought in question," he said slowly.

"Cannot you put it to yourself as though you were brought in question? You will at any rate admit that my argument is just."

"I hardly know. I must think of it. Such a marriage on my part would not outrage my stepmother, as would that of my sister."

"Outrage! You speak, Lord Hampstead, as though your mother would think that your sister would have disgraced herself as a woman!"

"I am speaking of her feelings, – not of mine. It would be different were I to marry in the same degree."

"Would it? Then I think that perhaps I had better counsel George not to go to Hendon Hall."

"My sister is not there. They are all in Germany."

"He had better not go where your sister will be thought of."

"I would not quarrel with your son for all the world."

"It will be better that you should. Do not suppose that I am pleading for him." That, however, was what he did suppose, and that was what she was doing. "I have told him already that I think that the prejudices will be too hard for him, and that he had better give it up before he adds to his own misery, and perhaps to hers. What I have said has not been in the way of pleading, – but only as showing the ground on which I think that such a marriage would be inexpedient. It is not that we, or our sister, are too bad or too low for such contact; but that you, on your side, are not as yet good enough or high enough."

"I will not dispute that with you, Mrs. Roden. But you will give him my message?"

"Yes; I will give him your message."

Then Lord Hampstead, having spent a full hour in the house, took his departure and rode away.

"Just an hour," said Clara Demijohn, who was still looking out of Mrs. Duffer's window. "What can they have been talking about?"

"I think he must be making up to the widow," said Mrs. Duffer, who was so lost in surprise as to be unable to suggest any new idea.

"He'd never have come with saddle horses to do that. She wouldn't be taken by a young man spending his money in that fashion. She'd like saving ways better. But they're his own horses, and his own man, and he's no more after the widow than he's after me," said Clara, laughing.

"I wish he were, my dear."

"There may be as good as him come yet, Mrs. Duffer. I don't think so much of their having horses and grooms. When they have these things they can't afford to have wives too, – and sometimes they can't afford to pay for either." Then, having seen the last of Lord Hampstead as he rode out of the Row, she went back to her mother's house.

But Mrs. Demijohn had been making use of her time while Clara and Mrs. Duffer had been wasting theirs in mere gazing, and making vain surmises. As soon as she found herself alone the old woman got her bonnet and shawl, and going out slily into the Row, made her way down to the end of the street in the direction opposite to that in which the groom was at that moment walking the horses. There she escaped the eyes of her niece and of the neighbours, and was enabled to wait unseen till the man, in his walking, came down to the spot at which she was standing. "My young man," she said in her most winning voice, when the groom came near her.

"What is it, Mum?"

"You'd like a glass of beer, wouldn't you; – after walking up and down so long?"

"No, I wouldn't, not just at present." He knew whom he served, and from whom it would become him to take beer.

"I'd be happy to pay for a pint," said Mrs. Demijohn, fingering a fourpenny bit so that he might see it.

"Thankye, Mum; no, I takes it reg'lar when I takes it. I'm on dooty just at present."

"Your master's horses, I suppose?"

"Whose else, Mum? His lordship don't ride generally nobody's 'orses but his own."

Here was a success! And the fourpenny bit saved! His lordship! "Of course not," said Mrs. Demijohn. "Why should he?"

"Why, indeed, Mum?"

"Lord – ; Lord – ; – Lord who, is he?"

The groom poked up his hat, and scratched his head, and bethought himself. A servant generally wishes to do what honour he can to his master. This man had no desire to gratify an inquisitive old woman, but he thought it derogatory to his master and to himself to seem to deny their joint name. "'Ampstead!" he said, looking down very serenely on the lady, and then moved on, not wasting another word.

"I knew all along they were something out of the common way," said Mrs. Demijohn as soon as her niece came in.

"You haven't found out who it is, aunt?"

"You've been with Mrs. Duffer, I suppose. You two'd put your heads together for a week, and then would know nothing." It was not till quite the last thing at night that she told her secret. "He was a peer! He was Lord 'Ampstead!"

"A peer!"

"He was Lord 'Ampstead, I tell you," said Mrs. Demijohn.

"I don't believe there is such a lord," said Clara, as she took herself up to bed.

CHAPTER VII

THE POST OFFICE

When George Roden came home that evening the matter was discussed between him and his mother at great length. She was eager with him, if not to abandon his love, at any rate to understand how impossible it was that he should marry Lady Frances. She was very tender with him, full of feeling, full of compassion and sympathy; but she was persistent in declaring that no good could come from such an engagement. But he would not be deterred in the least from his resolution, nor would he accept it as possible that he should be turned from his object by the wishes of any person as long as Lady Frances was true to him. "You speak as if daughters were slaves," he said.

"So they are. So women must be; – slaves to the conventions of the world. A young woman can hardly run counter to her family on a question of marriage. She may be persistent enough to overcome objections, but that will be because the objections themselves are not strong enough to stand against her. But here the objections will be very strong."

"We will see, mother," he said. She who knew him well perceived that it would be vain to talk to him further.

"Oh, yes," he said, "I will go out to Hendon, perhaps on Sunday. That Mr. Vivian is a pleasant fellow, and as Hampstead does not wish to quarrel with me I certainly will not quarrel with him."

Roden was generally popular at his office, and had contrived to make his occupation there pleasant to himself and interesting; but he had his little troubles, as will happen to most men in all walks of life. His came to him chiefly from the ill-manners of a fellow-clerk who sat in the same room with him, and at the same desk. There were five who occupied the apartment, an elderly gentleman and four youngsters. The elderly gentleman was a quiet, civil, dull old man, who never made himself disagreeable, and was content to put up with the frivolities of youth, if they did not become too uproarious or antagonistic to discipline. When they did, he had but one word of rebuke. "Mr. Crocker, I will not have it." Beyond that he had never been known to go in the way either of reporting the misconduct of his subordinates to other superior powers, or in quarrelling with the young men himself. Even with Mr. Crocker, who no doubt was troublesome, he contrived to maintain terms of outward friendship. His name was Jerningham, and next to Mr. Jerningham in age came Mr. Crocker, by whose ill-timed witticisms our George Roden was not unfrequently made to suffer. This had sometimes gone so far that Roden had contemplated the necessity of desiring Mr. Crocker to assume that a bond of enmity had been established between them; – or in other words, that they were not "to speak" except on official subjects. But there had been an air of importance about such a proceeding of which Crocker hardly seemed to be worthy; and Roden had abstained, putting off the evil hour from day to day, but still conscious that he must do something to stop vulgarities which were distasteful to him.

The two other young men, Mr. Bobbin and Mr. Geraghty, who sat at a table by themselves and were the two junior clerks in that branch of the office, were pleasant and good-humoured enough. They were both young, and as yet not very useful to the Queen. They were apt to come late to their office, and impatient to leave it when the hour of four drew nigh. There would sometimes come a storm through the Department, moved by an unseen but powerful and unsatisfied Æolus, in which Bobbin and Geraghty would be threatened to be blown into infinite space. Minutes would be written and rumours spread about; punishments would be inflicted, and it would be given to be understood that now one and then the other would certainly have to return to his disconsolate family at the very next offence. There was a question at this very moment whether Geraghty, who had come from the sister island about twelve months since, should not be returned to King's County. No doubt he had

passed the Civil Service examiners with distinguished applause; but Æolus hated the young Crichtons who came to him with full marks, and had declared that Geraghty, though no doubt a linguist, a philosopher, and a mathematician, was not worth his salt as a Post Office clerk. But he, and Bobbin also, were protected by Mr. Jerningham, and were well liked by George Roden.

That Roden was intimate with Lord Hampstead had become known to his fellow-clerks. The knowledge of this association acted somewhat to his advantage and somewhat to his injury. His daily companions could not but feel a reflected honour in their own intimacy with the friend of the eldest son of a Marquis, and were anxious to stand well with one who lived in such high society. Such was natural; – but it was natural also that envy should show itself in ridicule, and that the lord should be thrown in the clerk's teeth when the clerk should be deemed to have given offence. Crocker, when it first became certain that Roden passed much of his time in company with a young lord, had been anxious enough to foregather with the fortunate youth who sat opposite to him; but Roden had not cared much for Crocker's society, and hence it had come to pass that Crocker had devoted himself to jeers and witticisms. Mr. Jerningham, who in his very soul respected a Marquis, and felt something of genuine awe for anything that touched the peerage, held his fortunate junior in unfeigned esteem from the moment in which he became aware of the intimacy. He did in truth think better of the clerk because the clerk had known how to make himself a companion to a lord. He did not want anything for himself. He was too old and settled in life to be desirous of new friendships. He was naturally conscientious, gentle, and unassuming. But Roden rose in his estimation, and Crocker fell, when he became assured that Roden and Lord Hampstead were intimate friends, and that Crocker had dared to jeer at the friendship. A lord is like a new hat. The one on the arm the other on the head are no evidences of mental superiority. But yet they are taken, and not incorrectly taken, as signs of merit. The increased esteem shown by Mr. Jerningham for Roden should, I think, be taken as showing Mr. Jerningham's good sense and general appreciation.

The two lads were both on Roden's side. Roden was not a rose, but he lived with a rose, and the lads of course liked the scent of roses. They did not particularly like Crocker, though Crocker had a dash about him which would sometimes win their flattery. Crocker was brave and impudent and self-assuming. They were not as yet sufficiently advanced in life to be able to despise Crocker. Crocker imposed upon them. But should there come anything of real warfare between Crocker and Roden, there could be no doubt but that they would side with Lord Hampstead's friend. Such was the state of the room at the Post Office when Crocker entered it, on the morning of Lord Hampstead's visit to Paradise Row.

Crocker was a little late. He was often a little late, – a fact of which Mr. Jerningham ought to have taken more stringent notice than he did. Perhaps Mr. Jerningham rather feared Crocker. Crocker had so read Mr. Jerningham's character as to have become aware that his senior was soft, and perhaps timid. He had so far advanced in this reading as to have learned to think that he could get the better of Mr. Jerningham by being loud and impudent. He had no doubt hitherto been successful, but there were those in the office who believed that the day might come when Mr. Jerningham would rouse himself in his wrath.

"Mr. Crocker, you are late," said Mr. Jerningham.

"Mr. Jerningham, I am late. I scorn false excuses. Geraghty would say that his watch was wrong. Bobbin would have eaten something that had disagreed with him. Roden would have been detained by his friend, Lord Hampstead." To this Roden made no reply even by a look. "For me, I have to acknowledge that I did not turn out when I was called. Of twenty minutes I have deprived my country; but as my country values so much of my time at only seven-pence-halfpenny, it is hardly worth saying much about it."

"You are frequently late."

"When the amount has come up to ten pound I will send the Postmaster-General stamps to that amount." He was now standing at his desk, opposite to Roden, to whom he made a low bow. "Mr. George Roden," he said, "I hope that his lordship is quite well."

"The only lord with whom I am acquainted is quite well; but I do not know why you should trouble yourself about him."

"I think it becoming in one who takes the Queen's pay to show a becoming anxiety as to the Queen's aristocracy. I have the greatest respect for the Marquis of Kingsbury. Have not you, Mr. Jerningham?"

"Certainly I have. But if you would go to your work instead of talking so much it would be better for everybody."

"I am at my work already. Do you think that I cannot work and talk at the same time? Bobbin, my boy, if you would open that window, do you think it would hurt your complexion?" Bobbin opened the window. "Paddy, where were you last night?" Paddy was Mr. Geraghty.

"I was dining, then, with my sister's mother-in-law."

"What, – the O'Kelly, the great legislator and Home Ruler, whom his country so loves and Parliament so hates! I don't think any Home Ruler's relative ought to be allowed into the service. Do you, Mr. Jerningham?"

"I think Mr. Geraghty, if he will only be a little more careful, will do great credit to the service," said Mr. Jerningham.

"I hope that Æolus may think the same." Æolus was the name by which a certain pundit was known at the office; – a violent and imperious Secretary, but not in the main ill-natured. "Æolus, when last I heard of his opinion, seemed to have his doubts about poor Paddy." This was a disagreeable subject, and it was felt by them all that it might better be left in silence. From that time the work of the day was continued with no more than moderate interruptions till the hour of luncheon, when the usual attendant entered with the usual mutton-chops. "I wonder if Lord Hampstead has mutton-chops for luncheon?" asked Crocker.

"Why should he not?" asked Mr. Jerningham, foolishly.

"There must be some kind of gilded cutlet, upon which the higher members of the aristocracy regale themselves. I suppose, Roden, you must have seen his lordship at lunch."

"I dare say I have," said Roden, angrily. He knew that he was annoyed, and was angry with himself at his own annoyance.

"Are they golden or only gilded?" asked Crocker.

"I believe you mean to make yourself disagreeable," said the other.

"Quite the reverse. I mean to make myself agreeable; – only you have soared so high of late that ordinary conversation has no charms for you. Is there any reason why Lord Hampstead's lunch should not be mentioned?"

"Certainly there is," said Roden.

"Then, upon my life, I cannot see it. If you talked of my mid-day chop I should not take it amiss."

"I don't think a fellow should ever talk about another fellow's eating unless he knows the fellow." This came from Bobbin, who intended it well, meaning to fight the battle for Roden as well as he knew how.

"Most sapient Bobb," said Crocker, "you seem to be unaware that one young fellow, who is Roden, happens to be the peculiarly intimate friend of the other fellow, who is the Earl of Hampstead. Therefore the law, as so clearly laid down by yourself, has not been infringed. To return to our muttons, as the Frenchman says, what sort of lunch does his lordship eat?"

"You are determined to make yourself disagreeable," said Roden.

"I appeal to Mr. Jerningham whether I have said anything unbecoming."

"If you appeal to me, I think you have," said Mr. Jerningham.

"You have, at any rate, been so successful in doing it," continued Roden, "that I must ask you to hold your tongue about Lord Hampstead. It has not been by anything I have said that you have heard of my acquaintance with him. The joke is a bad one, and will become vulgar if repeated."

"Vulgar!" cried Crocker, pushing away his plate, and rising from his chair.

"I mean ungentlemanlike. I don't want to use hard words, but I will not allow myself to be annoyed."

"Hoity, toity," said Crocker, "here's a row because I made a chance allusion to a noble lord. I am to be called vulgar because I mentioned his name." Then he began to whistle.

"Mr. Crocker, I will not have it," said Mr. Jerningham, assuming his most angry tone. "You make more noise in the room than all the others put together."

"Nevertheless, I do wonder what Lord Hampstead has had for his lunch." This was the last shot, and after that the five gentlemen did in truth settle down to their afternoon's work.

When four o'clock came Mr. Jerningham with praiseworthy punctuality took his hat and departed. His wife and three unmarried daughters were waiting for him at Islington, and as he was always in his seat punctually at ten, he was justified in leaving it punctually at four. Crocker swaggered about the room for a minute or two with his hat on, desirous of showing that he was by no means affected by the rebukes which he had received. But he, too, soon went, not having summoned courage to recur to the name of Roden's noble friend. The two lads remained for the sake of saying a word of comfort to Roden, who still sat writing at his desk. "I thought it was very low form," said Bobbin; "Crocker going on like that."

"Crocker's a baist," said Geraghty.

"What was it to him what anybody eats for his lunch?" continued Bobbin.

"Only he likes to have a nobleman's name in his mouth," said Geraghty. "I think it's the hoighth of bad manners talking about anybody's friends unless you happen to know them yourself."

"I think it is," said Roden, looking up from his desk. "But I'll tell you what shows worse manners; – that is, a desire to annoy anybody. Crocker likes to be funny, and he thinks there is no fun so good as what he calls taking a rise. I don't know that I'm very fond of Crocker, but it may be as well that we should all think no more about it." Upon this the young men promised that they, at least, would think no more about it, and then took their departure. George Roden soon followed them, for it was not the practice of anybody in that department to remain at work long after four o'clock.

Roden as he walked home did think more of the little affair than it deserved, – more at least than he would acknowledge that it deserved. He was angry with himself for bearing it in mind, and yet he did bear it in mind. Could it be that a creature so insignificant as Crocker could annoy him by a mere word or two? But he was annoyed, and did not know how such annoyance could be made to cease. If the man would continue to talk about Lord Hampstead there was nothing by which he could be made to hold his tongue. He could not be kicked, or beaten, or turned out of the room. For any purpose of real assistance Mr. Jerningham was useless. As to complaining to the Æolus of the office that a certain clerk would talk about Lord Hampstead, that of course was out of the question. He had already used strong language, calling the man vulgar and ungentlemanlike, but if a man does not regard strong language what further can an angry victim do to him?

