

**WALTER
BESANT**

THE LADY OF
LYNN

Walter Besant
The Lady of Lynn

«Public Domain»

Besant W.

The Lady of Lynn / W. Besant — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

CHAPTER I	13
CHAPTER II	21
CHAPTER III	24
CHAPTER IV	28
CHAPTER V	31
CHAPTER VI	35
CHAPTER VII	40
CHAPTER VIII	44
CHAPTER IX	51
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	53

Walter Besant

The Lady of Lynn

PROLOGUE

PROMOTION AND A BASTING

The happiest day of my life, up to that time, because I should be the basest and the most ungrateful of men were I not to confess that I have since enjoyed many days far excelling in happiness that day, was the 20th day of June, in the year of grace, seventeen hundred and forty-seven.

For on that day, being my nineteenth birthday, I was promoted, though so young, to be mate, or chief officer, on board my ship, *The Lady of Lynn*, Captain Jaggard, then engaged in the Lisbon trade.

In the forenoon of that day I was on board and on duty. We were taking in our cargo. Barges and lighters were alongside and all the crew with the barges were hoisting and heaving and lowering and stowing with a grand yohoing and chanting, such as is common, with oaths innumerable, in the lading and the unlading of a ship. It was my duty to see the casks and crates hoisted aboard and lowered into the hold. The supercargo and the clerk from the counting-house sat at a table on deck and entered in their books every cask, box, chest, or bale. We took aboard and carried away for the use of the Portugals or any whom it might concern, turpentine, tar, resin, wool, pig iron and other commodities brought by our ships from the Baltic or carried in barges down the river to the port of Lynn. These were the things which we took out – what we brought home was wine; nothing but wine; barrels, tuns, pipes, hogsheads, casks of all kinds, containing wine. There would be in our hold wine of Malmsey, Madeira, Teneriffe, Canary, Alicante, Xeres, Oporto, Bucellas and Lisbon; all the wines of Spain and Portugal; the sweet strong wines to which our people are most inclined, especially our people of Norfolk, Marshland, Fenland, Lincoln and the parts around. Thanks to the port of Lynn and to the ships of Lynn engaged in the Lisbon trade, there is no place in England where this sweet strong wine can be procured better or at a more reasonable rate. This wine is truly beloved of all classes: it is the joy of the foxhunter after the day's run: of the justices after the ordinary on market day: of the fellows in their dull old colleges at Cambridge: of the dean and chapter in the sleepy cathedral close: of the country clergy and the country gentry – yea, and of the ladies when they visit each other. I say nothing in dispraise of Rhenish and of Bordeaux, but give me the wine that comes home in the bottoms that sail to and from Lisbon. All wine is good but that is best which warms the heart and strengthens the body and renews the courage – the wine of Spain and Portugal.

The Lady of Lynn was a three-masted, full rigged ship of 380 tons, a stout and strong built craft, not afraid of the bay at its worst and wildest, making her six knots an hour with a favourable breeze, therefore not one of your broad slow Dutch merchantmen which creep slowly, like Noah's Ark, over the face of the waters. Yet she was full in the beam and capacious in the hold: the more you put into her, the steadier she sat and the steadier she sailed. Man and boy I sailed in *The Lady of Lynn* for twenty-five years and I ought to know. We made, for the most part, two, but sometimes three voyages in the year, unless we experienced bad weather and had to go into dock. Bad weather there is in plenty: storms and chopping winds in the bay: beating up the channel against east winds: things are always uncertain in the North Sea; sometimes the ship will be tacking day after day, getting a knot or two in four and twenty hours: and sometimes she will be two or three weeks crossing the Wash, which, as everybody knows, is cumbered with shallows, and making way up the Ouse when a wind from the south or southeast will keep a ship from reaching her port for days together. To be sure, a sailor pays very little heed to the loss of a few days: it matters little to him whether he is working

on board or in port: he is a patient creature, who waits all his life upon a favourable breeze. And since he has no power over the wind and the sea, he accepts whatever comes without murmuring, and makes the best of it. Perhaps the wind blows up into a gale and the gale into a storm: perhaps the good ship founders with all hands: nobody pities the sailor: it is all in the day's work: young or old every one must die: the wife at home knows that, as well as the man at sea. She knew it when she married her husband. I have read of Turks and pagan Mohammedans that they have no fear or care about the future, believing that they cannot change what is predestined. It seems to me a foolish doctrine, because if we want anything we must work for it, or we shall not get it, fate or no fate. But the nearest to the Turk in this respect is our English sailor, who will work his hardest in the worst gale that ever blew, and face death without a pang, or a prayer, or a touch of fear, because he trusted his life to the sea and the wind, and he has no power to control the mounting waves or the roaring tempest. It is as if one should say "I make a bargain with the ocean, and with all seas that threaten and every wind that blows." I say to them, "Suffer me to make my living on a ship that your winds blow across your seas, and in return I will give you myself and the ship and the cargo – all your own – to take, if you please and whenever you please." It is a covenant between them. Sometimes the sailor gets the best of it and spends his old age on dry land, safe after many voyages: sometimes he gets the worst of it, and is taken, ship and all, when he is quite young. He cannot complain. He has made the bargain and must hold to it. But if one could sweep the bed of the ocean and recover among the tangled seaweed and the long sea serpents and monsters the treasures that lie scattered about, how rich the world would be! Perhaps (but this is idle talk) the sea might some day say, "I am gorged with the things that mankind call riches. My floor is strewn thick with ribs of ships and skeletons of men; with chests of treasure, bales and casks and cargoes. I have enough. Henceforth there shall be no more storms and the ships shall pass to and fro over a deep of untroubled blue with a surface like unto a polished mirror!" Idle talk! And who would be a sailor then? We should hand the ships over to the women and apprentice our girls to the trade of setting sails of silk with ropes of ribbons.

I will tell you presently how I was so fortunate as to be apprenticed to so fine a craft as *The Lady of Lynn*. Just now it is enough to set down that she was the finest vessel in the little fleet of ships belonging to my young mistress, Molly Miller, ward of Captain Crowle. There were eight ships, all her own: *The Lady of Lynn*, the ship in which I served my apprenticeship; the *Jolly Miller*, named after her father; the *Lovely Molly*, after herself; the *Joseph and Jennifer*, after her parents; the *Pride of Lynn*, the *Beauty of Lynn*, the *Glory of Lynn*, and the *Honour of Lynn*, all of which you may take, if you like, as named after their owner. Molly owned them all.

I have to tell you, in this place, why one day in especial must ever be remembered by me as the most surprising and the happiest that I had ever known.

I was, therefore, on the quarter-deck on duty when the boy came up the companion saying that the captain wanted to speak to me. So I followed, little thinking of what they had to say, expecting no more than some question about log or cargo, such as the skipper is always putting to his officers.

In the captain's cabin, however, I found sitting at the table not only Captain Jaggard himself, but my old friend and patron, Captain Crowle. His jolly face was full of satisfaction and good humour, so that it gave one pleasure only to look at him. But he sat upright and assumed the air of dignity which spoke of the quarter-deck. A man who has walked that part of the ship in command doth never lose the look of authority.

"John Pentecrosse," he began, "I have sent for you in order to inform you that on the recommendation of Captain Jaggard here – " Captain Jaggard gravely inclined his head in acquiescence, "and with the consent of Miss Molly Miller, sole proprietor of this good ship, *The Lady of Lynn*, I have promoted you to the rank of chief officer."

"Sir!" I cried, overwhelmed, for indeed, I had no reason to expect this promotion for another two or three years. "What can I say?"

"We don't want you to say anything, Jack, my lad," – the captain came down from the quarter-deck and became my old friend again. "Give me your hand. You're young, but there's never a better sailor afloat, is there, Captain Jaggard?"

"None, Captain Crowle – none. For his years."

"For his years, naturally. He's salt through and through, isn't he, Captain Jaggard?"

"And through, Captain Crowle." My skipper was a man of grave aspect and few words.

"Well, then – let us drink the lad's health." And upon that the cabin boy, who needed no further order, dived into the locker, produced a bottle, opened it and placed three glasses.

"No better Lisbon," said Captain Jaggard, pouring it out, "goes even to the table of the King – God bless him!"

"Now, gentlemen," Captain Crowle pushed a glass to me, "first, a glass to Miss Molly – my little maid. Jack, you've been her playfellow and you're now her servant."

"I could ask nothing better, sir."

"I know – a good and zealous servant. Drink it off – a full glass, running over, to Molly Miller."

We obeyed, nothing loth.

"And now, Captain Jaggard, here's the health of your new mate – long to serve under you – your right hand – your eyes open when you are off the deck – your sailing master – the keeper of your log – Jack Pentecrosse, I drink to your good luck."

That was the event which made this day the happiest in my life. Another event, of which I thought little at the time, was more important still in the after consequences. This was the humiliation of Samuel Semple.

In the evening, as soon as I could get ashore, I repaired, as in duty bound, to pay my respects to my young mistress. She lived, being Captain Crowle's ward, in his house, which was the old house with a tower formerly built for some religious purpose. It stands retired from the street, with a fair garden in front, a garden where I had played many hundreds of times with Molly when we were boy and girl together.

This evening she was sitting in the summerhouse with some needlework. Beside her sat her good old black woman, Nigra.

"Jack!" She dropped her work and jumped up to meet me. "I thought you would come this evening. Oh! Are you pleased?"

"You knew I should come, Molly. Why, have I not to thank you for my promotion?"

She gave me her hand with her sweet frankness and her smiling face.

"I would make you Captain Jack, but my guardian will not hear of it. All in good time, though. I am only waiting. I am proud of you, Jack, because everybody speaks so well of you. I met your father this morning and gave him the good news to rejoice his good old heart. He was too proud to confess his joy. But we know him, don't we, Jack? Well, I confess that I shall not be happy till you are Captain Pentecrosse, with a share in every cargo."

"Nay, Molly, the ship is yours and I am but your servant – though a proud and joyful servant."

She shook her head. "All you brave fellows," she said, "are going out to sea in storm and tempest to work for me. Why should all these ships bring riches to me? I have done nothing. They ought to bring riches for those who work." This shows her tenderness of heart. Never have I heard of any other woman who complained that her servants worked to make her rich while she did nothing. Yet the vicar would rebuke her, saying that riches and increase were the gifts of Providence, and that she must accept the things plainly intended by heaven. And Captain Crowle spoke to the same effect and my father, the schoolmaster, also pointed out that in the Divine scheme there were rich and there were poor: the former for an example and for an encouragement to industry: the latter for the virtues of duty, discipline and contentment – things pleasing in the eyes of the Lord. But still she returned to her talk about the people who worked for her.

And then we sat and talked, while Nigra went on with her work, sitting at the feet of her mistress, whom she watched all the time as a dog keeps one eye always upon his master.

At this time, my mistress, as I have said, was already sixteen years of age, a time when many girls are already married. But she was still a child, or a young girl, at heart: being one of those who, like a fine Orleans plum, ripen slowly and are all the better for the time they take. In person, if I may speak of what should be sacred, she was finely made, somewhat taller than the average, her hair of that fair colour which is the chief glory of the English maiden. Lord! If a Lisbon girl could show that fair hair, with those blue eyes, and that soft cheek, touched with the ruddy hue and the velvet bloom of the September peach, she would draw after her the whole town, with the king and his court and even the grand inquisitor and his accursed crew of torturers. I know not how she was dressed, but it was in simple fashion. Though so great an heiress she went to church no more finely dressed than any of the girls belonging to the better sort, save for a substantial gold chain which had been her father's. And this she always wore about her neck.

She was of a truly affectionate disposition – her mind being as lovely as her face. In manners she was easy and compliant: in discourse sometimes grave and sometimes merry. As for her great possessions, she was so simple in her tastes and habits, being in all respects like the daughter of a plain merchantman's skipper, that she understood little or nothing of what these possessions meant or what they might bestow upon her. She was, in a word, a plain and unaffected damsel with no pretence of anything superior to those around her. She was skilled in all household matters although so well read: she could brew and pickle and make perfumes and cordials for the still room: she could make cakes and puddings: she knew how to carve at table: she had poultry, her ducks, her pigs and her dairy, in the fields within the walls hard by the Lady's Mount. She was always busy and therefore never afflicted with the vapours or the spleen or the longing for one knows not what which afflict the empty mind of the idle and the fashionable dame. There were other good and comely girls in King's Lynn. I might perhaps, – I say it not with boastfulness – have married Victory, daughter of the Reverend Ellis Hayes, curate of St. Nicholas. She was a buxom wench enough and a notable housewife. Or I might have married Amanda, daughter of Dr. Worship, our physician – she who married Tom Rising, and when he broke his neck hunting the fox, afterwards married the Vicar of Hunstanton. She, too, was a fine woman, though something hard of aspect. But there was never, for me, any other woman in the world than Molly, my mistress.