Then his thoughts passed on to his connexion with the Marquis of Kingsbury's family generally. Had he not done wrong, at any rate, done foolishly, in thus moving himself out of his own sphere? At the present moment Lady Frances was nearer to him even than Lord Hampstead, – was more important to him and more in his thoughts. Was it not certain that he would give rise to misery rather than to happiness by what had occurred between him and Lady Frances? Was it not probable that he had embittered for her all the life of the lady whom he loved? He had assumed an assured face and a confident smile while declaring to his mother that no power on earth should stand between him and his promised wife, – that she would be able to walk out from her father's hall and marry him as certainly as might the housemaid or the ploughman's daughter go to her lover. But what would be

achieved by that if she were to walk out only to encounter misery? The country was so constituted that he and these Traffords were in truth of a different race; as much so as the negro is different from the white man. The Post Office clerk may, indeed, possibly become a Duke; whereas the negro's skin cannot be washed white. But while he and Lady Frances were as they were, the distance between them was so great that no approach could be made between them without disruption. The world might be wrong in this. To his thinking the world was wrong. But while the facts existed they were too strong to be set aside. He could do his duty to the world by struggling to propagate his own opinions, so that the distance might be a little lessened in his own time. He was sure that the distance was being lessened, and with this he thought that he ought to have been contented. The jeering of such a one as Crocker was unimportant though disagreeable, but it sufficed to show the feeling. Such a friendship as his with Lord Hampstead had appeared to Crocker to be ridiculous. Crocker would not have seen the absurdity unless others had seen it also. Even his own mother saw it. Here in England it was accounted so foolish a thing that he, a Post Office clerk, should be hand and glove with such a one as Lord Hampstead, that even a Crocker could raise a laugh against him! What would the world say when it should have become known that he intended to lead Lady Frances to the "hymeneal altar?" As he repeated the words to himself there was something ridiculous even to himself in the idea that the hymeneal altar should ever be mentioned in reference to the adventures of such a person as George Roden, the Post Office clerk. Thinking of all this, he was not in a happy frame of mind when he reached his home in Paradise Row.

CHAPTER VIII

MR. GREENWOOD

Roden spent a pleasant evening with his friend and his friend's friend at Hendon Hall before their departure for the yacht, – during which not a word was said or an allusion made to Lady Frances. The day was Sunday, July 20th. The weather was very hot, and the two young men were delighted at the idea of getting away to the cool breezes of the Northern Seas. Vivian also was a clerk in the public service, but he was a clerk very far removed in his position from that filled by George Roden. He was attached to the Foreign Office, and was Junior Private Secretary to Lord Persiflage, who was Secretary of State at that moment. Lord Persiflage and our Marquis had married sisters. Vivian was distantly related to the two ladies, and hence the young men had become friends. As Lord Hampstead and Roden had been drawn together by similarity of opinion, so had Lord Hampstead and Vivian by the reverse. Hampstead could always produce Vivian in proof that he was not, in truth, opposed to his own order. Vivian was one who proclaimed his great liking for things as he found them. It was a thousand pities that any one should be hungry; but, for himself, he liked truffles, ortolans, and all good things. If there was any injustice in the world he was not responsible. And if there was any injustice he had not been the gainer, seeing that he was a younger brother. To him all Hampstead's theories were sheer rhodomontade. There was the world, and men had got to live in it as best they might. He intended to do so, and as he liked yachting and liked grouse-shooting, he was very glad to have arranged with Lord Persiflage and his brother Private Secretary, so as to be able to get out of town for the next two months. He was member of half-a-dozen clubs, could always go to his brother's country house if nothing more inviting offered, dined out in London four or five days a week, and considered himself a thoroughly useful member of society in that he condescended to write letters for Lord Persiflage. He was pleasant in his manners to all men, and had accommodated himself to Roden as well as though Roden's office had also been in Downing Street instead of the City.

"Yes, grouse," he said, after dinner. "If anything better can be invented I'll go and do it. American bears are a myth. You may get one in three years, and, as far as I can hear, very poor fun it is when you get it. Lions are a grind. Elephants are as big as a hay-stack. Pig-sticking may be very well, but you've got to go to India, and if you're a poor Foreign Office clerk you haven't got either the time or the money."

"You speak as though killing something were a necessity," said Roden.

"So it is, unless somebody can invent something better. I hate races, where a fellow has nothing to do with himself when he can't afford to bet. I don't mean to take to cards for the next ten years. I have never been up in a balloon. Spooning is good fun, but it comes to an end so soon one way or another. Girls are so wide-awake that they won't spoon for nothing. Upon the whole I don't see what a fellow is to do unless he kills something."

"You won't have much to kill on board the yacht," said Roden.

"Fishing without end in Iceland and Norway! I knew a man who killed a ton of trout out of an Iceland lake. He had to pack himself up very closely in tight-fitting nets, or the midges would have eaten him. And the skin came off his nose and ears from the sun. But he liked that rather than not, and he killed his ton of trout."

"Who weighed them?" asked Hampstead.

"How well you may know a Utilitarian by the nature of his questions! If a man doesn't kill his ton all out, he can say he did, which is the next best thing to it."

"Are you taking close-packing nets with you?" Roden asked.

"Well, no. Hampstead would be too impatient. And the *Free Trader* isn't big enough to bring away the fish. But I don't mind betting a sovereign that I kill something every day I'm out, – barring Sundays."

Not a word was said about Lady Frances, although there were a few moments in which Roden and Lord Hampstead were alone together. Roden had made up his mind that he would ask no questions unless the subject were mentioned, and did not even allude to any of the family; but he learnt in the course of the evening that the Marquis had come back from Germany with the intention of attending to his Parliamentary duties during the remainder of the Session.

"He's going to turn us all out," said Vivian, "on the County Franchise, I suppose."

"I'm afraid my father is not so keen about County Franchise as he used to be, though I hope he will be one of the few to support it in the House of Lords if the House of Commons ever dares to pass it."

In this way Roden learnt that the Marquis, who had carried his daughter off to Saxony as soon as he had heard of the engagement, had left his charge there and had returned to London. As he went home that evening he thought that it would be his duty to go to Lord Kingsbury, and tell him, as from himself, that which the father had as yet only learnt from his daughter or from his wife. He was aware that it behoves a man when he has won a girl's heart to go to the father and ask permission to carry on his suit. This duty he thought he was bound to perform, even though the father were a person so high and mighty as the Marquis of Kingsbury. Hitherto any such going was out of his power. The Marquis had heard the tidings, and had immediately caught his daughter up and carried her off to Germany. It would have been possible to write to him, but Roden had thought that not in such a way should such a duty be performed. Now the Marquis had come back to London; and though the operation would be painful the duty seemed to be paramount. On the next day he informed Mr. Jerningham that private business of importance would take him to the West End, and asked leave to absent himself. The morning had been passed in the room at the Post Office with more than ordinary silence. Crocker had been collecting himself for an attack, but his courage had hitherto failed him. As Roden put on his hat and opened the door he fired a parting shot. "Remember me kindly to Lord Hampstead," he said; "and tell him I hope he enjoyed his cutlets."

Roden stood for a moment with the door in his hand, thinking that he would turn upon the man and rebuke his insolence, but at last determined that it would be best to hold his peace.

He went direct to Park Lane, thinking that he would probably find the Marquis before he left the house after his luncheon. He had never been before at the town mansion which was known as Kingsbury House, and which possessed all the appanages of grandeur which can be given to a London residence. As he knocked at the door he acknowledged that he was struck with a certain awe of which he was ashamed. Having said so much to the daughter, surely he should not be afraid to speak to the father! But he felt that he could have managed the matter much better had he contrived to have the interview at Hendon Hall, which was much less grand than Kingsbury House. Almost as soon as he knocked the door was opened, and he found himself with a powdered footman as well as the porter. The powdered footman did not know whether or no "my lord" was at home. He would inquire. Would the gentleman sit down for a minute or two? The gentleman did sit down, and waited for what seemed to him to be more than half-an-hour. The house must be very large indeed if it took the man all this time to look for the Marquis. He was beginning to think in what way he might best make his escape, – as a man is apt to think when delays of this kind prove too long for the patience, – but the man returned, and with a cold unfriendly air bade Roden to follow him. Roden was quite sure that some evil was to happen, so cold and unfriendly was the manner of the man; but still he followed, having now no means of escape. The man had not said that the Marquis would see him, had not even given any intimation that the Marquis was in the house. It was as though he were being led away to execution for having had the impertinence to knock at the door. But still he followed. He was taken along a passage on the ground floor, past numerous doors, to what must have been the back of the

house, and there was shown into a somewhat dingy room that was altogether surrounded by books. There he saw an old gentleman; – but the old gentleman was not the Marquis of Kingsbury.

"Ah, eh, oh," said the old gentleman. "You, I believe, are Mr. George Roden."

"That is my name. I had hoped to see Lord Kingsbury."

"Lord Kingsbury has thought it best for all parties that, – that, – that, – I should see you. That is, if anybody should see you. My name is Greenwood; – the Rev. Mr. Greenwood. I am his lordship's chaplain, and, if I may presume to say so, his most attached and sincere friend. I have had the honour of a very long connexion with his lordship, and have therefore been entrusted by him with this, – this, – this delicate duty, I had perhaps better call it." Mr. Greenwood was a stout, short man, about sixty years of age, with pendant cheeks, and pendant chin, with a few grey hairs brushed carefully over his head, with a good forehead and well-fashioned nose, who must have been good-looking when he was young, but that he was too short for manly beauty. Now, in advanced years, he had become lethargic and averse to exercise; and having grown to be corpulent he had lost whatever he had possessed in height by becoming broad, and looked to be a fat dwarf. Still there would have been something pleasant in his face but for an air of doubt and hesitation which seemed almost to betray cowardice. At the present moment he stood in the middle of the room rubbing his hands together, and almost trembling as he explained to George Roden who he was.

"I had certainly wished to see his lordship himself," said Roden.

"The Marquis has thought it better not, and I must say that I agree with the Marquis." At the moment Roden hardly knew how to go on with the business in hand. "I believe I am justified in assuring you that anything you would have said to the Marquis you may say to me."

"Am I to understand that Lord Kingsbury refuses to see me?"

"Well; – yes. At the present crisis he does refuse. What can be gained?"

Roden did not as yet know how far he might go in mentioning the name of Lady Frances to the clergyman, but was unwilling to leave the house without some reference to the business he had in hand. He was peculiarly averse to leaving an impression that he was afraid to mention what he had done. "I had to speak to his lordship about his daughter," he said.

"I know; I know; Lady Frances! I have known Lady Frances since she was a little child. I have the warmest regard for Lady Frances, – as I have also for Lord Hampstead, – and for the Marchioness, and for her three dear little boys, Lord Frederic, Lord Augustus, and Lord Gregory. I feel a natural hesitation in calling them my friends because I think that the difference in rank and station which it has pleased the Lord to institute should be maintained with all their privileges and all their honours. Though I have agreed with the Marquis through a long life in those political tenets by propagating which he has been ever anxious to improve the condition of the lower classes, I am not and have not been on that account less anxious to uphold by any small means which may be in my power those variations in rank, to which, I think, in conjunction with the Protestant religion, the welfare and high standing of this country are mainly to be attributed. Having these feelings at my heart very strongly I do not wish, particularly on such an occasion as this, to seem by even a chance word to diminish the respect which I feel to be due to all the members of a family of a rank so exalted as that which belongs to the family of the Marquis of Kingsbury. Putting that aside for a moment, I perhaps may venture on this occasion, having had confided to me a task so delicate as the present, to declare my warm friendship for all who bear the honoured name of Trafford. I am at any rate entitled to declare myself so far a friend, that you may say anything on this delicate subject which you would think it necessary to say to the young lady's father. However inexpedient it may be that anything should be said at all, I have been instructed by his lordship to hear, – and to reply."

George Roden, while he was listening to this tedious sermon, was standing opposite to the preacher with his hat in his hand, having not yet had accorded to him the favour of a seat. During the preaching of the sermon the preacher had never ceased to shiver and shake, rubbing one fat little clammy hand slowly over the other, and apparently afraid to look his audience in the face. It seemed

to Roden as though the words must have been learnt by heart, they came so glibly, with so much of unction and of earnestness, and were in their glibness so strongly opposed to the man's manner. There had not been a single word spoken that had not been offensive to Roden. It seemed to him that they had been chosen because of their offence. In all those long-winded sentences about rank in which Mr. Greenwood had expressed his own humility and insufficiency for the position of friend in a family so exalted he had manifestly intended to signify the much more manifest insufficiency of his hearer to fill a place of higher honour even than that of friend. Had the words come at the spur of the moment, the man must, thought Roden, have great gifts for extempore preaching. He had thought the time in the hall to be long, but it had not been much for the communication of the Earl's wishes, and then for the preparation of all these words. It was necessary, however, that he must make his reply without any preparation.

"I have come," he said, "to tell Lord Kingsbury that I am in love with his daughter." At hearing this the fat little man held up both his hands in amazement, – although he had already made it clear that he was acquainted with all the circumstances. "And I should have been bound to add," said Roden, plucking up all his courage, "that the young lady is also in love with me."

"Oh, – oh, – oh!" The hands went higher and higher as these interjections were made.

"Why not? Is not the truth the best?"

"A young man, Mr. Roden, should never boast of a young lady's affection, – particularly of such a young lady; – particularly when I cannot admit that it exists; – particularly not in her father's house."

"Nobody should boast of anything, Mr. Greenwood. I speak of a fact which it is necessary that a father should know. If the lady denies the assertion I have done."

"It is a matter in which delicacy demands that no question shall be put to the young lady. After what has occurred, it is out of the question that your name should even be mentioned in the young lady's hearing."

"Why? – I mean to marry her."

"Mean!" – this word was shouted in the extremity of Mr. Greenwood's horror. "Mr. Roden, it is my duty to assure you that under no circumstances can you ever see the young lady again."

"Who says so?"

"The Marquis says so, – and the Marchioness, – and her little brothers, who with their growing strength will protect her from all harm."

"I hope their growing strength may not be wanted for any such purpose. Should it be so I am sure they will not be deficient as brothers. At present there could not be much for them to do." Mr. Greenwood shook his head. He was still standing, not having moved an inch from the position in which he had been placed when the door was opened. "I can understand, Mr. Greenwood, that any further conversation on the subject between you and me must be quite useless."

"Quite useless," said Mr. Greenwood.

"But it has been necessary for my honour, and for my purpose, that Lord Kingsbury should know that I had come to ask him for his daughter's hand. I had not dared to expect that he would accept my proposal graciously."

"No, no; hardly that, Mr. Roden."

"But it was necessary that he should know my purpose from myself. He will now, no doubt, do so. He is, as I understand you, aware of my presence in the house." Mr. Greenwood shook his head, as though he would say that this was a matter he could not any longer discuss. "If not, I must trouble his lordship with a letter."

"That will be unnecessary."

"He does know." Mr. Greenwood nodded his head. "And you will tell him why I have come?"

"The Marquis shall be made acquainted with the nature of the interview."

Roden then turned to leave the room, but was obliged to ask Mr. Greenwood to show him the way along the passages. This the clergyman did, tripping on, ahead, upon his toes, till he had delivered

the intruder over to the hall porter. Having done so, he made as it were a valedictory bow, and tripped back to his own apartment. Then Roden left the house, thinking as he did so that there was certainly much to be done before he could be received there as a welcome son-in-law.

As he made his way back to Holloway he again considered it all. How could there be an end to this, – an end that would be satisfactory to himself and to the girl that he loved? The aversion expressed to him through the person of Mr. Greenwood was natural. It could not but be expected that such a one as the Marquis of Kingsbury should endeavour to keep his daughter out of the hands of such a suitor. If it were only in regard to money would it not be necessary for him to do so? Every possible barricade would be built up in his way. There would be nothing on his side except the girl's love for himself. Was it to be expected that her love would have power to conquer such obstacles as these? And if it were, would she obtain her own happiness by clinging to it? He was aware that in his present position no duty was so incumbent on him as that of looking to the happiness of the woman whom he wished to make his wife.

CHAPTER IX

AT KÖNIGSGRAAF

Very shortly after this there came a letter from Lady Frances to Paradise Row, – the only letter which Roden received from her during this period of his courtship. A portion of the letter shall be given, from which the reader will see that difficulties had arisen at Königsgraaf as to their correspondence. He had written twice. The first letter had in due course reached the young lady's hands, having been brought up from the village post-office in the usual manner, and delivered to her without remark by her own maid. When the second reached the Castle it fell into the hands of the Marchioness. She had, indeed, taken steps that it should fall into her hands. She was aware that the first letter had come, and had been shocked at the idea of such a correspondence. She had received no direct authority from her husband on the subject, but felt that it was incumbent on herself to take strong steps. It must not be that Lady Frances should receive love-letters from a Post Office clerk! As regarded Lady Frances herself, the Marchioness would have been willing enough that the girl should be given over to a letter-carrier, if she could be thus got rid of altogether, – so that the world should not know that there was or had been a Lady Frances. But the fact was patent, – as was also that too, too-sad truth of the existence of a brother older than her own comely bairns. As the feeling of hatred grew upon her, she continually declared to herself that she would have been as gentle a stepmother as ever loved another woman's children, had these two known how to bear themselves like the son and daughter of a Marquis. Seeing what they were, – and what were her own children, – how these struggled to repudiate that rank which her own were born to adorn and protect, was it not natural that she should hate them, and profess that she should wish them to be out of the way? They could not be made to get out of the way, but Lady Frances might at any rate be repressed. Therefore she determined to stop the correspondence.

She did stop the second letter, – and told her daughter that she had done so.

"Papa didn't say I wasn't to have my letters," pleaded Lady Frances.

"Your papa did not suppose for a moment that you would submit to anything so indecent."

"It is not indecent."

"I shall make myself the judge of that. You are now in my care. Your papa can do as he likes when he comes back." There was a long altercation, but it ended in victory on the part of the Marchioness. The young lady, when she was told that, if necessary, the postmistress in the village should be instructed not to send on any letter addressed to George Roden, believed in the potency of the threat. She felt sure also that she would be unable to get at any letters addressed to herself if the quasi-parental authority of the Marchioness were used to prevent it. She yielded, on the condition, however, that one letter should be sent; and the Marchioness, not at all thinking that her own instructions would have prevailed with the post-mistress, yielded so far.

The tenderness of the letter readers can appreciate and understand without seeing it expressed in words. It was very tender, full of promises, and full of trust. Then came the short passage in which her own uncomfortable position was explained; – "You will understand that there has come one letter which I have not been allowed to see. Whether mamma has opened it I do not know, or whether she has destroyed it. Though I have not seen it, I take it as an assurance of your goodness and truth. But it will be useless for you to write more till you hear from me again; and I have promised that this, for the present, shall be my last to you. The last and the first! I hope you will keep it till you have another, in order that you may have something to tell you how well I love you." As she sent it from her she did not know how much of solace there was even in the writing of a letter to him she loved, nor had she as yet felt how great was the torment of remaining without palpable notice from him she loved.

After the episode of the letter life at Königsgraaf was very bitter and very dull. But few words were spoken between the Marchioness and her stepdaughter, and those were never friendly in their tone or kindly in their nature. Even the children were taken out of their sister's way as much as possible, so that their morals should not be corrupted by evil communication. When she complained of this to their mother the Marchioness merely drew herself up and was silent. Were it possible she would have altogether separated her darlings from contact with their sister, not because she thought that the darlings would in truth be injured, – as to which she had no fears at all, seeing that the darlings were subject to her own influences, – but in order that the punishment to Lady Frances might be the more complete. The circumstances being such as they were, there should be no family love, no fraternal sports, no softnesses, no mercy. There must, she thought, have come from the blood of that first wife a stain of impurity which had made her children altogether unfit for the rank to which they had unfortunately been born. This iniquity on the part of Lady Frances, this disgrace which made her absolutely tremble as she thought of it, this abominable affection for an inferior creature, acerbated her feelings even against Lord Hampstead. The two were altogether so base as to make her think that they could not be intended by Divine Providence to stand permanently in the way of the glory of the family. Something certainly would happen. It would turn out that they were not truly the legitimate children of a real Marchioness. Some beautiful scheme of romance would discover itself to save her and her darlings, and all the Traffords and all the Montressors from the terrible abomination with which they were threatened by these interlopers. The idea dwelt in her mind till it became an almost fixed conviction that Lord Frederic would live to become Lord Hampstead, – or probably Lord Highgate, as there was a third title in the family, and the name of Hampstead must for a time be held to have been disgraced, – and in due course of happy time Marquis of Kingsbury. Hitherto she had been accustomed to speak to her own babies of their elder brother with something of that respect which was due to the future head of the family; but in these days she altered her tone when they spoke to her of Jack, as they would call him, and she, from herself, never mentioned his name to them. "Is Fanny naughty?" Lord Frederic asked one day. To this she made no reply. "Is Fanny very naughty?" the boy persisted in asking. To this she nodded her head solemnly. "What has Fanny done, mamma?" At this she shook her head mysteriously. It may, therefore, be understood that poor Lady Frances was sadly in want of comfort during the sojourn at Königsgraaf.

About the end of August the Marquis returned. He had hung on in London till the very last days of the Session had been enjoyed, and had then pretended that his presence had been absolutely required at Trafford Park. To Trafford Park he went, and had spent ten miserable days alone. Mr. Greenwood had indeed gone with him; but the Marquis was a man who was miserable unless surrounded by the comforts of his family, and he led Mr. Greenwood such a life that that worthy clergyman was very happy when he was left altogether in solitude by his noble friend. Then, in compliance with the promise which he had absolutely made, and aware that it was his duty to look after his wicked daughter, the Marquis returned to Königsgraaf. Lady Frances was to him at this period of his life a cause of unmitigated trouble. It must not be supposed that his feelings were in any way akin to those of the Marchioness as to either of his elder children. Both of them were very dear to him, and of both of them he was in some degree proud. They were handsome, noble-looking, clever, and to himself thoroughly well-behaved. He had seen what trouble other elder sons could give their fathers, what demands were made for increased allowances, what disreputable pursuits were sometimes followed, what quarrels there were, what differences, what want of affection and want of respect! He was wise enough to have perceived all this, and to be aware that he was in some respects singularly blest. Hampstead never asked him for a shilling. He was a liberal man, and would willingly have given many shillings. But still there was a comfort in having a son who was quite contented in having his own income. No doubt a time would come when those little lords would want shillings. And Lady Frances had always been particularly soft to him, diffusing over his life a sweet taste of the memory of his first wife. Of the present Marchioness he was fond enough, and was aware how

much she did for him to support his position. But he was conscious ever of a prior existence in which there had been higher thoughts, grander feelings, and aspirations which were now wanting to him. Of these something would come back in the moments which he spent with his daughter; and in this way she was very dear to him. But now there had come a trouble which robbed his life of all its sweetness. He must go back to the grandeur of his wife and reject the tenderness of his daughter. During these days at Trafford he made himself very unpleasant to the devoted friend who had always been so true to his interests.

When the battle about the correspondence was explained to him by his wife, it, of course, became necessary to him to give his orders to his daughter. Such a matter could hardly be passed over in silence, – though he probably might have done so had he not been instigated to action by the Marchioness.

"Fanny," he said, "I have been shocked by these letters."

"I only wrote one, papa."

"Well, one. But two came."

"I only had one, papa."

"That made two. But there should have been no letter at all. Do you think it proper that a young lady should correspond with, – with, – a gentleman in opposition to the wishes of her father and mother?"

"I don't know, papa."

This seemed to him so weak that the Marquis took heart of grace, and made the oration which he felt that he as a father was bound to utter upon the entire question. For, after all, it was not the letters which were of importance, but the resolute feeling which had given birth to the letters. "My dear, this is a most unfortunate affair." He paused for a reply; but Lady Frances felt that the assertion was one to which at the present moment she could make no reply. "It is, you know, quite out of the question that you should marry a young man so altogether unfitted for you in point of station as this young man."

"But I shall, papa."

"Fanny, you can do no such thing."

"I certainly shall. It may be a very long time first; but I certainly shall, – unless I die."

"It is wicked of you, my dear, to talk of dying in that way."

"What I mean is, that however long I may live I shall consider myself engaged to Mr. Roden."

"He has behaved very, very badly. He has made his way into my house under a false pretence."

"He came as Hampstead's friend."

"It was very foolish of Hampstead to bring him, – very foolish, – a Post Office clerk."

"Mr. Vivian is a clerk in the Foreign Office. Why shouldn't one office be the same as another?"

"They are very different; – but Mr. Vivian wouldn't think of such a thing. He understands the nature of things, and knows his own position. There is a conceit about the other man."

"A man should be conceited, papa. Nobody will think well of him unless he thinks well of himself."

"He came to me in Park Lane."

"What! Mr. Roden?"

"Yes; he came. But I didn't see him. Mr. Greenwood saw him."

"What could Mr. Greenwood say to him?"

"Mr. Greenwood could tell him to leave the house, – and he did so. There was nothing more to tell him. Now, my dear, let there be no more about it. If you will put on your hat, we will go out and walk down to the village."

To this Lady Frances gave a ready assent. She was not at all disposed to quarrel with her father, or to take in bad part what he had said about her lover. She had not expected that things would go very easily. She had promised to herself constancy and final success; but she had not expected that

in her case the course of true love could be made to run smooth. She was quite willing to return to a condition of good humour with her father, and, – not exactly to drop her lover for the moment, – but so to conduct herself as though he were not paramount in her thoughts. The cruelty of her stepmother had so weighed upon her that she found it to be quite a luxury to be allowed to walk with her father.

"I don't know that anything can be done," the Marquis said a few days afterwards to his wife. "It is one of those misfortunes which do happen now and again!"

"That such a one as your daughter should give herself up to a clerk in the Post Office!"

"What's the use of repeating that so often? I don't know that the Post Office is worse than anything else. Of course it can't be allowed; – and having said so, the best thing will be to go on just as though nothing had happened."

"And let her do just what she pleases?"

"Who's going to let her do anything? She said she wouldn't write, and she hasn't written. We must just take her back to Trafford, and let her forget him as soon as she can."

The Marchioness was by no means satisfied, though she did not know what measure of special severity to recommend. There was once a time, – a very good time, as Lady Kingsbury thought now, – in which a young lady could be locked up in a convent, or perhaps in a prison, or absolutely forced to marry some suitor whom her parents should find for her. But those comfortable days were past. In a prison Lady Frances was detained now; but it was a prison of which the Marchioness was forced to make herself the gaoler, and in which her darlings were made to be fellow-prisoners with their wicked sister. She herself was anxious to get back to Trafford and the comforts of her own home. The beauties of Königsgraaf were not lovely to her in her present frame of mind. But how would it be if Lady Frances should jump out of the window at Trafford and run away with George Roden? The windows at Königsgraaf were certainly much higher than those at Trafford.

They had made up their mind to return early in September, and the excitement of packing up had almost commenced among them when Lord Hampstead suddenly appeared on the scene. He had had enough of yachting, and had grown tired of books and gardening at Hendon. Something must be done before the hunting began, and so, without notice, he appeared one day at Königsgraaf. This was to the intense delight of his brothers, over whose doings he assumed a power which their mother was unable to withstand. They were made to gallop on ponies on which they had only walked before; they were bathed in the river, and taken to the top of the Castle, and shut up in the dungeon after a fashion which was within the reach of no one but Hampstead. Jack was Jack, and all was delight, as far as the children were concerned; but the Marchioness was not so well pleased with the arrival. A few days after his coming a conversation arose as to Lady Frances which Lady Kingsbury would have avoided had it been possible, but it was forced upon her by her stepson.

"I don't think that Fanny ought to be bullied," said her stepson.

"Hampstead, I wish you would understand that I do not understand strong language."

"Teased, tormented, and made wretched."

"If she be wretched she has brought it on herself."

"But she is not to be treated as though she had disgraced herself."

"She has disgraced herself."

"I deny it. I will not hear such a word said of her even by you." The Marchioness drew herself up as though she had been insulted. "If there is to be such a feeling about her in your house I must ask my father to have her removed, and I will make a home for her. I will not see her broken-hearted by cruel treatment. I am sure that he would not wish it."

"You have no right to speak to me in this manner."

"I surely have a right to protect my sister, and I will exercise it."

"You have brought most improperly a young man into the house – "

"I have brought into the house a young man whom I am proud to call my friend."

"And now you mean to assist him in destroying your sister."

"You are very wrong to say so. They both know, Roden and my sister also, that I disapprove of this marriage. If Fanny were with me I should not think it right to ask Roden into the house. They would both understand that. But it does not follow that she should be cruelly used."

"No one has been cruel to her but she herself."

"It is easy enough to perceive what is going on. It will be much better that Fanny should remain with the family; but you may be sure of this, – that I will not see her tortured." Then he took himself off, and on the next day he had left Königsgraaf. It may be understood that the Marchioness was not reconciled to her radical stepson by such language as he had used to her. About a week afterwards the whole family returned to England and to Trafford.

CHAPTER X

"NOBLESSE OBLIGE."

"I quite agree," said Hampstead, endeavouring to discuss the matter rationally with his sister, "that her ladyship should not be allowed to torment you."

"She does torment me. You cannot perceive what my life was at Königsgraaf! There is a kind of usage which would drive any girl to run away, – or to drown herself. I don't suppose a man can know what it is always to be frowned at. A man has his own friends, and can go anywhere. His spirits are not broken by being isolated. He would not even see half the things which a girl is made to feel. The very servants were encouraged to treat me badly. The boys were not allowed to come near me. I never heard a word that was not intended to be severe."

"I am sure it was bad."

"And it was not made better by the conviction that she has never cared for me. It is to suffer all the authority, but to enjoy none of the love of a mother. When papa came of course it was better; but even papa cannot make her change her ways. A man is comparatively so very little in the house. If it goes on it will drive me mad."

"Of course I'll stand to you."

"Oh, John, I am sure you will."

"But it isn't altogether easy to know how to set about it. If we were to keep house together at Hendon – " As he made this proposition a look of joy came over her face, and shone amidst her tears. "There would, of course, be a difficulty."

"What difficulty?" She, however, knew well what would be the difficulty.

"George Roden would be too near to us."

"I should never see him unless you approved."

"I should not approve. That would be the difficulty. He would argue the matter with me, and I should have to tell him that I could not let him come to the house, except with my father's leave. That would be out of the question. And therefore, as I say, there would be a difficulty."

"I would never see him, – except with your sanction, – nor write to him, – nor receive letters from him. You are not to suppose that I would give him up. I shall never do that. I shall go on and wait. When a girl has once brought herself to tell a man that she loves him, according to my idea she cannot give him up. There are things which cannot be changed. I could have lived very well without thinking of him had I not encouraged myself to love him. But I have done that, and now he must be everything to me."

"I am sorry that it should be so."

"It is so. But if you will take me to Hendon I will never see him till I have papa's leave. It is my duty to obey him, – but not her."

"I am not quite clear about that."

"She has rejected me as a daughter, and therefore I reject her as a mother. She would get rid of us both if she could."

"You should not attribute to her any such thoughts."

"If you saw her as often as I do you would know. She hates you almost as much as me, – though she cannot show it so easily."

"That she should hate my theories I can easily understand."

"You stand in her way."

"Of course I do. It is natural that a woman should wish to have the best for her own children. I have sometimes myself felt it to be a pity that Frederic should have an elder brother. Think what a gallant young Marquis he would make, while I am altogether out of my element."

"That is nonsense, John."

"I ought to have been a tailor. Tailors, I think, are generally the most ill-conditioned, sceptical, and patriotic of men. Had my natural propensities been sharpened by the difficulty of maintaining a wife and children upon seven and sixpence a day, I really think I could have done something to make myself conspicuous. As it is, I am neither one thing nor another; neither fish nor fowl nor good red herring. To the mind devoted to marquises I can understand that I should be a revolting being. I have no aptitudes for aristocratic prettinesses. Her ladyship has three sons, either of which would make a perfect marquis. How is it possible that she should not think that I am standing in her way?"