No one, however, must believe that there was any thought or discourse, concerning love between us. I had been her companion and playfellow: I knew her very mind, and could tell at any time of what she was thinking. Sometimes her thoughts were of high and serious things such as were inspired by the sermon; mostly they were of things simple, such as the prospects of the last brew, or the success of the latest cordial. Of suitors she had none, although she was now, as I said, sixteen years of age. There were no suitors. I very well know why, because, perhaps for friendly reasons, Captain Crowle had told me something of his ambition for his ward. She was too rich and too good for the young men of Lynn – what would any of them do with such an heiress? She was too rich and too good even for the gentfolk of the county, a hearty, rough, good-natured people who hunted and shot and feasted and drank – what would they do with an heiress of wealth beyond their highest hopes – had they any knowledge of her wealth; but I believe that they had none. No one knew how rich she was, except the captain. The girl was intended by her guardian for some great man; he knew not, as yet, how he should find this great man: but he knew that there were very few, even of the noble lords in the House of Peers, whose fortune or whose income would compare with that of his ward – his little maid. And I, who knew this ambition, knew also that I was trusted not to betray confidence, nor to disturb the girl's mind by any talk of love. Now the mind of a young maid piously disposed is like the surface of a calm sea, which looks up to the sky and reflects the blue of heaven, undisturbed: till Dan Cupid comes along and agitates the calm with the reflection of some shepherd swain and ripples the surface with new thoughts which are allowed by heaven, but belong not to any of its many mansions.

Therefore we talked of everything except love: of the voyages to the Portugals and their horrid Inquisition: of the yarns told by sailors of the places they had seen, and so forth. There was no talk about books because there were none. A Ready Reckoner; a Manual of Navigation; Mill's Geography; a Wages Book; the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer were the only books belonging to the good old captain. Nor, in all Lynn, save for the learned shelves of the vicar and the curate of St. Nicholas are there any books. It is not a town which reads or asks for, books. Why, even on market days you will not see any stall for the sale of books such as may be seen every week at Cambridge, and at Norwich, and even at Bury St. Edmund's. 'Tis perhaps pity that so many gentlemen, substantial merchants, and sea captains never read books. For their knowledge of the outer world, and the nations, they trust to the sailors who, to tell the truth, know as much as any books can tell them: but sailors are not always truthful. For their wisdom and their conduct of life and manners these honest merchants depend upon the Old and the New Testament: or, since there are some who neglect that Treasury of Divine knowledge, they trust to mere tradition and to proverbs; to the continuation of their forefathers' habits, and to the memory of what their forefathers achieved.

The sun went down as we sat talking. The sun went down and the soft twilight of June, the month which most I love because there is no darkness, and a man on watch can discern ahead breakers and ships as well as the vast circle of the rolling sea. And then Nigra gathered her work together and arose.

"Come to supper, honey," she said. "Come, Massa Jack," and led the way.

I have often, since I learned and understood things, wondered at the simplicity with which Molly's guardian thought it proper to bring up this young heiress whose hand he intended for some great personage, as yet unknown. He lived for choice in a small parlour overlooking his neighbour's garden: it was nearly as narrow as the cabin to which he was accustomed. His fare was that which, as a sailor, he considered luxurious. The staple, so to speak, was salt beef or salt pork, but not quite so hard as that of the ship's barrels. This evening, for instance, we sat down to a supper consisting of a piece of cold boiled beef somewhat underdone; there was a cold chicken; a sallet of lettuce, spring onions and young radishes; and a gooseberry pie afterwards with plenty of strong brown sugar. With these dainties was served a jug of home-brewed – to my mind a more delicious drink than any of the wine brought home by *The Lady of Lynn* – I remember now how it stood beside the captain with its noble head of froth, overtopping the Brown George in which it was drawn.

It had been a joyful day. It was destined to conclude with an event neither joyful nor sorrowful – an act of justice. For my own part I could have sung and laughed all through the supper: the more joyful, because Molly looked happy in my happiness. But there was something wrong. When we talked and laughed, the captain laughed with us, but not mirthfully. His face indicated a change of weather, just as in the bay before a storm the waters grow turbid: and I observed also, that Molly's mother, though she laughed with Molly and applauded our sallies, glanced anxiously from time to time at the captain, who was her cousin as well as her husband's executor and her daughter's guardian. And I knew not what to make of these symptoms, because in the midst of fine weather, with an open sea, a fine sky, and a favouring breeze, one does not expect the signs of head winds and driving sleet. What it meant you shall learn, and why I have said that the day was memorable for two reasons.

Supper over, the captain, instead of turning round his chair to the fireplace, filling his pipe, and calling for another glass of October, as we expected, pushed back his chair, and rose with dignity.

"Jennifer," he addressed Molly's mother, "the persuader."

Jennifer was her Christian name. She got up and drew from the corner by the cupboard a stout crab tree cudgel, twisted and gnarled like the old tree from which it came. "Be not revengeful, John," she said.

"No, no. I am a justice of the peace. I am captain on my own quarter-deck. Punishment I shall bestow – not revenge."

"Well, John. But he is young and you are old."

Captain Crowle laughed. "Young, is he? And I am old, am I? We shall see."

Some one was going to be tried, judged, found guilty, sentenced and to receive his sentence at once. The thing was not unusual in the house of a justice of the peace.

"Come with me, Jack. It shall not be said that I inflicted this punishment without a witness. All the world shall know about it, if so be the culprit desires. Come with me. Jennifer, keep within, and if you hear groans, praise the Lord for the correction of a sinner."

Greatly marvelling I followed the captain as he marched out of the parlour. Arrived at the garden he looked around. "So!" he said, "he has not yet come. Perhaps it is light enough for you to read some of his pernicious stuff." With that he put his hand into his pocket and drew forth a paper. "Read that, Jack, I say, read it."

I obeyed: the twilight gave sufficient light for reading the manuscript. Besides, the writing was large and in bold characters. "Why," I said, "I know this writing. It is Sam Semple's."

"Very good. Go on, therefore –"

At the very first words I understood what had already happened and guessed, pretty well, what was going to happen —

"Molly divine! Thy heavenly charms prevail;
As when the sun doth rise stars fade and pale."

"No need for much more of the rubbish, Jack. Read the last of it. I read it all and it made me sick."

"So, matchless maid, thy silence grants consent.
See, at thy feet, the poet's knee is bent —
When evening roses scatter fragrance faint
And the sad Philomel renews his plaint."

"Did ever man hear such stuff, Jack? Go on."

To-morrow, Wednesday, at the hour of ten,
That bow'r a shrine of Love and Temple fair,
I will await thee – Samuel Semple – there."

"What do you think of that, Jack? Samuel Semple! the ragged, skulking, snivelling, impudent son of a thieving exciseman! A very fine lover for my little maid! Ha! Will he? Will he?" The captain grasped his cudgel, with resolution.

"Sir," I said, with submission. "What did Molly say to this precious epistle?"

"Molly? Dost think that I would let the little maid see such ranting stuff? Not so. The black woman brought the precious letters to me. There are three of them. Wait, Jack. Thou shalt see. Hush! I hear his step. Let us get into the summerhouse, and lie snug to see what happens."