"But she knew of your existence when she married papa."

"No doubt she did; – but that does not alter her nature. I think I could find it in my heart to forgive her, even though she attempted to poison me, so much do I stand in her way. I have sometimes thought that I ought to repudiate myself; give up my prospects, and call myself John Trafford – so as to make way for her more lordly lordlings."

"That is nonsense, John."

"At any rate it is impossible. I could only do it by blowing my brains out – which would not be in accordance with my ideas of life. But you are not in anybody's way. There is nothing to be got by poisoning you. If she were to murder me there would be something reasonable in it, – something that one could pardon; but in torturing you she is instigated by a vile ambition. She is afraid, lest her own position should be tarnished by an inferior marriage on your part. There would be something noble in killing me for the sake of dear little Fred. She would be getting something for him who, of course, is most dear to her. But the other is the meanest vanity; – and I will not stand it."

This conversation took place early in October, when they had been some weeks at Trafford Park. Hampstead had come and gone, as was his wont, never remaining there above two or three days at a time. Lord Kingsbury, who was ill at ease, had run hither and thither about the country, looking after this or the other property, and staying for a day or two with this or the other friend. The Marchioness had declined to invite any friends to the house, declaring to her husband that the family was made unfit for gaiety by the wicked conduct of his eldest daughter. There was no attempt at shooting the pheasants, or even preparing to shoot them, so great was the general depression. Mr. Greenwood was there, and was thrown into very close intercourse with her ladyship. He fully sympathized with her ladyship. Although he had always agreed with the Marquis, – as he had not forgotten to tell George Roden during that interview in London, – in regard to his lordship's early political tenets, nevertheless his mind was so constituted that he was quite at one with her ladyship as to the disgraceful horror of low associations for noble families. Not only did he sympathize as to the abomination of the Post Office clerk, but he sympathized also fully as to the positive unfitness which Lord Hampstead displayed for that station in life to which he had been called. Mr. Greenwood would sigh and wheeze and groan when the future prospects of the House of Trafford were discussed between him and her ladyship. It might be, or it might not be, well, – so he kindly put it in talking to the Marchioness, – that a nobleman should indulge himself with liberal politics; but it was dreadful to think that the heir to a great title should condescend to opinions worthy of a radical tailor. For Mr. Greenwood agreed with Lord Hampstead about the tailor. Lord Hampstead seemed to him to be a matter simply for sorrow, – not for action. Nothing, he thought, could be done in regard to Lord Hampstead. Time, – time that destroys but which also cures so many things, – would no doubt have its effect; so that Lord Hampstead might in the fulness of years live to be as staunch a supporter of his class as any Duke or Marquis living. Or perhaps, – perhaps, it might be that the Lord would take him. Mr. Greenwood saw that this remark was more to the purpose, and at once went to work with the Peerage, and found a score of cases in which, within half-a-century, the second brother had risen

to the title. It seemed, indeed, to be the case that a peculiar mortality attached itself to the eldest sons of Peers. This was comforting. But there was not in it so much ground for positive action as at the present moment existed in regard to Lady Frances. On this matter there was a complete unison of spirit between the two friends.

Mr. Greenwood had seen the objectionable young man, and could say how thoroughly objectionable he was at all points, – how vulgar, flippant, ignorant, impudent, exactly what a clerk in the Post Office might be expected to be. Any severity, according to Mr. Greenwood, would be justified in keeping the two young persons apart. Gradually Mr. Greenwood learnt to talk of the female young person with very little of that respect which he showed to other members of the family. In this way her ladyship came to regard Lady Frances as though she were not Lady Frances at all, – as though she were some distant Fanny Trafford, a girl of bad taste and evil conduct, who had unfortunately been brought into the family on grounds of mistaken charity.

Things had so gone on at Trafford, that Trafford had hardly been preferable to Königsgraaf. Indeed, at Königsgraaf there had been no Mr. Greenwood, and Mr. Greenwood had certainly added much to the annoyances which poor Lady Frances was made to bear. In this condition of things she had written to her brother, begging him to come to her. He had come, and thus had taken place the conversation which has been given above.

On the same day Hampstead saw his father and discussed the matter with him; – that matter, and, as will be seen, some others also. "What on earth do you wish me to do about her?" asked the Marquis.

"Let her come and live with me at Hendon. If you will let me have the house I will take all the rest upon myself."

"Keep an establishment of your own?"

"Why not? If I found I couldn't afford it I'd give up the hunting and stick to the yacht."

"It isn't about money," said the Marquis, shaking his head.

"Her ladyship never liked Hendon for herself."

"Nor is it about the house. You might have the house and welcome. But how can I give up my charge over your sister just when I know that she is disposed to do just what she ought not."

"She won't be a bit more likely to do it there than here," said the brother.

"He would be quite close to her."

"You may take this for granted, sir, that no two persons would be more thoroughly guided by a sense of duty than my sister and George Roden."

"Did she show her duty when she allowed herself to be engaged to a man like that without saying a word to any of her family."

"She told her ladyship as soon as it occurred."

"She should not have allowed it to have occurred at all. It is nonsense talking like that. You cannot mean to say that such a girl as your sister is entitled to do what she likes with herself without consulting any of her family, – even to accepting such a man as this for her lover."

"I hardly know," said Hampstead, thoughtfully.

"You ought to know. I know. Everybody knows. It is nonsense talking like that."

"I doubt whether people do know," said Hampstead. "She is twenty-one, and as far as the law goes might, I believe, walk out of the house, and marry any man she pleases to-morrow. You as her father have no authority over her whatever;" – here the indignant father jumped up from his chair; but his son went on with his speech, as though determined not to be interrupted, – "except what may come to you by her good feeling, or else from the fact that she is dependent on you for her maintenance."

"Good G – !" shouted the Marquis.

"I think this is about the truth of it. Young ladies do subject themselves to the authority of their parents from feeling, from love, and from dependence; but, as far as I understand in the matter, they are not legally subject beyond a certain age."

"You'd talk the hind legs off a dog."

"I wish I could. But one may say a few words without being so eloquent as that. If such is the case I am not sure that Fanny has been morally wrong. She may have been foolish. I think she has been, because I feel that the marriage is not suitable for her."

"Noblesse oblige," said the Marquis, putting his hand upon his bosom.

"No doubt. Nobility, whatever may be its nature, imposes bonds on us. And if these bonds be not obeyed, then nobility ceases. But I deny that any nobility can bind us to any conduct which we believe to be wrong."

"Who has said that it does?"

"Nobility," continued the son, not regarding his father's question, "cannot bind me to do that which you or others think to be right, if I do not approve it myself."

"What on earth are you driving at?"

"You imply that because I belong to a certain order, – or my sister, – we are bound to those practices of life which that order regards with favour. This I deny both on her behalf and my own. I didn't make myself the eldest son of an English peer. I do acknowledge that as very much has been given to me in the way of education, of social advantages, and even of money, a higher line of conduct is justly demanded from me than from those who have been less gifted. So far, *noblesse oblige*. But before I undertake the duty thus imposed upon me, I must find out what is that higher line of conduct. Fanny should do the same. In marrying George Roden she would do better, according to your maxim, than in giving herself to some noodle of a lord who from first to last will have nothing to be proud of beyond his acres and his title."

The Marquis had been walking about the room impatiently, while his didactic son was struggling to explain his own theory as to those words *noblesse oblige*. Nothing could so plainly express the feelings of the Marquis on the occasion as that illustration of his as to the dog's hind legs. But he was a little ashamed of it, and did not dare to use it twice on the same occasion. He fretted and fumed, and would have stopped Hampstead had it been possible; but Hampstead was irrepressible when he had become warm on his own themes, and his father knew that he must listen on to the bitter end. "I won't have her go to Hendon at all," he said, when his son had finished.

"Then you will understand little of her nature, – or of mine. Roden will not come near her there. I can hardly be sure that he will not do so here. Here Fanny will feel that she is being treated as an enemy."

"You have no right to say so."

"There she will know that you have done much to promote her happiness. I will give you my assurance that she will neither see him nor write to him. She has promised as much to me herself, and I can trust her."

"Why should she be so anxious to leave her natural home?"

"Because," said Hampstead boldly, "she has lost her natural mother." The Marquis frowned awfully at hearing this. "I have not a word to say against my stepmother as to myself. I will not accuse her of anything as to Fanny, – except that they thoroughly misunderstand each other. You must see it yourself, sir." The Marquis had seen it very thoroughly. "And Mr. Greenwood has taken upon himself to speak to her, – which was, I think, very impertinent."

"I never authorized him."

"But he did. Her ladyship no doubt authorized him. The end of it is that Fanny is watched. Of course she will not bear a continuation of such misery. Why should she? It will be better that she should come to me than be driven to go off with her lover."

Before the week was over the Marquis had yielded. Hendon Hall was to be given up altogether to Lord Hampstead, and his sister was to be allowed to live with him as the mistress of his house. She was to come in the course of next month, and remain there at any rate till the spring. There would be a difficulty about the hunting, no doubt, but that Hampstead if necessary was prepared to

abandon for the season. He thought that perhaps he might be able to run down twice a week to the Vale of Aylesbury, going across from Hendon to the Willesden Junction. He would at any rate make his sister's comfort the first object of his life, and would take care that in doing so George Roden should be excluded altogether from the arrangement.

The Marchioness was paralyzed when she heard that Lady Frances was to be taken away, – to be taken into the direct neighbourhood of London and the Post Office. Very many words she said to her husband, and often the Marquis vacillated. But, when once the promise was given, Lady Frances was strong enough to demand its fulfilment. It was on this occasion that the Marchioness first allowed herself to speak to Mr. Greenwood with absolute disapproval of her husband. "To Hendon Hall!" said Mr. Greenwood, holding up his hands with surprise when the project was explained.

"Yes, indeed! It does seem to me to be the most, – most improper sort of thing to do."

"He can walk over there every day as soon as he has got rid of the letters." Mr. Greenwood probably thought that George Roden was sent about with the Post Office bags.

"Of course they will meet."

"I fear so, Lady Kingsbury."

"Hampstead will arrange that for them."

"No, no!" said the clergyman, as though he were bound on behalf of the family to repudiate an idea that was so damnatory to its honour.

"It is just what he will do. Why else should he want to have her there? With his ideas he would think it the best thing he could do utterly to degrade us all. He has no idea of the honour of his brothers. How should he, when he is so anxious to sacrifice his own sister? As for me, of course, he would do anything to break my heart. He knows that I am anxious for his father's name, and, therefore, he would disgrace me in any way that was possible. But that the Marquis should consent!"

"That is what I cannot understand," said Mr. Greenwood.

"There must be something in it, Mr. Greenwood, which they mean to keep from me."

"The Marquis can't intend to give her to that young man!"

"I don't understand it. I don't understand it at all," said the Marchioness. "He did seem so firm about it. As for the girl herself, I will never see her again after she has left my house in such a fashion. And, to tell the truth, I never wish to see Hampstead again. They are plotting against me; and if there is anything I hate it is a plot." In this way Mr. Greenwood and the Marchioness became bound together in their great disapproval of Lady Frances and her love.

CHAPTER XI

LADY PERSIFLAGE

Hampstead rushed up to Hendon almost without seeing his stepmother, intent on making preparations for his sister, and then, before October was over, rushed back to fetch her. He was very great at rushing, never begrudging himself any personal trouble in what he undertook to do. When he left the house he hardly spoke to her ladyship. When he took Lady Frances away he was of course bound to bid her adieu.

"I think," he said, "that Frances will be happy with me at Hendon."

"I have nothing to do with it, – literally nothing," said the Marchioness, with her sternest frown. "I wash my hands of the whole concern."

"I am sure you would be glad that she should be happy."

"It is impossible that any one should be happy who misconducts herself."

"That, I think, is true."

"It is certainly true, with misconduct such as this."

"I quite agree with what you said first. But the question remains as to what is misconduct. Now – "

"I will not hear you, Hampstead; not a word. You can persuade your father, I dare say, but you cannot persuade me. Fanny has divorced herself from my heart for ever."

"I am sorry for that."

"And I'm bound to say that you are doing the same. It is better in some cases to be plain."

"Oh – certainly; but not to be irrational."

"I am not irrational, and it is most improper for you to speak to me in that way."

"Well, good-bye. I have no doubt it will come right some of these days," said Hampstead, as he took his leave. Then he carried his sister off to Hendon.

Previous to this there had been a great deal of unpleasantness in the house. From the moment in which Lady Kingsbury had heard that her stepdaughter was to go to her brother she had refused even to speak to the unfortunate girl. As far as it was possible she put her husband also into Coventry. She held daily consultations with Mr. Greenwood, and spent most of her hours in embracing, coddling, and spoiling those three unfortunate young noblemen who were being so cruelly injured by their brother and sister. One of her keenest pangs was in seeing how boisterously the three bairns romped with "Jack" even after she had dismissed him from her own good graces as utterly unworthy of her regard. That night he positively brought Lord Gregory down into the drawing-room in his night-shirt, having dragged the little urchin out of his cot, – as one might do who was on peculiar terms of friendship with the mother. Lord Gregory was in Elysium, but the mother tore the child from the sinner's arms, and carried him back in anger to the nursery.

"Nothing does children so much good as disturbing them in their sleep," said Lord Hampstead, turning to his father; but the anger of the Marchioness was too serious a thing to allow of a joke.

"From this time forth for evermore she is no child of mine," said Lady Kingsbury the next morning to her husband, as soon as the carriage had taken the two sinners away from the door.

"It is very wrong to say that. She is your child, and must be your child."

"I have divorced her from my heart; – and also Lord Hampstead. How can it be otherwise, when they are both in rebellion against me? Now there will be this disgraceful marriage. Would you wish that I should receive the Post Office clerk here as my son-in-law?"

"There won't be any disgraceful marriage," said the Marquis. "At least, what I mean is, that it will be much less likely at Hendon than here."

"Less likely than here! Here it would have been impossible. There they will be all together."

"No such thing," said the Marquis. "Hampstead will see to that. And she too has promised me."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed the Marchioness.

"I won't have you say Pshaw to me when I tell you. Fanny always has kept her word to me, and I don't in the least doubt her. Had she remained here your treatment would have induced her to run away with him at the first word."

"Lord Kingsbury," said the offended lady, "I have always done my duty by the children of your first marriage as a mother should do. I have found them to be violent, and altogether unaware of the duties which their position should impose upon them. It was only yesterday that Lord Hampstead presumed to call me irrational. I have borne a great deal from them, and can bear no more. I wish you would have found some one better able to control their conduct." Then, with a stately step, she stalked out of the room. Under these circumstances, the house was not comfortable to any of the inhabitants.

As soon as her ladyship had reached her own apartments after this rough interview she seated herself at the table, and commenced a letter to her sister, Lady Persiflage, in which she proceeded to give a detailed account of all her troubles and sufferings. Lady Persiflage, who was by a year or two the younger of the two, filled a higher position in society than that of the Marchioness herself. She was the wife only of an Earl; but the Earl was a Knight of the Garter, Lord Lieutenant of his County, and at the present moment Secretary of State for the Home Department. The Marquis had risen to no such honours as these. Lord Persiflage was a peculiar man. Nobody quite knew of what his great gifts consisted. But it was acknowledged of him that he was an astute diplomat; that the honour of England was safe in his hands; and that no more perfect courtier ever gave advice to a well-satisfied sovereign. He was beautiful to look at, with his soft grey hair, his bright eyes, and well-cut features. He was much of a dandy, and, though he was known to be nearer seventy than sixty years of age, he maintained an appearance of almost green juvenility. Active he was not, nor learned, nor eloquent. But he knew how to hold his own, and had held it for many years. He had married his wife when she was very young, and she had become, first a distinguished beauty, and then a leader of fashion. Her sister, our Marchioness, had been past thirty when she married, and had never been quite so much in the world's eye as her sister, Lady Persiflage. And Lady Persiflage was the mother of her husband's heir. The young Lord Hautboy, her eldest son, was now just of age. Lady Kingsbury looked upon him as all that the heir to an earldom ought to be. His mother, too, was proud of him, for he was beautiful as a young Phœbus. The Earl, his father, was not always as well pleased, because his son had already achieved a knack of spending money. The Persiflage estates were somewhat encumbered, and there seemed to be a probability that Lord Hautboy might create further trouble. Such was the family to whom collectively the Marchioness looked for support in her unhappiness. The letter which she wrote to her sister on the present occasion was as follows; —

> *Trafford Park,*
> *Saturday, October 25th.*
> *My Dear Geraldine, —*
>
> I take up my pen to write to you with a heart laden with trouble. Things have become so bad with me that I do not know where to turn myself unless you can give me comfort. I am beginning to feel how terrible it is to have undertaken the position of mother to another person's children. God knows I have endeavoured to do my duty. But it has all been in vain. Everything is over now. I have divided myself for ever from Hampstead and from Fanny. I have felt myself compelled to tell their father that I have divorced them from my heart; and I have told Lord Hampstead the same. You will understand how terrible must have been the occasion when I found myself compelled to take such a step as this.

You know how dreadfully shocked I was when she first revealed to me the fact that she had promised to marry that Post Office clerk. The young man had actually the impudence to call on Lord Kingsbury in London, to offer himself as a son-in-law. Kingsbury very properly would not see him, but instructed Mr. Greenwood to do so. Mr. Greenwood has behaved very well in the matter, and is a great comfort to me. I hope we may be able to do something for him some day. A viler or more ill-conditioned young man he says that he never saw; – insolent, too, and talking as though he had as much right to ask for Fanny's hand as though he were one of the same class. As for that, she would deserve nothing better than to be married to such a man, were it not that all the world would know how closely she is connected with my own darling boys!

Then we took her off to Königsgraaf; and such a time as I had with her! She would write letters to this wretch, and contrived to receive one. I did stop that, but you cannot conceive what a life she led me. Of course I have felt from the first that she would be divided from her brothers, because one never knows how early bad morals may be inculcated! Then her papa came, and Hampstead, – who in all this has encouraged his sister. The young man is his friend. After this who will say that any nobleman ought to call himself what they call a Liberal? Then we came home; and what do you think has happened? Hampstead has taken his sister to live with him at Hendon, next door, as you may say, to the Post Office clerk, where the young man has made himself thoroughly at home; – and Kingsbury has permitted it! Oh, Geraldine, that is the worst of it! Am I not justified in declaring that I have divorced them from my heart?

You can hardly feel as I do, you, whose son fills so well that position which an eldest son ought to fill! Here am I with my darlings, not only under a shade, but with this disgrace before them which they will never be able altogether to get rid of. I can divorce Hampstead and his sister from my heart; but they will still be in some sort brother and sister to my poor boys. How am I to teach them to respect their elder brother, who I suppose must in course of time become Head of the House, when he is hand and glove with a dreadful young man such as that! Am I not justified in declaring that no communication shall be kept up between the two families? If she marries the man she will of course drop the name; but yet all the world will know because of the title. As for him, I am afraid that there is no hope; – although it is odd that the second son does so very often come to the title. If you look into it you will find that the second brother has almost a better chance than the elder, – although I am sure that nothing of the kind will ever happen to dear Hautboy. But he knows how to live in that state of life to which it has pleased God to call him! Do write to me at once, and tell me what I ought to do with a due regard to the position to which I have been called upon to fill in the world.

Your most affectionate sister,
Clara Kingsbury.

P.S. – Do remember poor Mr. Greenwood if Lord Persiflage should know how to do something for a clergyman. He is getting old, and Kingsbury has never been able to do anything for him. I hope the Liberals never will be able to do anything for anybody. I don't think Mr. Greenwood would be fit for any duty, because he has been idle all his life, and is now fond of good living; but a deanery would just suit him.

After the interval of a fortnight Lady Kingsbury received a reply from her sister which the reader may as well see at once.
Castle Hautboy,
November 9th.

My dear Clara, —

I don't know that there is anything further to be done about Fanny. As for divorcing her from your heart, I don't suppose that it amounts to much. I advise you to keep on good terms with Hampstead, because if anything were to happen, it is always well for the Dowager to be friends with the heir. If Fanny will marry the man she must. Lady Di Peacocke married Mr. Billyboy, who was a clerk in one of the offices. They made him Assistant Secretary, and they now live in Portugal Street and do very well. I see Lady Diana about everywhere. Mr. Billyboy can't keep a carriage for her, but that of course is her look-out.

As to what you say about second sons succeeding, don't think of it. It would get you into a bad frame of mind, and make you hate the very person upon whom you will probably have to depend for much of your comfort.

I think you should take things easier, and, above all, do not trouble your husband. I am sure he could make himself very unpleasant if he were driven too far. Persiflage has no clerical patronage whatever, and would not interfere about Deans or Bishops for all the world. I suppose he could appoint a Chaplain to an Embassy, but your clergyman seems to be too old and too idle for that.
Your affectionate sister,
Geraldine Persiflage.

This letter brought very little comfort to the distracted Marchioness. There was much in it so cold that it offended her deeply, and for a moment prompted her almost to divorce also Lady Persiflage from her heart. Lady Persiflage seemed to think that Fanny should be absolutely encouraged to marry the Post Office clerk, because at some past period some Lady Diana, who at the time was near fifty, had married a clerk also. It might be that a Lady Diana should have run away with a groom, but would that be a reason why so monstrous a crime should be repeated? And then in this letter there was so absolute an absence of all affectionate regard for her own children! She had spoken with great love of Lord Hautboy; but then Lord Hautboy was the acknowledged heir, whereas her own children were nobodies. In this there lay the sting. And then she felt herself to have been rebuked because she had hinted at the possibility of Lord Hampstead's departure for a better world. Lord Hampstead was mortal, as well as others. And why should not his death be contemplated, especially as it would confer so great a benefit on the world at large? Her sister's letter persuaded her of nothing. The divorce should remain as complete as ever. She would not condescend to think of any future advantages which might accrue to her from any intimacy with her stepson. Her dower had been regularly settled. Her duty was to her own children, – and secondly to her husband. If she could succeed in turning him against these two wicked elder children, then she would omit to do nothing which might render his life pleasant to him. Such were the resolutions which she formed on receipt of her sister's letter.

About this time Lord Kingsbury found it necessary to say a few words to Mr. Greenwood. There had not of late been much expression of kindness from the Marquis to the clergyman. Since their return from Germany his lordship had been either taciturn or cross. Mr. Greenwood took this very much to heart. For though he was most anxious to assure to himself the friendship of the Marchioness he did not at all wish to neglect the Marquis. It was in truth on the Marquis that he depended for everything that he had in the world. The Marquis could send him out of the house to-morrow, – and if this house were closed to him, none other, as far as he knew, would be open to him except the

Union. He had lived delicately all his life, and luxuriously, – but fruitlessly as regarded the gathering of any honey for future wants. Whatever small scraps of preferment might have come in his way had been rejected as having been joined with too much of labour and too little of emolument. He had gone on hoping that so great a man as the Marquis would be able to do something for him, – thinking that he might at any rate fasten his patron closely to him by bonds of affection. This had been in days before the coming of the present Marchioness. At first she had not created any special difficulty for him. She did not at once attempt to overthrow the settled politics of the family, and Mr. Greenwood had been allowed to be blandly liberal. But during the last year or two, great management had been necessary. By degrees he had found it essential to fall into the conservative views of her ladyship, – which extended simply to the idea that the cream of the earth should be allowed to be the cream of the earth. It is difficult in the same house to adhere to two political doctrines, because the holders of each will require support at all general meetings. Gradually the Marchioness had become exigeant, and the Marquis was becoming aware that he was being thrown over. A feeling of anger was growing up in his mind which he did not himself analyze. When he heard that the clergyman had taken upon himself to lecture Lady Frances, – for it was thus he read the few words which his son had spoken to him, – he carried his anger with him for a day or two, till at last he found an opportunity of explaining himself to the culprit.

"Lady Frances will do very well where she is," said the Marquis, in answer to some expression of a wish as to his daughter's comfort.

"Oh, no doubt!"

"I am not sure that I am fond of too much interference in such matters."

"Have I interfered, my lord?"

"I do not mean to find any special fault on this occasion."

"I hope not, my lord."

"But you did speak to Lady Frances when I think it might have been as well that you should have held your tongue."

"I had been instructed to see that young man in London."

"Exactly; – but not to say anything to Lady Frances."

"I had known her ladyship so many years!"

"Do not drive me to say that you had known her too long."

Mr. Greenwood felt this to be very hard; – for what he had said to Lady Frances he had in truth said under instruction. That last speech as to having perhaps known the young lady too long seemed to contain a terrible threat. He was thus driven to fall back upon his instructions. "Her ladyship seemed to think that perhaps a word in season – "

The Marquis felt this to be cowardly, and was more inclined to be angry with his old friend than if he had stuck to that former plea of old friendship. "I will not have interference in this house, and there's an end of it. If I wish you to do anything for me I will tell you. That is all. If you please nothing more shall be said about it. The subject is disagreeable to me."

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"Has the Marquis said anything about Lady Frances since she went?" the Marchioness asked the clergyman the next morning. How was he to hold his balance between them if he was to be questioned by both sides in this way? "I suppose he has mentioned her?"

"He just mentioned the name one day."

"Well?"

"I rather think that he does not wish to be interrogated about her ladyship."

"I dare say not. Is he anxious to have her back again?"

"That I cannot say, Lady Kingsbury. I should think he must be."

"Of course I shall be desirous to ascertain the truth. He has been so unreasonable that I hardly know how to speak to him myself. I suppose he tells you!"

"I rather think his lordship will decline to speak about her ladyship just at present."

"Of course it is necessary that I should know. Now that she has chosen to take herself off I shall not choose to live under the same roof with her again. If Lord Kingsbury speaks to you on the subject you should make him understand that." Poor Mr. Greenwood felt that there were thorny paths before him, in which it might be very difficult to guard his feet from pricks. Then he had to consider if there were to be two sides in the house, strongly opposed to each other, with which would it be best for him to take a part? The houses of the Marquis, with all their comforts, were open for him; but the influence of Lord Persiflage was very great, whereas that of the Marquis was next to nothing.

CHAPTER XII

CASTLE HAUTBOY

"You'd better ask the old Traffords down here for a few weeks. Hampstead won't shoot, but he can hunt with the Braeside harriers."

This was the answer made by Lord Persiflage to his wife when he was told by her of that divorce which had taken place at Trafford Park, and of the departure of Lady Frances for Hendon. Hampstead and Lady Frances were the old Traffords. Lord Persiflage, too, was a Conservative, but his politics were of a very different order from those entertained by his sister-in-law. He was, above all, a man of the world. He had been our Ambassador at St. Petersburg, and was now a Member of the Cabinet. He liked the good things of office, but had no idea of quarrelling with a Radical because he was a Radical. He cared very little as to the opinions of his guests, if they could make themselves either pleasant or useful. He looked upon his sister-in-law as an old fool, and had no idea of quarrelling with Hampstead for her sake. If the girl persisted in making a bad match she must take the consequences. No great harm would come, – except to her. As to the evil done to his "order," that did not affect Lord Persiflage at all. He did not expect his order to endure for ever. All orders become worn out in time, and effete. He had no abhorrence for anybody; but he liked pleasant people; he liked to treat everything as a joke; and he liked the labours of his not unlaborious life to be minimised. Having given his orders about the old Traffords, as he called them in reference to the "darlings," he said nothing more on the subject. Lady Persiflage wrote a note to "Dear Fanny," conveying the invitation in three words, and received a reply to the effect that she and her brother would be at Castle Hautboy before the end of November. Hampstead would perhaps bring a couple of horses, but he would put them up at the livery stables at Penrith.

"How do you do, Hampstead," said Persiflage when he first met his guest before dinner on the day of the arrival. "You haven't got rid of everything yet?"

This question was supposed to refer to Lord Hampstead's revolutionary tendencies. "Not quite so thoroughly as we hope to do soon."

"I always think it a great comfort that in our country the blackguards are so considerate. I must own that we do very little for them, and yet they never knock us over the head or shoot at us, as they do in Russia and Germany and France." Then he passed on, having said quite enough for one conversation.

"So you've gone off to Hendon to live with your brother?" said Lady Persiflage to her niece.

"Yes; indeed," said Lady Fanny, blushing at the implied allusion to her low-born lover which was contained in this question.

But Lady Persiflage had no idea of saying a word about the lover, or of making herself in any way unpleasant. "I dare say it will be very comfortable for you both," she said; "but we thought you might be a little lonely till you got used to it, and therefore asked you to come down for a week or two. The house is full of people, and you will be sure to find some one that you know." Not a word was said at Castle Hautboy as to those terrible things which had occurred in the Trafford family.

Young Vivian was there, half, as he said, for ornament, but partly for pleasure and partly for business. "He likes to have a private secretary with him," he said to Hampstead, "in order that people might think there is something to do. As a rule they never send anything down from the Foreign Office at this time of year. He always has a Foreign Minister or two in the house, or a few Secretaries of Legation, and that gives an air of business. Nothing would offend or surprise him so much as if one of them were to say a word about affairs. Nobody ever does, and therefore he is supposed to be the safest Foreign Minister that we've had in Downing Street since old – 's time."

"Well, Hautboy." "Well, Hampstead." Thus the two heirs greeted each other. "You'll come and shoot to-morrow?" asked the young host.

"I never shoot. I thought all the world knew that."

"The best cock-shooting in all England," said Hautboy. "But we shan't come to that for the next month."

"Cocks or hens, pheasants, grouse, or partridge, rabbits or hares, it's all one to me. I couldn't hit 'em if I would, and I wouldn't if I could."

"There is a great deal in the couldn't," said Hautboy. "As for hunting, those Braeside fellows go out two or three times a week. But it's a wretched sort of affair. They hunt hares or foxes just as they come, and they're always climbing up a ravine or tumbling down a precipice."

"I can climb and tumble as well as any one," said Hampstead. So that question as to the future amusement of the guest was settled.

But the glory of the house of Hauteville, – Hauteville was the Earl's family name, – at present shone most brightly in the person of the eldest daughter, Lady Amaldina. Lady Amaldina, who was as beautiful in colour, shape, and proportion as wax could make a Venus, was engaged to marry the eldest son of the Duke of Merioneth. The Marquis of Llwddythlw was a young man about forty years of age, of great promise, who had never been known to do a foolish thing in his life, and his father was one of those half-dozen happy noblemen, each of whom is ordinarily reported to be the richest man in England. Lady Amaldina was not unnaturally proud of her high destiny, and as the alliance had already been advertised in all the newspapers, she was not unwilling to talk about it. Lady Frances was not exactly a cousin, but stood in the place of a cousin, and therefore was regarded as a good listener for all the details which had to be repeated. It might be that Lady Amaldina took special joy in having such a listener, because Lady Frances herself had placed her own hopes so low. That story as to the Post Office clerk was known to everybody at Castle Hautboy. Lady Persiflage ridiculed the idea of keeping such things secret. Having so much to be proud of in regard to her own children, she thought that there should be no such secrets. If Fanny Trafford did intend to marry the Post Office clerk it would be better that all the world should know it beforehand. Lady Amaldina knew it, and was delighted at having a confidante whose views and prospects in life were so different from her own. "Of course, dear, you have heard what is going to happen to me," she said, smiling.

"I have heard of your engagement with the son of the Duke of Merioneth, the man with the terrible Welsh name."

"When you once know how to pronounce it it is the prettiest word that poetry ever produced!" Then Lady Amaldina did pronounce her future name; – but nothing serviceable would be done for the reader if an attempt were made to write the sound which she produced. "I am not sure but what it was the name which first won my heart. I can sign it now quite easily without a mistake."

"It won't be long, I suppose, before you will have to do so always?"

"An age, my dear! The Duke's affairs are of such a nature, – and Llwddythlw is so constantly engaged in business, that I don't suppose it will take place for the next ten years. What with settlements, and entails, and Parliament, and the rest of it, I shall be an old woman before I am, – led to the hymeneal altar."

"Ten years!" said Lady Fanny.

"Well, say ten months, which seems to be just as long."

"Isn't he in a hurry?"

"Oh, awfully; but what can he do, poor fellow? He is so placed that he cannot have his affairs arranged for him in half-an-hour, as other men can do. It is a great trouble having estates so large and interests so complicated! Now there is one thing I particularly want to ask you."

"What is it?"

"About being one of the bridesmaids."