We stepped into the summerhouse, now pretty dark, and waited expectant.

Like the captain, I was filled with amazement that Samuel, whom I knew well, who was my schoolfellow, should presume to lift his eyes so high. Alas! There is no bound, or limit, I am assured, to the presumption of such as this stringer of foolish rhymes. Yet I felt some compunction for him, because he would most assuredly receive a basting such as would cure him effectually of the passion called Love, so far as this object was concerned.

Presently, we heard footsteps crunching the gravel. "Snug, my lad! Lie snug," whispered the captain. We heard the steps making their way along the path between the gooseberry and current bushes. Then they came out upon the grass lawn before the summerhouse. "The grass is as big as a

quarter-deck, Jack," said the captain. "It will serve for the basting of a measley clerk. I've knocked down many a mutinous dog on the quarter-deck."

The poet came to the summerhouse and stood outside, irresolute. He could not see the two occupants. He hemmed twice, aloud. There was no reply. "Matchless Molly!" he whispered. "Divine Maid! I am here, at thy feet. Nymph of the azure sea, I am here."

"The devil you are!" cried the captain, stepping out. "Why, here is a precious villain for you! Jack, cut him off in the rear if he tries to get away. So – so, my young quill driver. You would poach on the preserves of your betters, would you? Would you? Would you?" At each repetition he banged the wooden post of the summerhouse with his cudgel.

The poet made no reply, but he looked to right and to left and behind him, for a way of escape, but found none, for I was ready to bar his flight. Wherefore, his shoulders became rounded, and his head hung down, and his knees trembled. Samuel Semple was caught in a trap. Some young fellows would have made a fight of it. But not Samuel: all he thought about was submission and non-resistance, which might provoke pity.

"Three times, jackanapes, hast thou presumed to send stuff to my ward. Here they are," he took from me the last sheet of doggerel verse and drew from his pocket two more. "Here they are – one – two – three – all addressed to the Matchless Molly. Why, thou impudent villain – what devil prompted thee to call her Matchless Molly – matchless – to such as you! Take that, sirrah, and that – " They were laid on with a will. The poet groaned but made no reply – again looking vainly to right and left for some way of escape.

"Now, sir," said the captain, "before we go on to the serious business, thou wilt eat this precious stuff – eat it – eat it – swallow it all – or by the Lord!" Again he raised the cudgel, "I will stuff it down thy throat."

"Oh! Captain Crowle," he murmured, "I will eat them – I will eat them."

The poet took the papers. They were dry eating and I fear tasteless, but in a few minutes he had swallowed them all.

"They are down," said the captain. "Now comes the basting. And I would have you to understand, lump of impudence, that it is my mercy only – my foolish mercy, perhaps, that keeps me from sending you through the town at the tail of a cart. Kneel down, sir, in token of repentance. What? I say – kneel down."

The basting which followed was really worthy of the days when Captain Crowle, with his own hand, quelled a mutiny and drove the whole crew under hatches. The right hand at seventy was as vigorous as at forty. For my own part, I attempted no interference. The captain was wrathful but he had command of himself. If he added to the basting a running commentary of sea-going terms, signifying scorn and contempt, with the astonishment with which a sailor always regards presumption, it was only to increase the terror and the effect of the cudgelling. I am quite certain that he was resolved in his own mind when he should stop; that is to say, when the justice of the case would have been met and revenge would begin. And I hold myself excused for not preventing any portion of this commentary.

It was a poor, shrinking, trembling figure full of bruises and aches and pains that presently arose and slunk away. I should have felt sorry for him had he taken punishment like a man. Why, I would maroon any of my crew who would cry and grovel and snivel when tied up for his three dozen. It made one sick and ashamed to see him and to hear him, with his —

"Mercy, captain! Oh! Enough, good captain! Oh! captain, I confess. I deserve it all. Never again, captain. Oh! Forgiveness – forgiveness!" And so on. I say it made me sick and ashamed. When all was over I followed him to the garden gate. "Oh! Jack," he groaned. "You stood by and saw it all. I am a dead man. He shall be hanged for it. You are the witness. I am nothing but a bag of broken bones. Ribs and collar bones and skull. I am a poor, unfortunate, murdered man. I am done to death with a cudgel."

"Go home," I said. "You a man? You cry like a whipped cur. Murdered? Not you. Cudgelled you are, and well you deserved it. Go home and get brown paper and vinegar and tell all the town how you have been cudgelled for writing verses to a matchless maid. They will laugh, Sam Semple. They will laugh."

The captain went back to the parlour, somewhat flushed with the exercise.

"Justice," he said, "has been done, without the cart and the cat. My pipe, Jennifer, and the home-brewed. Molly, my dear, your very good health."

A day or two afterwards, we heard that Sam Semple had gone to London to make his fortune. He was carried thither by the waggon that once a week makes the journey to London, returning the following week. But when Sam Semple came back it was in a chaise, with much splendour, as in due course you shall hear. You shall also hear of the singular gratitude with which he repaid the captain for that wholesome correction.

CHAPTER I

MY LORD'S LEVEE

It is three years later. We are now in the year 1750.

At twelve o'clock in the morning the anteroom of the town house of the Right Honourable the Earl of Fylingdale was tolerably filled with a mixed company attending his levee. Some were standing at the windows; some were sitting: a few were talking: most, however, were unknown to each other, and if they spoke at all, it was only to ask each other when his lordship might be expected to appear.

As is customary at a great lord's levee there were present men of all conditions; they agreed, however, in one point, that they were all beggars. It is the lot of the nobleman that he is chiefly courted for the things that he can give away, and that the number of his friends and the warmth of their friendship depend upon the influence he is supposed to possess in the bestowal of places and appointments.

Among the suitors this morning, for instance, was a half-pay captain who sought for a company in a newly raised regiment: he bore himself bravely, but his face betrayed his anxiety and his necessities. The poor man would solicit his lordship in vain, but this he did not know, and so he would be buoyed up for a time with new hopes. Beside him stood a lieutenant in the navy, who wanted promotion and a ship. If good service and wounds in battle were of any avail he should have commanded both, but it is very well known that in the Royal Navy there are no rewards for gallantry; men grow old without promotion: nothing helps but interest: a man may remain a midshipman for life without interest: never has it been known that without interest a ship has been bestowed even upon the most deserving officer and after the most signal service. The lieutenant, too, would be cheered by a promise, and lulled by false hopes – but that he did not know.

One man wanted a post in the admiralty: the pay is small but the perquisites and the pickings are large: for the same reason another asked for a place in the customs. A young poet attended with a subscription list and a dedication. He thought that his volume of verse, once published, would bring him fortune, fame, and friends: he, too, would be disappointed. The clergyman wanted another living: one of the fat and comfortable churches in the city: a deanery would not be amiss: he was even ready to take upon himself the office of bishop, for which, indeed, he considered that his qualifications admirably fitted him. Would his lordship exercise his all powerful influence in the matter of that benefice or that promotion?