"One can hardly answer for ten years hence."

"That is nonsense, of course. I am determined to have no girl who has not a title. It isn't that I care about that kind of thing in the least, but the Duke does. And then I think the list will sound more distinguished in the newspapers, if all the Christian names are given with the Lady before them. There are to be his three sisters, Lady Anne, Lady Antoinette, and Lady Anatolia; – then my two sisters, Lady Alphonsa and Lady Amelia. To be sure they are very young."

"They may be old enough according to what you say."

"Yes, indeed. And then there will be Lady Arabella Portroyal, and Lady Augusta Gelashires. I have got the list written out somewhere, and there are to be just twenty."

"If the catalogue is finished there will hardly be room for me."

"The Earl of Knocknacoppul's daughter has sent me word that she must refuse, because her own marriage will take place first. She would have put it off, as she is only going to marry an Irish baronet, and because she is dying to have her name down as one of the bevy, but he says that if she delays any longer he'll go on a shooting expedition to the Rocky Mountains, and then perhaps he might never come back. So there is a vacancy."

"I hardly like to make a promise so long beforehand. Perhaps I might have a young man, and he might go off to the Rocky Mountains."

"That's just what made me not put down your name at first. Of course you know we've heard about Mr. Roden?"

"I didn't know," said Lady Frances, blushing.

"Oh dear, yes. Everybody knows it. And I think it such a brave thing to do, – if you're really attached to him!"

"I should never marry any man without being attached to him," said Lady Frances.

"That's of course! But I mean romantically attached. I don't pretend to that kind of thing with Llwddythlw. I don't think it necessary in a marriage of this kind. He is a great deal older than I am, and is bald. I suppose Mr. Roden is very, very handsome?"

"I have not thought much about that."

"I should have considered that one would want it for a marriage of that kind. I don't know whether after all it isn't the best thing to do. Romance is so delicious!"

"But then it's delicious to be a Duchess," said Lady Frances, with the slightest touch of irony.

"Oh, no doubt! One has to look at it all round, and then to form a judgment. It went a great way with papa, I know, Llwddythlw being such a good man of business. He has been in the Household, and the Queen will be sure to send a handsome present. I expect to have the grandest show of wedding presents that any girl has yet exhibited in England. Ever so many people have asked mamma already as to what I should like best. Mr. MacWhapple said out plain that he would go to a hundred and fifty pounds. He is a Scotch manufacturer, and has papa's interest in Wigtonshire. I suppose you don't intend to do anything very grand in that way."

"I suppose not, as I don't know any Scotch manufacturers. But my marriage, if I ever am married, is a thing so much of the future that I haven't even begun to think of my dress yet."

"I'll tell you a secret," said Lady Amaldina, whispering. "Mine is already made, and I've tried it on."

"You might get ever so much stouter in ten years," said Lady Frances.

"That of course was joking. But we did think the marriage would come off last June, and as we were in Paris in April the order was given. Don't you tell anybody about that."

Then it was settled that the name of Lady Frances should be put down on the list of bridesmaids, but put down in a doubtful manner, – as is done with other things of great importance.

A few days after Lord Hampstead's arrival a very great dinner-party was given at the Castle, at which all the county round was invited. Castle Hautboy is situated near Pooly Bridge, just in the county of Westmoreland, on an eminence, giving it a grand prospect over Ulleswater, which is generally considered to be one of the Cumberland Lakes. Therefore the gentry from the two counties

were invited as far round as Penrith, Shap, Bampton, and Patterdale. The Earl's property in that neighbourhood was scattered about through the two counties, and was looked after by a steward, or manager, who lived himself at Penrith, and was supposed to be very efficacious in such duties. His name was Crocker; and not only was he invited to the dinner, but also his son, who happened at the time to be enjoying the month's holiday which was allowed to him by the authorities of the office in London to which he was attached.

The reader may remember that a smart young man of this name sat at the same desk with George Roden at the General Post Office. Young Crocker was specially delighted with the honour done him on this occasion. He not only knew that his fellow clerk's friend, Lord Hampstead, was at the Castle, and his sister, Lady Frances, with him; but he also knew that George Roden was engaged to marry that noble lady! Had he heard this before he left London, he would probably have endeavoured to make some atonement for his insolence to Roden; for he was in truth filled with a strong admiration for the man who had before him the possibility of such high prospects. But the news had only reached him since he had been in the North. Now he thought that he might possibly find an opportunity of making known to Lord Hampstead his intimacy with Roden, and of possibly saying a word – just uttering a hint – as to that future event.

It was long before he could find himself near enough to Lord Hampstead to address him. He had even refused to return home with his father, who did not like being very late on the road, saying that he had got a lift into town in another conveyance. This he did, with the prospect of having to walk six miles into Penrith in his dress boots, solely with the object of saying a few words to Roden's friend. At last he was successful.

"We have had what I call an extremely pleasant evening, my lord." It was thus he commenced; and Hampstead, whose practice it was to be specially graceful to any one whom he chanced to meet but did not think to be a gentleman, replied very courteously that the evening had been pleasant.

"Quite a thing to remember," continued Crocker.

"Perhaps one remembers the unpleasant things the longest," said Hampstead, laughing.

"Oh, no, my lord, not that. I always forget the unpleasant. That's what I call philosophy." Then he broke away into the subject that was near his heart. "I wish our friend Roden had been here, my lord."

"Is he a friend of yours?"

"Oh dear, yes; – most intimate. We sit in the same room at the Post Office. And at the same desk, – as thick as thieves, as the saying is. We often have a crack about your lordship."

"I have a great esteem for George Roden. He and I are really friends. I know no one for whom I have a higher regard." This he said with an earnest voice, thinking himself bound to express his friendship more loudly than he would have done had the friend been in his own rank of life.

"That's just what I feel. Roden is a man that will rise."

"I hope so."

"He'll be sure to get something good before long. They'll make him a Surveyor, or Chief Clerk, or something of that kind. I'll back him to have £500 a year before any man in the office. There'll be a shindy about it, of course. There always is a shindy when a fellow is put up out of his turn. But he needn't care for that. They can laugh as win. Eh, my lord!"

"He would be the last to wish an injustice to be done for his own good."

"We've got to take that as it comes, my lord. I won't say but what I should like to go up at once to a senior class over other men's heads. There isn't a chance of that, because I'm independent, and the seniors don't like me. Old Jerningham is always down upon me just for that reason. You ask Roden, and he'll tell you the same thing, – my lord." Then came a momentary break in the conversation, and Lord Hampstead was seizing advantage of it to escape. But Crocker, who had taken enough wine to be bold, saw the attempt, and intercepted it. He was desirous of letting the lord know all that he knew. "Roden is a happy dog, my lord."

"Happy, I hope, though not a dog," said Hampstead, trusting that he could retreat gracefully behind the joke.

"Ha, ha, ha! The dog only meant what a lucky fellow he is. I have heard him speak in raptures of what is in store for him."

"What!"

"There's no happiness like married happiness; is there, my lord?"

"Upon my word, I can't say. Good night to you."

"I hope you will come and see me and Roden at the office some of these days."

"Good night, good night!" Then the man did go. For a moment or two Lord Hampstead felt actually angry with his friend. Could it be that Roden should make so little of his sister's name as to talk about her to the Post Office clerks, – to so mean a fellow as this! And yet the man certainly knew the fact of the existing engagement. Hampstead thought it impossible that it should have travelled beyond the limits of his own family. It was natural that Roden should have told his mother; but unnatural, – so Hampstead thought, – that his friend should have made his sister a subject of conversation to any one else. It was horrible to him that a stranger such as that should have spoken to him about his sister at all. But surely it was not possible that Roden should have sinned after that fashion. He soon resolved that it was not possible. But how grievous a thing it was that a girl's name should be made so common in the mouths of men!

After that he sauntered into the smoking-room, where were congregated the young men who were staying in the house. "That's a kind of thing that happens only once a year," said Hautboy, speaking to all the party; "but I cannot, for the life of me, see why it should happen at all."

"Your governor finds that it succeeds in the county," said one.

"He polishes off a whole heap at one go," said another.

"It does help to keep a party together," said a third.

"And enables a lot of people to talk of dining at Castle Hautboy without lying," said a fourth.

"But why should a lot of people be enabled to say that they'd dined here?" asked Hautboy. "I like to see my friends at dinner. What did you think about it, Hampstead?"

"It's all according to Hampstead's theories," said one.

"Only he'd have had the tinkers and the tailors too," said another.

"And wouldn't have had the ladies and gentlemen," said a third.

"I would have had the tailors and tinkers," said Hampstead, "and I would have had the ladies and gentlemen, too, if I could have got them to meet the tailors and tinkers; – but I would not have had that young man who got me out into the hall just now."

"Why, – that was Crocker, the Post Office clerk," said Hautboy. "Why shouldn't we have a Post Office clerk as well as some one else? Nevertheless, Crocker is a sad cad." In the mean time Crocker was walking home to Penrith in his dress boots.

CHAPTER XIII

THE BRAESIDE HARRIERS

The Braeside Harriers can hardly be called a "crack" pack of hounds. Lord Hautboy had been right in saying that they were always scrambling through ravines, and that they hunted whatever they could find to hunt. Nevertheless, the men and the hounds were in earnest, and did accomplish a fair average of sport under difficult circumstances. No "Pegasus" or "Littlelegs," or "Pigskin," ever sent accounts of wondrous runs from Cumberland or Westmoreland to the sporting papers, in which the gentlemen who had asked the special Pigskin of the day to dinner were described as having been "in" at some "glorious finish" on their well-known horses Banker or Buff, – the horses named being generally those which the gentlemen wished to sell. The names of gorses and brooks had not become historic, as have those of Ranksborough and Whissendine. Trains were not run to suit this or the other meet. Gentlemen did not get out of fast drags with pretty little aprons tied around their waists, like girls in a country house coming down to breakfast. Not many perhaps wore pink coats, and none pink tops. One horse would suffice for one day's work. An old assistant huntsman in an old red coat, with one boy mounted on a ragged pony, served for an establishment. The whole thing was despicable in the eyes of men from the Quorn and Cottesmore. But there was some wonderful riding and much constant sport with the Braeside Harriers, and the country had given birth to certainly the best hunting song in the language; —

Do you ken John Peel with his coat so gay;
Do you ken John Peel at the break of day;
Do you ken John Peel when he's far, far away
With his hounds and his horn in the morning.

Such as the Braeside Harriers were, Lord Hampstead determined to make the experiment, and on a certain morning had himself driven to Cronelloe Thorn, a favourite meet halfway between Penrith and Keswick. I hold that nothing is so likely to be permanently prejudicial to the interest of hunting in the British Isles as a certain flavour of tip-top fashion which has gradually enveloped it. There is a pretence of grandeur about that and, alas, about other sports also, which is, to my thinking, destructive of all sport itself. Men will not shoot unless game is made to appear before them in clouds. They will not fish unless the rivers be exquisite. To row is nothing unless you can be known as a national hero. Cricket requires appendages which are troublesome and costly, and by which the minds of economical fathers are astounded. To play a game of hockey in accordance with the times you must have a specially trained pony and a gaudy dress. Racquets have given place to tennis because tennis is costly. In all these cases the fashion of the game is much more cherished than the game itself. But in nothing is this feeling so predominant as in hunting. For the management of a pack, as packs are managed now, a huntsman needs must be a great man himself, and three mounted subordinates are necessary, as at any rate for two of these servants a second horse is required. A hunt is nothing in the world unless it goes out four times a week at least. A run is nothing unless the pace be that of a steeplechase. Whether there be or be not a fox before the hounds is of little consequence to the great body of riders. A bold huntsman who can make a dash across country from one covert to another, and who can so train his hounds that they shall run as though game were before them, is supposed to have provided good sport. If a fox can be killed in covert afterwards so much the better for those who like to talk of their doings. Though the hounds brought no fox with them, it is of no matter. When a fox does run according to his nature he is reviled as a useless brute, because he will not go

straight across country. But the worst of all is the attention given by men to things altogether outside the sport. Their coats and waistcoats, their boots and breeches, their little strings and pretty scarfs, their saddles and bridles, their dandy knick-knacks, and, above all, their flasks, are more to many men than aught else in the day's proceedings. I have known girls who have thought that their first appearance in the ball-room, when all was fresh, unstained, and perfect from the milliner's hand, was the one moment of rapture for the evening. I have sometimes felt the same of young sportsmen at a Leicestershire or Northamptonshire meet. It is not that they will not ride when the occasion comes. They are always ready enough to break their bones. There is no greater mistake than to suppose that dandyism is antagonistic to pluck. The fault is that men train themselves to care for nothing that is not as costly as unlimited expenditure can make it. Thus it comes about that the real love of sport is crushed under a desire for fashion. A man will be almost ashamed to confess that he hunts in Essex or Sussex, because the proper thing is to go down to the Shires. Grass, no doubt, is better than ploughed land to ride upon; but, taking together the virtues and vices of all hunting counties, I doubt whether better sport is not to be found in what I will venture to call the haunts of the clodpoles, than among the palmy pastures of the well-breeched beauties of Leicestershire.

Braeside Harriers though they were, a strong taste for foxes had lately grown up in the minds of men and in the noses of hounds. Blank days they did not know, because a hare would serve the turn if the nobler animal were not forthcoming; but ideas of preserving had sprung up; steps were taken to solace the minds of old women who had lost their geese; and the Braeside Harriers, though they had kept their name, were gradually losing their character. On this occasion the hounds were taken off to draw a covert instead of going to a so-ho, as regularly as though they were advertised among the fox-hounds in *The Times*. It was soon known that Lord Hampstead was Lord Hampstead, and he was welcomed by the field. What matter that he was a revolutionary Radical if he could ride to hounds? At any rate, he was the son of a Marquis, and was not left to that solitude which sometimes falls upon a man who appears suddenly as a stranger among strangers on a hunting morning. "I am glad to see you out, my lord," said Mr. Amblethwaite, the Master. "It isn't often that we get recruits from Castle Hautboy."

"They think a good deal of shooting there."

"Yes; and they keep their horses in Northamptonshire. Lord Hautboy does his hunting there. The Earl, I think, never comes out now."

"I dare say not. He has all the foreign nations to look after."

"I suppose he has his hands pretty full," said Mr. Amblethwaite. "I know I have mine just at this time of the year. Where do you think these hounds ran their fox to last Friday? We found him outside of the Lowther Woods, near the village of Clifton. They took him straight over Shap Fell, and then turning sharp to the right, went all along Hawes Wall and over High Street into Troutbeck."

"That's all among the mountains," said Hampstead.

"Mountains! I should think so. I have to spend half my time among the mountains."

"But you couldn't ride over High Street?"

"No, we couldn't ride; not there. But we had to make our way round, some of us, and some of them went on foot. Dick never lost sight of the hounds the whole day." Dick was the boy who rode the ragged pony. "When we found 'em there he was with half the hounds around him, and the fox's brush stuck in his cap."

"How did you get home that night?" asked Hampstead.

"Home! I didn't get home at all. It was pitch dark before we got the rest of the hounds together. Some of them we didn't find till next day. I had to go and sleep at Bowness, and thought myself very lucky to get a bed. Then I had to ride home next day over Kirkstone Fell. That's what I call something like work for a man and horse. – There's a fox in there, my lord, do you hear them?" Then Mr. Amblethwaite bustled away to assist at the duty of getting the fox to break.

"I'm glad to see that you're fond of this kind of thing, my lord," said a voice in Hampstead's ear, which, though he had only heard it once, he well remembered. It was Crocker, the guest at the dinner-party, – Crocker, the Post Office clerk.

"Yes," said Lord Hampstead, "I am very fond of this kind of thing. That fox has broken, I think, at the other side of the cover." Then he trotted off down a little lane between two loose-built walls, so narrow that there was no space for two men to ride abreast. His object at that moment was to escape Crocker rather than to look after the hounds.

They were in a wild country, not exactly on a mountain side, but among hills which not far off grew into mountains, where cultivation of the rudest kind was just beginning to effect its domination over human nature. There was a long spinney rather than a wood stretching down a bottom, through which a brook ran. It would now cease, and then renew itself, so that the trees, though not absolutely continuous, were nearly so for the distance of half a mile. The ground on each side was rough with big stones, and steep in some places as they went down the hill. But still it was such that horsemen could gallop on it. The fox made his way along the whole length, and then traversing, so as to avoid the hounds, ran a ring up the hillside, and back into the spinney again. Among the horsemen many declared that the brute must be killed unless he would make up his mind for a fair start. Mr. Amblethwaite was very busy, hunting the hounds himself, and intent rather on killing the fox fairly than on the hopes of a run. Perhaps he was not desirous of sleeping out another night on the far side of Helvellyn. In this way the sportsmen galloped up and down the side of the wood till the feeling arose, as it does on such occasions, that it might be well for a man to stand still awhile and spare his horse, in regard to the future necessities of the day. Lord Hampstead did as others were doing, and in a moment Crocker was by his side. Crocker was riding an animal which his father was wont to drive about the country, but one well known in the annals of the Braeside Harriers. It was asserted of him that the fence was not made which he did not know how to creep over. Of jumping, such as jumping is supposed to be in the shires, he knew nothing. He was, too, a bad hand at galloping, but with a shambling, half cantering trot, which he had invented for himself, he could go along all day, not very quickly, but in such fashion as never to be left altogether behind. He was a flea-bitten horse, if my readers know what that is, – a flea-bitten roan, or white covered with small red spots. Horses of this colour are ugly to look at, but are very seldom bad animals. Such as he was, Crocker, who did not ride much when up in London, was very proud of him. Crocker was dressed in a green coat, which in a moment of extravagance he had had made for hunting, and in brown breeches, in which he delighted to display himself on all possible occasions. "My lord," he said, "you'd hardly think it, but I believe this horse to be the best hunter in Cumberland."

"Is he, indeed? Some horse of course must be the best, and why not yours?"

"There's nothing he can't do; – nothing. His jumping is mi – raculous, and as for pace, you'd be quite surprised. – They're at him again now. What an echo they do make among the hills!"

Indeed they did. Every now and then the Master would just touch his horn, giving a short blast, just half a note, and then the sound would come back, first from this rock and then from the other, and the hounds as they heard it would open as though encouraged by the music of the hills, and then their voices would be carried round the valley, and come back again and again from the steep places, and they would become louder and louder as though delighted with the effect of their own efforts. Though there should be no hunting, the concert was enough to repay a man for his trouble in coming there. "Yes," said Lord Hampstead, his disgust at the man having been quenched for the moment by the charm of the music, "it is a wonderful spot for echoes."

"It's what I call awfully nice. We don't have anything like that up at St. Martin's-le-Grand." Perhaps it may be necessary to explain that the Post Office in London stands in a spot bearing that poetic name.

"I don't remember any echoes there," said Lord Hampstead.

"No, indeed; – nor yet no hunting, nor yet no hounds; are there, my lord? All the same, it's not a bad sort of place!"

"A very respectable public establishment!" said Lord Hampstead.

"Just so, my lord; that's just what I always say. It ain't swell like Downing Street, but it's a deal more respectable than the Custom House."

"Is it? I didn't know."

"Oh yes. They all admit that. You ask Roden else." On hearing the name, Lord Hampstead began to move his horse, but Crocker was at his side and could not be shaken off. "Have you heard from him, my lord, since you have been down in these parts?"

"Not a word."

"I dare say he thinks more of writing to a correspondent of the fairer sex."

This was unbearable. Though the fox had again turned and gone up the valley, – a movement which seemed to threaten his instant death, and to preclude any hope of a run from that spot, – Hampstead felt himself compelled to escape, if he could. In his anger he touched his horse with his spur and galloped away among the rocks, as though his object was to assist Mr. Amblethwaite in his almost frantic efforts. But Crocker cared nothing for the stones. Where the lord went, he went. Having made acquaintance with a lord, he was not going to waste the blessing which Providence had vouchsafed to him.

"He'll never leave that place alive, my lord."

"I dare say not." And again the persecuted nobleman rode on, – thinking that neither should Crocker, if he could have his will.

"By the way, as we are talking of Roden – "

"I haven't been talking about him at all." Crocker caught the tone of anger, and stared at his companion. "I'd rather not talk about him."

"My lord! I hope there has been nothing like a quarrel. For the lady's sake, I hope there's no misunderstanding!"

"Mr. Crocker," he said very slowly, "it isn't customary – "

At that moment the fox broke, the hounds were away, and Mr. Amblethwaite was seen rushing down the hill-side, as though determined on breaking his neck. Lord Hampstead rushed after him at a pace which, for a time, defied Mr. Crocker. He became thoroughly ashamed of himself in even attempting to make the man understand that he was sinning against good taste. He could not do so without some implied mention of his sister, and to allude to his sister in connection with such a man was a profanation. He could only escape from the brute. Was this a punishment which he was doomed to bear for being – as his stepmother was wont to say – untrue to his order?

In the mean time the hounds went at a great pace down the hill. Some of the old stagers, who knew the country well, made a wide sweep round to the left, whence by lanes and tracks, which were known to them, they could make their way down to the road which leads along Ulleswater to Patterdale. In doing this they might probably not see the hounds again that day, – but such are the charms of hunting in a hilly country. They rode miles around, and though they did again see the hounds, they did not see the hunt. To have seen the hounds as they start, and to see them again as they are clustering round the huntsman after eating their fox, is a great deal to some men.

On this occasion it was Hampstead's lot – and Crocker's – to do much more than that. Though they had started down a steep valley, – down the side rather of a gully, – they were not making their way out from among the hills into the low country. The fox soon went up again, – not back, but over an intervening spur of a mountain towards the lake. The riding seemed sometimes to Hampstead to be impossible. But Mr. Amblethwaite did it, and he stuck to Mr. Amblethwaite. It would have been all very well had not Crocker stuck to him. If the old roan would only tumble among the stones what an escape there would be! But the old roan was true to his character, and, to give every one his due, the Post Office clerk rode as well as the lord. There was nearly an hour and a-half of it before the

hounds ran into their fox just as he was gaining an earth among the bushes and hollies with which Airey Force is surrounded. Then on the sloping meadow just above the waterfall, the John Peel of the hunt dragged out the fox from among the trees, and, having dismembered him artistically, gave him to the hungry hounds. Then it was that perhaps half-a-dozen diligent, but cautious, huntsmen came up, and heard all those details of the race which they were afterwards able to give, as on their own authority, to others who had been as cautious, but not so diligent, as themselves.

"One of the best things I ever saw in this country," said Crocker, who had never seen a hound in any other country. At this moment he had ridden up alongside of Hampstead on the way back to Penrith. The Master and the hounds and Crocker must go all the way. Hampstead would turn off at Pooley Bridge. But still there were four miles, during which he would be subjected to his tormentor.

"Yes, indeed. A very good thing, as I was saying, Mr. Amblethwaite."

CHAPTER XIV

COMING HOME FROM HUNTING

Lord Hampstead had been discussing with Mr. Amblethwaite the difficult nature of hunting in such a county as Cumberland. The hounds were in the road before them with John Peel in the midst of them. Dick with the ragged pony was behind, looking after stragglers. Together with Lord Hampstead and the Master was a hard-riding, rough, weather-beaten half-gentleman, half-farmer, named Patterson, who lived a few miles beyond Penrith and was Amblethwaite's right hand in regard to hunting. Just as Crocker joined them the road had become narrow, and the young lord had fallen a little behind. Crocker had seized his opportunity; – but the lord also seized his, and thrust himself in between Mr. Patterson and the Master. "That's all true," said the Master. "Of course we don't presume to do the thing as you swells do it down in the Shires. We haven't the money, and we haven't the country, and we haven't the foxes. But I don't know whether for hunting we don't see as much of it as you do."

"Quite as much, if I may take to-day as a sample."

"Very ordinary; – wasn't it, Amblethwaite?" asked Patterson, who was quite determined to make the most of his own good things.

"It was not bad to-day. The hounds never left their scent after they found him. I think our hillsides carry the scent better than our grasses. If you want to ride, of course, it's rough. But if you like hunting, and don't mind a scramble, perhaps you may see it here as well as elsewhere."

"Better, a deal, from all I hear tell," said Patterson. "Did you ever hear any music like that in Leicestershire, my lord?"

"I don't know that ever I did," said Hampstead. "I enjoyed myself amazingly."

"I hope you'll come again," said the Master, "and that often."

"Certainly, if I remain here."

"I knew his lordship would like it," said Crocker, crowding in on a spot where it was possible for four to ride abreast. "I think it was quite extraordinary to see how a stranger like his lordship got over our country."

"Clever little 'orse his lordship's on," said Patterson.

"It's the man more than the beast, I think," said Crocker, trying to flatter.

"The best man in England," said Patterson, "can't ride to hounds without a tidy animal under him."

"Nor yet can't the best horse in England stick to hounds without a good man on top of him," said the determined Crocker. Patterson grunted, – hating flattery, and remembering that the man flattered was a lord.

Then the road became narrow again, and Hampstead fell a little behind. Crocker was alongside of him in a moment. There seemed to be something mean in running away from the man; – something at any rate absurd in seeming to run away from him. Hampstead was ashamed in allowing himself to be so much annoyed by such a cause. He had already snubbed the man, and the man might probably be now silent on the one subject which was so peculiarly offensive. "I suppose," said he, beginning a conversation which should show that he was willing to discuss any general matter with Mr. Crocker, "that the country north and west of Penrith is less hilly than this?"

"Oh, yes, my lord; a delightful country to ride over in some parts. Is Roden fond of following the hounds, my lord?"

"I don't in the least know," said Hampstead, curtly. Then he made another attempt. "These hounds don't go as far north as Carlisle?"

"Oh, no, my lord; never more than eight or ten miles from Penrith. They've another pack up in that country; nothing like ours, but still they do show sport. I should have thought now Roden would have been just the man to ride to hounds, – if he got the opportunity."

"I don't think he ever saw a hound in his life. I'm rather in a hurry, and I think I shall trot on."

"I'm in a hurry myself," said Crocker, "and I shall be happy to show your lordship the way. It isn't above a quarter of a mile's difference to me going by Pooley Bridge instead of Dallmaine."

"Pray don't do anything of the kind; I can find the road." Whereupon Hampstead shook hands cordially with the Master, bade Mr. Patterson good-bye with a kindly smile, and trotted on beyond the hounds as quickly as he could.

But Crocker was not to be shaken off. The flea-bitten roan was as good at the end of a day as he was at the beginning, and trotted on gallantly. When they had gone some quarter of a mile Hampstead acknowledged to himself that it was beyond his power to shake off his foe. By that time Crocker had made good his position close alongside of the lord, with his horse's head even with that of the other. "There is a word, my lord, I want to say to you." This Crocker muttered somewhat piteously, so that Hampstead's heart was for the moment softened towards him. He checked his horse and prepared himself to listen. "I hope I haven't given any offence. I can assure you, my lord, I haven't intended it. I have so much respect for your lordship that I wouldn't do it for the world."

What was he to do? He had been offended. He had intended to show that he was offended. And yet he did not like to declare as much openly. His object had been to stop the man from talking, and to do so if possible without making any reference himself to the subject in question. Were he now to declare himself offended he could hardly do so without making some allusion to his sister. But he had determined that he would make no such allusion. Now as the man appealed to him, asking as it were forgiveness for some fault of which he was not himself conscious, it was impossible to refrain from making him some answer. "All right," he said; "I'm sure you didn't mean anything. Let us drop it, and there will be an end of it."

"Oh, certainly; – and I'm sure I'm very much obliged to your lordship. But I don't quite know what it is that ought to be dropped. As I am so intimate with Roden, sitting at the same desk with him every day of my life, it did seem natural to speak to your lordship about him."

This was true. As it had happened that Crocker, who as well as Roden was a Post Office Clerk, had appeared as a guest at Castle Hautboy, it had been natural that he should speak of his office companion to a man who was notoriously that companion's friend. Hampstead did not quite believe in the pretended intimacy, having heard Roden declare that he had not as yet formed any peculiar friendship at the Office. He had too felt, unconsciously, that such a one as Roden ought not to be intimate with such a one as Crocker. But there was no cause of offence in this. "It was natural," he said.

"And then I was unhappy when I thought from what you said that there had been some quarrel."

"There has been no quarrel," said Hampstead.

"I am very glad indeed to hear that." He was beginning to touch again on a matter that should have been private. What was it to him whether or no there was a quarrel between Lord Hampstead and Roden. Hampstead therefore again rode on in silence.

"I should have been so very sorry that anything should have occurred to interfere with our friend's brilliant prospects." Lord Hampstead looked about to see whether there was any spot at which he could make his escape by jumping over a fence. On the right hand there was the lake rippling up on to the edge of the road, and on the left was a high stone wall, without any vestige of an aperture through it as far as the eye could reach. He was already making the pace as fast as he could, and was aware that no escape could be effected in that manner. He shook his head, and bit the handle of his whip, and looked straight away before him through his horse's ears. "You cannot think how proud I've been that a gentleman sitting at the same desk with myself should have been so fortunate in his matrimonial prospects. I think it an honour to the Post Office all round."

"Mr. Crocker," said Lord Hampstead, pulling up his horse suddenly, and standing still upon the spot, "if you will remain here for five minutes I will ride on; or if you will ride on I will remain here till you are out of sight. I must insist that one of these arrangements be made."

"My lord!"

"Which shall it be?"

"Now I have offended you again."

"Don't talk of offence, but just do as I bid you. I want to be alone."

"Is it about the matrimonial alliance?" demanded Crocker almost in tears. Thereupon Lord Hampstead turned his horse round and trotted back towards the hounds and horsemen, whom he heard on the road behind him. Crocker paused a moment, trying to discover by the light of his own intellect what might have been the cause of this singular conduct on the part of the young nobleman, and then, having failed to throw any light on the matter, he rode on homewards, immersed in deep thought. Hampstead, when he found himself again with his late companions, asked some idle questions as to the hunting arrangements of next week. That they were idle he was quite aware, having resolved that he would not willingly put himself into any position in which it might be probable that he should again meet that objectionable young man. But he went on with his questions, listening or not listening to Mr. Amblethwaite's answers, till he parted company with his companions in the neighbourhood of Pooley Bridge. Then he rode alone to Hautboy Castle, with his mind much harassed by what had occurred. It seemed to him to have been almost proved that George Roden must have spoken to this man of his intended marriage. In all that the man had said he had suggested that the information had come direct from his fellow-clerk. He had seemed to declare, – Hampstead thought that he had declared, – that Roden had often discussed the marriage with him. If so, how base must have been his friend's conduct! How thoroughly must he have been mistaken in his friend's character! How egregiously wrong must his sister have been in her estimate of the man! For himself, as long as the question had been simply one of his own intimacy with a companion whose outside position in the world had been inferior to his own, he had been proud of what he had done, and had answered those who had remonstrated with him with a spirit showing that he despised their practices quite as much as they could ridicule his. He had explained to his father his own ideas of friendship, and had been eager in showing that George Roden's company was superior to most young men of his own position. There had been Hautboy, and Scatterdash, and Lord Plunge, and the young Earl of Longoolds, all of them elder sons, whom he described as young men without a serious thought in their heads. What was it to him how Roden got his bread, so long as he got it honestly? "The man's the man for a' that." Thus he had defended himself and been quite conscious that he was right. When Roden had suddenly fallen in love with his sister, and his sister had as suddenly fallen in love with Roden, – then he had begun to doubt. A thing which was in itself meritorious might become dangerous and objectionable by reason of other things which it would bring in its train. He felt for a time that associations which were good for himself might not be so good for his sister. There seemed to be a sanctity about her rank which did not attach to his own. He had thought that the Post Office clerk was as good as himself; but he could not assure himself that he was as good as the ladies of his family. Then he had begun to reason with himself on this subject, as he did on all. What was there different in a girl's nature that ought to make her fastidious as to society which he felt to be good enough for himself? In entertaining the feeling which had been strong within him as to that feminine sanctity, was he not giving way to one of those empty prejudices of the world, in opposition to which he had resolved to make a life-long fight? So he had reasoned with himself; but his reason, though it affected his conduct, did not reach his taste. It irked him to think there should be this marriage, though he was strong in his resolution to uphold his sister, – and, if necessary, to defend her. He had not given way as to the marriage. It had been settled between himself and his sister and his father that there should be no meeting of the lovers at Hendon Hall. He did hope that the engagement might die away, though he was determined to cling to her even though she clung to her lover. This was his state of mind, when this hideous

young man, who seemed to have been created with the object of showing him how low a creature a Post Office clerk could be, came across him, and almost convinced him that that other Post Office clerk had been boasting among his official associates of the favours of the high-born lady who had unfortunately become attached to him! He would stick to his politics, to his Radical theories, to his old ideas about social matters generally; but he was almost tempted to declare to himself that women for the present ought to be regarded as exempt from those radical changes which would be good for men. For himself his "order" was a vanity and a delusion; but for his sister it must still be held as containing some bonds. In this frame of mind he determined that he would return to Hendon Hall almost immediately. Further hope of hunting with the Braeside Harriers there was none; and it was necessary for him to see Roden as soon as possible.