A young man, whose face betrayed the battered rake, would be contented even with carrying the colours on the Cape Coast regiment if nothing better could be had. Surely his lordship would procure so small a thing as that! If nothing could be found for him then – the common side of the King's Bench Prison and rags and starvation until death released him. Poor wretch! He was on his way to that refuge, but he knew it not; for my lord would promise to procure for him what he wanted.

So they all waited, hungry and expectant, thinking how best to frame their requests: how best to appear grateful before there was any call for gratitude. Surely a nobleman must grow wearied with the assurances of gratitude and promises of prayers. His experience must teach him that gratitude is but a short-lived plant: a weed which commonly flourishes for a brief period and produces neither flowers nor fruit; while as for the prayers, though we may make no doubt that the fervent prayer of the righteous availeth much, we are nowhere assured that the prayers of the worldly and the unrighteous are heard on behalf of another; while there is no certainty that the promised petition will ever be offered up before the throne. Yet the suitors, day after day, repeat the same promise, and rely on the same belief. "Oh! my lord," they say, or sing with one accord, "your name: your voice: your influence: it is all that I ask. My gratitude: my life-long gratitude: my service: my prayers will all be yours."

Soon after twelve o'clock the doors of the private apartments were thrown open and his lordship appeared, wearing the look of dignity and proud condescension combined, which well became the star he wore and the ancient title which he had inherited. His age was about thirty, a time of life when there linger some remains of youth and the serious responsibilities are yet, with some men, hardly felt. His face was cold and proud and hard; the lips firmly set: the eyes keen and even piercing; the features regular: his stature tall, but not ungainly, his figure manly. It was remarkable, among those who knew him intimately, that there was as yet no sign of luxurious living on face and figure. He was not as yet swelled out with wine and punch: his neck was still slender; his face pale, without any telltale marks of wine and debauchery; so far as appearance goes he might pass if he chose, for a person of the most rigid and even austere virtue. This, as I have said, was considered remarkable by his friends, most of whom were already stamped on face and feature and figure with the outward and visible tokens of a profligate life. For, to confess the truth at the very beginning and not to attempt concealment, or to suffer a false belief as regards this nobleman, he was nothing better than a cold-blooded, pitiless, selfish libertine; a rake, and a voluptuary; one who knew and obeyed no laws save the laws of (so-called) honour. These laws allow a man to waste his fortune at the gaming table: to ruin confiding girls: to spend his time with rake hell companions in drink and riot and debauchery of all kinds. He must, however, pay his gambling debts: he must not cheat at cards; he must be polite in speech: he must be ready to fight whenever the occasion calls for his sword, and the quarrel seems of sufficient importance. Lord Fylingdale, however, was not among those who found his chief pleasure scouring the streets and in mad riot. You shall learn, in due course, what forms of pleasure chiefly attracted him.

I have said that his face was proud. There was not, I believe, any man living in the whole world, who could compare with Lord Fylingdale for pride. An overwhelming pride sat upon his brow; was proclaimed by his eyes and was betrayed by his carriage. With such pride did Lucifer look round upon his companions, fallen as they were, and in the depths of hopeless ruin.

In many voyages to foreign parts I have seen something of foreign peoples; every nation possesses its own nobility; I suppose that king, lords and commons is the order designed for human society by Providence. But I think that there is nowhere any pride equal to the pride of the English aristocracy. The Spaniard, if I have observed him aright, wraps himself in the pride of birth as with a cloak: it is often a tattered cloak: poverty has no terrors for him so long as he has his pride of birth. Yet he tolerates his fellow-countrymen whom he does not despise because they lack what most he prizes. The English nobleman, whether a peer or only a younger son, or a nephew or a cousin, provided he is a sprig of quality, disdains and despises all those who belong to the world of work, and have neither title, nor pedigree, nor coat of arms. He does not see any necessity for concealing this contempt. He lacks the courtesy which would hide it in the presence of the man of trade or the man of a learned profession. To be sure, the custom of the country encourages him, because to him is given every place and every preferment. He fills the House of Commons as well as the House of Lords: he commands our armies, our regiments, even the companies in the regiments: he commands our fleets and our ships: he holds all the appointments and draws all the salaries: he makes our laws, and, as justice of the peace, he administers them: he receives pensions, having done nothing to deserve them; he holds sinecures which require no duties. And the people who do the work – the merchants who bring wealth to the country: the manufacturers; the craftsmen; the farmers; the soldiers who fight the wars which the aristocracy consider necessary; the sailor who carries the flag over the world: all these are supposed to be sufficiently rewarded with a livelihood while they maintain the nobility and their children in luxury and in idleness and are received and treated with contempt.

I speak of what I have myself witnessed. This man's pride I have compared with the pride of Lucifer. You shall learn while I narrate the things which follow, that he might well be compared, as regards his actions as well, with that proud and presumptuous spirit.

He was dressed in a manner becoming to his rank: need we dwell upon his coat of purple velvet; his embroidered waistcoat; his white silk stockings; his lace of ruffles and cravat; his gold buckles and his gold clocks; his laced hat carried under his arm; his jewelled sword hilt and the rings upon his fingers? You would think, by his dress, that his wealth was equal to his pride, and, by his reception of the suitors, that his power was equal to both pride and wealth together.

The levee began; one after the other stepped up to him, spoke a few words, received a few words in reply and retired, each, apparently, well pleased. For promises cost nothing. To the poet who asked for a subscription and preferred a dedication, my lord promised the former, accepted the latter, and added a few words of praise and good wishes. But the subscription was never paid; and the dedication was afterwards altered so far as the superscription, to another noble patron. To the clergyman who asked for a country living then vacant, my lord promised the most kindly consideration and bade him write his request and send it him by letter, for better assurance of remembrance. To the officer he promised his company as only due to gallantry and military skill: to the place hunter he promised a post far beyond the dreams and the hopes of the suppliant. Nothing more came of it to either.

The company grew thin: one after the other, the suitors withdrew to feed on promises. It is like opening your mouth to drink the wind. But 'twas all they got.

Among those who remained to the last was a man in the dress of a substantial shopkeeper, with a brown cloth coat and silver buttons. He, when his opportunity arrived, advanced and bowed low to my lord.

"Sir," said his lordship, with gracious, but cold looks, "in what way may I be of service to you?"

"With your lordship's permission, I would seek a place in your household – any place – scullion in the kitchen, or groom to the stable – any place."

"Why should I give you a place? Have I room in my household for every broken cit?"

"My lord, it is to save me from bankruptcy and the King's Bench. It is to save my wife and children from destitution. There are already many shopkeepers in Westminster and the city who have been admitted servants in the households of noblemen. It is no new thing – your lordship must have heard of the custom."

"I do not know why I should save thy family or thyself. However, this is the affair of my steward. Go and see him. Tell him that a place in my household will save thee from bankruptcy and prison – it may be that a place is vacant."

The man bowed again and retired. He knew very well what was meant. He would have to pay a round sum for the privilege. This noble lord, like many others of his rank, took money, through his steward, for nominal places in his household, making one citizen yeoman of his dairy; in Leicester Fields, perhaps, where no dairy could be placed; another steward of the granaries, having in the town neither barns nor storehouses nor ricks: a third, clerk to the stud book, having no race horses; and so on. Thus justice is defeated, a man's creditors may be defied and a man may escape payment of his just debts.

When he was gone, Lord Fylingdale looked round the room. In the window stood, dangling a cane from his wrist, a gentleman dressed in the highest and the latest fashion. In his left hand he held a snuffbox adorned with the figure of a heathen goddess. To those who know the meaning of fashion it was evident that he was in the front rank, belonging to the few who follow or command, the variations of the passing hour. These descend to the smallest details. I am told that the secrets of the inner circle, the select few, who lead the fashion, are displayed for their own gratification in the length of the cravat, the colour of the sash, the angle of the sword, the breadth of the ruffles, the width of the skirts, the tye of the wig. They are also shown in the mincing voice, and the affected tone, and the use of the latest adjectives and oaths. Yet, when one looked more closely, it was seen that this gallant exterior arrayed an ancient gentleman whose years were proclaimed by the sharpening of his features, the wrinkles of his feet, the crows'-feet round his eyes, and his bending shoulders which he

continually endeavoured to set square and upright. Hat in one hand, and snuffbox in the other, he ambled towards his lordship on tiptoe, which happened just then to be the fashionable gait.

"Thy servant, Sir Harry" – my lord offered him his hand with condescension. "It warms my heart to see thee. Therefore I sent a letter. Briefly, Sir Harry, wouldst do me a service?"

"I am always at your lordship's commands. This, I hope, I have proved."

"Then, Sir Harry, this is the case. It is probable that for certain private reasons, I may have to pay a visit to a country town – a town of tarpaulins and traders, not a town of fashion" – Sir Harry shuddered – "patience, my friend. I know not how long I shall endure the barbaric company. But I must go – there are reasons – let me whisper – reasons of state – important secrets which call me there" – Sir Harry smiled and looked incredulous – "I want, on the spot, a friend" – Sir Harry smiled again, as one who began to understand – "a friend who would appear to be a stranger. Would you, therefore, play the part of such a friend?"

"I will do whatever your lordship commands. Yet to leave town at this season" – it was then the month of April – "the assembly, the park, the card table – the society of the ladies – "

"The loss will be theirs, Sir Harry. To lose their old favourite – oh! there will be lamentations, at the rout – Perhaps, however, we may find consolations."

"Impossible. There are none out of town, except at Bath or Tunbridge – "

"The ladies of Norfolk are famous for their beauty."

"Hoydens – I know them,

"I who erst beneath a tree
Sung, Bumpkinet, and Bowzybee,
And Blouzelind and Marian bright
In aprons blue or aprons white,"

"as Gay hath it. Hoydens, my lord, I know them. They play whist and dance jigs."

"The Norfolk gentlemen drink hard and the wine is good."

"Nay, my lord, this is cruel. For I can drink no longer."

"I shall find other diversions for you. It is possible – I say – possible – that the Lady Anastasia may go there as well. She will, as usual, keep the bank if she does go."

The old beau's face cleared, whether in anticipation of Lady Anastasia's society or her card table I know not.

"My character, Sir Harry, will be in your hands. I leave it there confidently. For reasons – reasons of state – it should be a character of..."

"I understand. Your lordship is a model of all the virtues – "

"So – we understand. My secretary will converse with thee further on the point of expenditure."

Sir Harry retired, bowing and twisting his body something like an ape.

Then a gentleman in scarlet presented himself.

"Your lordship's most obedient," he said, with scant courtesy. "I come in obedience to your letter – for command."

"Colonel, you will hold yourself in readiness to go into the country. There will be play – you may lose as much as you please – to Sir Harry Malyus or to any one else whom my secretary will point out to you. Perhaps you may have to receive a remonstrance from me. We are strangers, remember, and I am no gambler, though I sometimes take a card."

"I await your lordship's further commands." So he, too, retired. A proper well-set-up figure he was, with the insolence of the trooper in his face, and the signs of strong drink on his nose. Any one who knew the town would set him down for a half-pay captain, a sharper, a bully, a roysterer, one who lived by his wits, one who was skilled in billiards and commonly lucky at any game of cards. Perhaps such a judgment of the gallant colonel would not be far wrong.

There remained one suitor. He was a clergyman dressed in a fine silk cassock with bands of the whitest and a noble wig of the order Ecclesiastic. I doubt if the archbishop himself had a finer. He was in all respects a divine of the superior kind: a dean, perhaps; an archdeacon, perhaps; a canon, rector, vicar, chaplain, with a dozen benefices, no doubt. His thin, slight figure carried a head too big for his body. His face was sallow and thin, the features regular; he bore the stamp of a scholar and had the manner of a scoffer. He spoke as if he was in the pulpit, with a voice loud, clear and resonant, as though the mere power of hearing that voice diffused around him the blessings of virtue and piety and a clear conscience.

"Good, my lord," he said, "I am, as usual, a suppliant. The rectory of St. Leonard le Size, Jewry, in the city, is now vacant. With my small benefices in the country, it would suit me hugely. A word from your lordship to the lord mayor – the rectory is in the gift of the corporation – would, I am sure, suffice."

"If, my old tutor, the thing can be done by me, you may consider it as settled. There are, however, I would have you to consider, one or two scandals still outstanding, the memory of which may have reached the ears of the city. These city people, for all their ignorance of fashion, do sometimes hear of things. The little affair at Bath, for instance – "

"The lady hath since returned to her own home. It is now quite forgotten and blown over. My innocency is always well known to your lordship."

"Assuredly. Has that other little business at Oxford blown over? Are certain verses still attributed to the Reverend Benjamin Purdon?"

His reverence lightly blew upon his fingers. "That report is now forgotten. But 'tis a censorious world. One man is hanged for looking over a gate while another steals a pig and is applauded. As for the author of those verses, he still remains undiscovered, while the verses themselves – a deplorable fact – are handed about for the joy of the undergraduates."

"Next time, then, steal the pig. Frankly, friend Purdon, thy name is none of the sweetest, and I doubt if the bishop would consent. Meantime, you are living, as usual, I suppose, at great expense – "

"At small expense, considering my abilities; but still at greater expense than my slender income will allow. Am I not your lordship's domestic chaplain? Must I not keep up the dignity due to the position?"