That evening at the Castle Lady Amaldina got hold of him, and asked him his advice as to her future duties as a married woman. Lady Amaldina was very fond of little confidences as to her future life, and had as yet found no opportunity of demanding the sympathy of her cousin. Hampstead was not in truth her cousin, but they called each other cousins, – or were called so. None of the Hauteville family felt any of that aversion to the Radicalism of the heir to the marquisate which the Marchioness entertained. Lady Amaldina delighted to be Amy to Lord Hampstead, and was very anxious to ask him his advice as to Lord Llwddythlw.

"Of course you know all about my marriage, Hampstead?" she said.

"I don't know anything about it," Hampstead replied.

"Oh, Hampstead; how ill-natured!"

"Nobody knows anything about it, because it hasn't taken place."

"That is so like a Radical, to be so precise and rational. My engagement then?"

"Yes; I've heard a great deal about that. We've been talking about that for – how long shall I say?"

"Don't be disagreeable. Of course such a man as Llwddythlw can't be married all in a hurry just like anybody else."

"What a misfortune for him!"

"Why should it be a misfortune?"

"I should think it so if I were going to be married to you."

"That's the prettiest thing I have ever heard you say. At any rate he has got to put up with it, and so have I. It is a bore, because people will talk about nothing else. What do you think of Llwddythlw as a public man?"

"I haven't thought about it. I haven't any means of thinking. I am so completely a private man myself, that I know nothing of public men. I hope he's good at going to sleep."

"Going to sleep?"

"Otherwise it must be so dull, sitting so many hours in the House of Commons. But he's been at it a long time, and I dare say he's used to it."

"Isn't it well that a man in his position should have a regard to his country?"

"Every man ought to have a regard to his country; – but a stronger regard, if it be possible, to the world at large."

Lady Amaldina stared at him, not knowing in the least what he meant. "You are so droll," she said. "You never, I think, think of the position you were born to fill."

"Oh yes, I do. I'm a man, and I think a great deal about it."

"But you've got to be Marquis of Kingsbury, and Llwddythlw has got to be Duke of Merioneth. He never forgets it for a moment."

"What a nuisance for him, – and for you."

"Why should it be a nuisance for me? Cannot a woman understand her duties as well as a man?"

"Quite so, if she knows how to get a glimpse at them."

"I do," said Lady Amaldina, earnestly. "I am always getting glimpses at them. I am quite aware of the functions which it will become me to perform when I am Llwddythlw's wife."

"Mother of his children?"

"I didn't mean that at all, Hampstead. That's all in the hands of the Almighty. But in becoming the future Duchess of Merioneth – "

"That's in the hands of the Almighty, too, isn't it?"

"No; yes. Of course everything is in God's hands."

"The children, the dukedom, and all the estates."

"I never knew any one so provoking," she exclaimed.

"One is at any rate as much as another."

"You don't a bit understand me," she said. "Of course if I go and get married, I do get married."

"And if you have children, you do have children. If you do, – and I hope you will, – I'm sure they'll be very pretty and well behaved. That will be your duty, and then you'll have to see that Llwddythlw has what he likes for dinner."

"I shall do nothing of the kind."

"Then he'll dine at the Club, or at the House of Commons. That's my idea of married life."

"Nothing beyond that? No community of soul?"

"Certainly not."

"No!"

"Because you believe in the Trinity, Llwddythlw won't go to heaven. If he were to take to gambling and drinking you wouldn't go to the other place."

"How can you be so horrid."

"That would be a community of souls, – as souls are understood. A community of interests I hope you will have, and, in order that you may, take care and look after his dinner." She could not make much more of her cousin in the way of confidence, but she did exact a promise from him, that he would be in attendance at her wedding.

A few days afterwards he returned to Hendon Park, leaving his sister to remain for a fortnight longer at Castle Hautboy.

CHAPTER XV

MARION FAY AND HER FATHER

"I saw him go in a full quarter of an hour since, and Marion Fay went in before. I feel quite sure that she knew that he was expected." Thus spoke Clara Demijohn to her mother.

"How could she have known it," asked Mrs. Duffer, who was present in Mrs. Demijohn's parlour, where the two younger women were standing with their faces close to the window, with their gloves on and best bonnets, ready for church.

"I am sure she did, because she had made herself smarter than ever with her new brown silk, and her new brown gloves, and her new brown hat, – sly little Quaker that she is. I can see when a girl has made herself up for some special occasion. She wouldn't have put on new gloves surely to go to church with Mrs. Roden."

"If you stay staring there any longer you'll both be late," said Mrs. Demijohn.

"Mrs. Roden hasn't gone yet," said Clara, lingering. It was Sunday morning, and the ladies at No. 10 were preparing for their devotions. Mrs. Demijohn herself never went to church, having some years since had a temporary attack of sciatica, which had provided her with a perpetual excuse for not leaving the house on a Sunday morning. She was always left at home with a volume of Blair's Sermons; but Clara, who was a clever girl, was well aware that more than half a page was never read. She was aware also that great progress was then made with the novel which happened to have last come into the house from the little circulating library round the corner. The ringing of the neighbouring church bell had come to its final tinkling, and Mrs. Duffer knew that she must start, or disgrace herself in the eyes of the pew-opener. "Come, my dear," she said; and away they went. As the door of No. 10 opened so did that of No. 11 opposite, and the four ladies, including Marion Fay, met in the road. "You have a visitor this morning," said Clara.

"Yes; – a friend of my son's."

"We know all about it," said Clara. "Don't you think he's a very fine-looking young man, Miss Fay?"

"Yes, I do," said Marion. "He is certainly a handsome young man."

"Beauty is but skin deep," said Mrs. Duffer.

"But still it goes a long way," said Clara, "particularly with high birth and noble rank."

"He is an excellent young man, as far as I know him," said Mrs. Roden, thinking that she was called upon to defend her son's friend.

Hampstead had returned home on the Saturday, and had taken the earliest opportunity on the following Sunday morning to go over to his friend at Holloway. The distance was about six miles, and he had driven over, sending the vehicle back with the intention of walking home. He would get his friend to walk with him, and then should take place that conversation which he feared would become excessively unpleasant before it was finished. He was shown up to the drawing-room of No. 11, and there he found all alone a young woman whom he had never seen before. This was Marion Fay, the daughter of Zachary Fay, a Quaker, who lived at No. 17, Paradise Row. "I had thought Mrs. Roden was here," he said.

"Mrs. Roden will be down directly. She is putting her bonnet on to go to church."

"And Mr. Roden?" he asked. "He I suppose is not going to church with her?"

"Ah, no; I wish he were. George Roden never goes to church."

"Is he a friend of yours?"

"For his mother's sake I was speaking; – but why not for his also? He is not specially my friend, but I wish well to all men. He is not at home at present, but I understood that he will be here shortly."

"Do you always go to church?" he asked, grounding his question not on any impertinent curiosity as to her observance of her religious duties, but because he had thought from her dress she must certainly be a Quaker.

"I do usually go to your church on a Sunday."

"Nay," said he, "I have no right to claim it as my church. I fear you must regard me also as a heathen, – as you do George Roden."

"I am sorry for that, sir. It cannot be good that any man should be a heathen when so much Christian teaching is abroad. But men I think allow themselves a freedom of thought from which women in their timidity are apt to shrink. If so it is surely good that we should be cowards?" Then the door opened, and Mrs. Roden came into the room.

"George is gone," she said, "to call on a sick friend, but he will be back immediately. He got your letter yesterday evening, and he left word that I was to tell you that he would be back by eleven. Have you introduced yourself to my friend Miss Fay?"

"I had not heard her name," he said smiling, "but we had introduced ourselves."

"Marion Fay is my name," said the girl, "and yours, I suppose is – Lord Hampstead."

"So now we may be supposed to know each other for ever after," he replied, laughing; " – only I fear, Mrs. Roden, that your friend will repudiate the acquaintance because I do not go to church."

"I said not so, Lord Hampstead. The nearer we were to being friends, – if that were possible, – the more I should regret it." Then the two ladies started on their morning duty.

Lord Hampstead when he was alone immediately decided that he would like to have Marion Fay for a friend, and not the less so because she went to church. He felt that she had been right in saying that audacity in speculation on religious subjects was not becoming a young woman. As it was unfitting that his sister Lady Frances should marry a Post Office clerk, so would it have been unbecoming that Marion Fay should have been what she herself called a heathen. Surely of all the women on whom his eyes had ever rested she was, – he would not say to himself the most lovely, – but certainly the best worth looking at. The close brown bonnet and the little cap, and the well-made brown silk dress, and the brown gloves on her little hands, together made, to his eyes, as pleasing a female attire as a girl could well wear. Could it have been by accident that the graces of her form were so excellently shown? It had to be supposed that she, as a Quaker, was indifferent to outside feminine garniture. It is the theory of a Quaker that she should be so, and in every article she had adhered closely to Quaker rule. As far as he could see there was not a ribbon about her. There was no variety of colour. Her head-dress was as simple and close as any that could have been worn by her grandmother. Hardly a margin of smooth hair appeared between her cap and her forehead. Her dress fitted close to her neck, and on her shoulders she wore a tight-fitting shawl. The purpose in her raiment had been Quaker all through. The exquisite grace must have come altogether by accident, – just because it had pleased nature to make her gracious! As to all this there might perhaps be room for doubt. Whether there had been design or not might possibly afford scope for consideration. But that the grace was there was a matter which required no consideration, and admitted of no doubt.

As Marion Fay will have much to do with our story, it will be well that some further description should be given here of herself and of her condition in life. Zachary Fay, her father, with whom she lived, was a widower with no other living child. There had been many others, who had all died, as had also their mother. She had been a prey to consumption, but had lived long enough to know that she had bequeathed the fatal legacy to her offspring, – to all of them except to Marion, who, when her mother died, had seemed to be exempted from the terrible curse of the family. She had then been old enough to receive her mother's last instructions as to her father, who was then a broken-hearted man struggling with difficulty against the cruelty of Providence. Why should it have been that God should thus afflict him, – him who had no other pleasure in the world, no delights, but those which were afforded to him by the love of his wife and children? It was to be her duty to comfort him, to make up as best she might by her tenderness for all that he had lost and was losing. It was to be especially

her duty to soften his heart in all worldly matters, and to turn him as far as possible to the love of heavenly things. It was now two years since her mother's death, and in all things she had endeavoured to perform the duties which her mother had exacted from her.

But Zachary Fay was not a man whom it was easy to turn hither and thither. He was a stern, hard, just man, of whom it may probably be said that if a world were altogether composed of such, the condition of such a world would be much better than that of the world we know; – for generosity is less efficacious towards permanent good than justice, and tender speaking less enduring in its beneficial results than truth. His enemies, for he had enemies, said of him that he loved money. It was no doubt true; for he that does not love money must be an idiot. He was certainly a man who liked to have what was his own, who would have been irate with any one who had endeavoured to rob him of his own, or had hindered him in his just endeavour to increase his own. That which belonged to another he did not covet, – unless it might be in the way of earning it. Things had prospered with him, and he was – for his condition in life – a rich man. But his worldly prosperity had not for a moment succeeded in lessening the asperity of the blow which had fallen upon him. With all his sternness he was essentially a loving man. To earn money he would say – or perhaps more probably would only think – was the necessity imposed upon man by the Fall of Adam; but to have something warm at his heart, something that should be infinitely dearer to him than himself and all his possessions, – that was what had been left of Divine Essence in a man even after the Fall of Adam. Now the one living thing left for him to love was his daughter Marion.

He was not a man whose wealth was of high order, or his employment of great moment, or he would not probably have been living at Holloway in Paradise Row. He was and had now been for many years senior clerk to Messrs. Pogson and Littlebird, Commission Agents, at the top of King's Court, Old Broad Street. By Messrs. Pogson and Littlebird he was trusted with everything, and had become so amalgamated with the firm as to have achieved in the City almost the credit of a merchant himself. There were some who thought that Zachary Fay must surely be a partner in the house, or he would not have been so well known or so much respected among merchants themselves. But in truth he was no more than senior clerk, with a salary amounting to four hundred a year. Nor, though he was anxious about his money, would he have dreamed of asking for any increase of his stipend. It was for Messrs. Pogson and Littlebird to say what his services were worth. He would not on any account have lessened his authority with them by becoming a suppliant for increased payment. But for many years he had spent much less than his income, and had known how to use his City experiences in turning his savings to the best account. Thus, as regarded Paradise Row and its neighbourhood, Zachary Fay was a rich man.

He was now old, turned seventy, tall and thin, with long grey hair, with a slight stoop in his shoulders, – but otherwise hale as well as healthy. He went every day to his office, leaving his house with strict punctuality at half-past eight, and entering the door of the counting-house just as the clock struck nine. With equal accuracy he returned home at six, having dined in the middle of the day at an eating-house in the City. All this time was devoted to the interests of the firm, except for three hours on Thursday, during which he attended a meeting in a Quaker house of worship. On these occasions Marion always joined him, making a journey into the City for the purpose. She would fain have induced him also to accompany her on Sundays to the English Church. But to this he never would consent at her instance, – as he had refused to do so at the instance of his wife. He was he said a Quaker, and did not mean to be aught else than a Quaker. In truth, though he was very punctual at those Quaker meetings, he was not at heart a religious man. To go through certain formularies, Quaker though he was, was as sufficient to him as to many other votaries of Church ordinances. He had been brought up to attend Quaker meetings, and no doubt would continue to attend them as long as his strength might suffice; but it may be presumed of him without harsh judgment that the price of stocks was often present to his mind during those tedious hours in the meeting-house. In his language he always complied with the strict tenets of his sect, "thou-ing" and "thee-ing" all those

whom he addressed; but he had assented to an omission in this matter on the part of his daughter, recognizing the fact that there could be no falsehood in using a mode of language common to all the world. "If a plural pronoun of ignoble sound," so he said, "were used commonly for the singular because the singular was too grand and authoritative for ordinary use, it was no doubt a pity that the language should be so injured; but there could be no untruth in such usage; and it was better that at any rate the young should adhere to the manner of speech which was common among those with whom they lived." Thus Marion was saved from the "thees" and the "thous," and escaped that touch of hypocrisy which seems to permeate the now antiquated speeches of Quakers. Zachary Fay in these latter years of his life was never known to laugh or to joke; but, if circumstances were favourable, he would sometimes fall into a quaint mode of conversation in which there was something of drollery and something also of sarcasm; but this was unfrequent, as Zachary was slow in making new friends, and never conversed after this fashion with the mere acquaintance of the hour.

Of Marion Fay's appearance something has already been said; enough, perhaps, – not to impress any clear idea of her figure on the mind's eye of a reader, for that I regard as a feat beyond the power of any writer, – but to enable the reader to form a conception of his own. She was small of stature, it should be said, with limbs exquisitely made. It was not the brilliance of her eyes or the chiselled correctness of her features which had struck Hampstead so forcibly as a certain expression of earnest eloquence which pervaded her whole form. And there was a fleeting brightness of colour which went about her cheeks and forehead, and ran around her mouth, which gave to her when she was speaking a brilliance which was hardly to be expected from the ordinary lines of her countenance. Had you been asked, you would have said that she was a brunette, – till she had been worked to some excitement in talking. Then, I think, you would have hardly ventured to describe her complexion by any single word. Lord Hampstead, had he been asked what he thought about her, as he sat waiting for his friend, would have declared that some divinity of grace had been the peculiar gift which had attracted him. And yet that rapid change of colour had not passed unobserved, as she told him that she was sorry that he did not go to church.

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