"Your dignity is costly. I must get a bishopric or a deanery for you. Meantime I have a small service to ask of you."

"Small? My lord, let it be great: it cannot be too great."

"It is that you go into the country for me."

"Not to Bath – or to Oxford?" His reverence betrayed an anxiety on this point which was not quite in harmony with his previous declarations.

"Not to either. To another place, where they know not thy name or thy fame. Very good. I thought I could depend upon your loyalty. As for arrangements and time, you will hear from my secretary." So my lord turned on his heel and his chaplain was dismissed. He remained for a moment, looking after his master doubtfully. The order liked him not. He was growing old and would have chosen, had he the power of choice, some fat city benefice with two or three country livings thrown in. He was tired of his dependence: perhaps he was tired of a life that ill became his profession: perhaps he could no longer enjoy it as of old. There was, at least, no sign of repentance as there was no touch of the spiritual life in his face, which was stamped with the plain and visible marks of the world, the flesh and the devil. What is that stamp? Nobody can paint it, or describe it: yet it is understood and recognised whenever one sees it. And it stood out legible so that all those who ran might read upon the face of this reverend and learned divine.

When the levee was finished and everybody gone, Lord Fylingdale sank into a chair. I know not the nature of his thoughts save that they were not pleasant, for his face grew darker every moment.

Finally, he sprang to his feet and rang the bell. "Tell Mr. Semple that I would speak with him," he ordered.

Mr. Semple, the same Samuel whom you have seen under a basting from the captain, was now changed and for the better. His dress was simple. No one could guess from his apparel the nature of his occupation. For all professions and all crafts there is a kind of uniform. The divine wears gown and cassock, bands and wig, which proclaim his calling: the lawyer is also known by his gown and marks his rank at the bar by coif and wig: the attorney puts on broadcloth black of hue: the physician assumes black velvet, a magisterial wig, and a gold-headed cane. The officer wears the King's scarlet; the nobleman his star: the sprig of quality puts on fine apparel and assumes an air and manner unknown to Cheapside and Ludgate Hill: you may also know him by his speech. The merchant wears black velvet with gold buttons, gold buckles, white silk stockings and a gold-laced hat; the shopkeeper substitutes silver for gold and cloth for velvet: the clerk has brown cloth metal buttons and worsted stockings. As for the crafts, has not each its own jacket, sleeves, apron, cap, and badge?

But for this man, where would we place him? What calling did he represent? For he wore the flowered waist-coat – somewhat frayed and stained, of a beau, and the black coat of the merchant: the worsted stockings of the clerk and his metal buttons. Yet he was neither gentleman, merchant, shopkeeper, clerk, nor craftsman. He was a member of that fraternity which is no fraternity because there is no brotherhood among them all; in which every man delights to slander, gird at, and to depreciate his brother. In other words he wore the dress – which is no uniform – of a poet. At this time he also called himself secretary to his lordship having by ways known only to himself, and by wriggings up back stairs, and services of a kind never proclaimed to the world, made himself useful. The position also granted him, as it granted certain tradesmen, immunity from arrest. He had the privilege of walking abroad through a street full of hungry creditors, and that, not on Sundays only, like most of his tribe, but on every day in the week.

He obeyed the summons and entered the room with a humble cringe.

"Semple," said his lordship, crossing his legs and playing with the tassel of his sword knot, "I have read thy letter – "

"Your lordship will impute – "

"First, what is the meaning of the preamble?"

"I have been your lordship's secretary for six months. I have therefore perused all your lordship's letters. I have also in my zeal for your lordship's interests – looked about me. And I discovered – what I ventured to state in that preamble."

"Well, sir?"

"Namely, that the Fylingdale estates are gone so far as your lordship's life is concerned – but – in a word, all is gone. And that – your lordship will pardon the plain truth – your lordship's credit cannot last long and that – I now touch a most delicate point to a man of your lordship's nice sense of honour – the only resource left is precarious."

"You mean?"

"I mean – a certain lady and a certain bank."

"How, sir? Do you dare? What has put this suspicion into your head?"

"Nay, my lord – I have no thought but for your lordship's interests, believe me."

"And so you tell me about the rustic heiress, and you propose a plan – "

"I have had the temerity to do so."

"Yes. Tell me once more about this girl – and about her fortune."

"Her name is Molly Miller: she is an orphan: her guardian is an honest sailor who has taken the greatest care of her property. She was an heiress already when her father died. That was eighteen years ago; she is now nineteen."

"Is she passable – to look at? A hoyden with a high colour, I warrant."

"A cream-coloured complexion, touched with red and pink: light hair in curls and blue eyes; the face and figure of a Venus; the sweetest mouth in the world and the fondest manner."

"Hang me if the fellow isn't in love with her, himself! If she is all this, man, why not apply yourself, for the post of spouse?"

"Because her guardian keeps off all would-be lovers and destines his ward for a gentleman at least – for a nobleman, he hopes."

"He is ambitious. Now as to her fortune."

"She has a fleet of half a dozen tall vessels – nay, there are more, but I know not how many. I was formerly clerk in a countinghouse of the town and I learned a great deal – what each is worth and what the freight of each voyage may produce – but not all. The captain, her guardian, keeps things close. My lord, I can assure you, from what I learned in that capacity and by looking into old books, that she must be worth over a hundred thousand pounds – over a hundred thousand pounds! My lord, there is no such heiress in the city. In your lordship's interests I have enquired in the taverns where the merchants' clerks congregate. They know of all the city heiresses. The greatest, at this moment, is the only daughter of a tallow chandler who has twenty thousand to her name. She squints."

"Why have you given me this information? The girl belongs to your friends – are you anxious for her happiness? You know my way of life. Would that way make her happier?"

The man made no reply.

"Come, Semple, out with it. Your reasons – gratitude – to me – or revenge upon an enemy?"

The man coloured. He looked up: he stood upright but for a moment only. Then his eyes dropped and his shoulders contracted.

"Gratitude, my lord, to you," he replied. "Revenge? Why what reason should I have for revenge?"

"How should I know of any? Let it be gratitude, then."

"I have ventured to submit – not a condition – but a prayer."

"I have read the clause. I grant it. On the day after the marriage if the plan comes to anything, I will present thee to a place where there are no duties and many perquisites. That is understood. I would put this promise in writing but no writing would bind me more than my word."

"Yet I would have the promise in writing."

"You are insolent, sirrah."

"I am protecting myself. My lord, I must speak openly in this matter. How many promises have you made this morning? How many will you keep? I must not be pushed aside with such a promise."

Lord Fylingdale made no reply.

"I offer you a fortune of a hundred thousands pounds and more."

"I can now take this fortune without your assistance."

"With submission, my lord, you cannot. I know too much."

"What shall I write, then?"

"I am only reasonable. The girl's fortune when you have it will go the same way as your rents and woods have gone. Provide for me, therefore, before you begin to spend that money."

"Semple, I did not think you had so much courage. Learn that a dozen times I have been on the point of kicking you out of the house. Now," he rose, "give me paper and a pen – and I will write this promise."

Semple placed a chair at the table and laid paper and pen before it. "Let me presume so far as to dictate the promise," he said. "I undertake and promise that on the day after my marriage with the girl named Molly Miller, I will give Samuel Semple such a place as will provide him for life with a salary of not less than £200 a year. So – will your lordship sign it?"

He took up this precious paper from the table, read it, folded it and put it in his pocket.

"What next?" asked his patron.

"I am preparing a scheme which will give a plausible excuse for your lordship's visit to the town. I have already suggested that certain friends should prepare the way. The lady's guardian has prejudices in favour of morality and religion. They are, I know, beneath your lordship's notice – yet still – it will be in fact, necessary that your lordship's character shall be such as will commend itself to this unfashionable old sailor."

"We will speak again upon this point. The girl you say has no lover."

"She has no lover. Your lordship's rank: your manner: your appearance will certainly carry the day. By contrast alone with the country bumpkins the heart of the girl will be won."

"Mr. Semple," his lordship yawned. "Do you suppose that the heart of the girl concerns me? Go and complete your scheme – of gratitude, not revenge."

CHAPTER II

THE LADY ANASTASIA

The Lady Anastasia was in her dressing-room in the hands of her friseur, the French hairdresser, and her maid. She sat in a dishabille which was a loose robe, called, I believe a nightgown, of pink silk, trimmed with lace, which showed the greater part of a very well shaped arm; she had one slipper off and one slipper on, which showed a very small and well shaped foot, but no one was there to see. Her maid was busy at the toilette table which was covered with glass bottles containing liquids of attractive colour; silver patch boxes; powder boxes; powder puffs; cosmetics in pots, and other mysterious secrets into which it would be useless and fruitless to inquire. The artist, for his part, was laboriously and conscientiously building the edifice – object of so much ingenuity and thought – called a "Head."

She was in the best temper imaginable. When you hear that she had won overnight the sum of a hundred and twenty guineas you will understand that she had exactly that number of reasons for being satisfied with the world. Moreover, she had received from an admirer a present in the shape of a piece of china representing a monkey, which, she reflected with satisfaction, would awaken in the minds of her friends the keenest feelings of envy, jealousy, hatred, longing, and despair.

The Lady Anastasia was the young widow of an old baronet: she was also the daughter of an earl and the sister of his successor. She therefore enjoyed the freedom of a widow; the happiness natural to youth; and all the privileges of rank. No woman could be happier. It was reported that her love of the card table had greatly impaired her income: the world said that her own private dowry was wholly gone and a large part of her jointure. But it is a spiteful world – all that was known for certain was that she played much and that she played high. Perhaps Fortune, in a mood of penitence, was giving back what she had previously taken away. The contrary is commonly the case, viz, that Fortune, which certainly takes away with alacrity, restores with reluctance.

Perhaps, however, the reports were not true.

She kept a small establishment in Mount Street: her people consisted of no more than two footmen, a butler, a lady's maid, a housekeeper, and three or four maids with two chairmen. She did not live as a rich woman: she received, it is true, twice a week, on Sundays and Wednesdays, but not with any expense of supper and wine. Her friends came to play cards and she held the bank for them. On other evenings she went out and played at the houses of her friends.

Except for fashions and her dress – what fine woman but makes that exception? – she had no other occupation; no other pursuit; no other subject of conversation, than the playing of cards. She played at all games and knew them all; she sat down with a willing mind to Ombre, Faro, Quadrille, Basset, Loo, Cribbage, All Fours, or Beggar my Neighbour, but mostly she preferred the game of Hazard, when she herself kept the bank. It is a game which more than any other allures and draws on the player so that a young man who has never before been known to set a guinea on any card, or to play at any game, will in a single night be filled with all the ardour and eagerness of a practised gamester; will know the extremes of joy and despair; and will regard the largest fortune as bestowed by Providence for no other purpose than to prolong the excitement and the agony of a gamester.

While the Lady Anastasia was still admiring the china vase set upon the table, so that she might gaze upon it and so refresh her soul, and while the friseur was still completing her head, Lord Fylingdale was announced. The lady blushed violently: she sat up and looked anxiously in the glass.

"Betty," she cried, "a touch of red – not much, you clumsy creature! Will you never learn to have a lighter hand? So! that is better. I am horribly pale. His lordship can wait in the morning room. You have nearly finished, monsieur? Quick then! The last touches. Betty, the flowered satin petticoat. My fan. The pearl necklace. So," she looked again at the glass, "am I looking tolerable, Betty?"

"Your ladyship is ravishing," said Betty finishing the toilette. In truth, it was a very pretty creature if one knew how much was real and how much was due to art. The complexion was certainly laid on; the hair was powdered and built up over cushions and pillows; there were patches on the cheek: the neck was powdered; eyes naturally very fine were set off and made more lustrous with a touch of dark powder: the frock and petticoat and hoop were all alike removed from nature. However, the result was a beautiful woman of fashion who is far removed indeed from the beautiful woman as made by the Creator. For her age the Lady Anastasia might have been seven and twenty, or even thirty – an age when with some women, the maturity of their beauty is even more charming than the first sprightly loveliness of youth.

She swam out of the room with a gliding movement, then the fashion, and entered the morning room where Lord Fylingdale awaited her.

"Anastasia!" he said, softly, taking her hand. "It is very good of you to see me alone. I feared you would be surrounded with courtiers and fine ladies or with singers, musicians, hairdressers, and other baboons. Permit me," he raised her hand to his lips. "You look divine this morning. It is long since I have seen you look so perfectly charming."

The lady murmured something. She was one of those women who like above all things to hear praises of what most they prize, their beauty, and to believe what they most desire to be the truth, the preservation and perfecting of that beauty.

"But you came to see me alone. Was it to tell me that I look charming? Other men tell me as much in company."

"Not altogether that, dear lady, though that is something. I come to tell you of a change of plans."

"You have heard that the grand jury of Middlesex has presented me by name as a corruptor of innocence, and I know not what, because I hold my bank on Sunday nights."

"I have heard something of the matter. It is almost time, I think, to give these presumptuous shopkeepers a lesson not to interfere with the pursuits of persons of rank. Let them confine themselves to the prentices who play at pitch and toss."

"Oh! what matters their presentment? I shall continue to keep the bank on Sunday nights. Now, my dear lord, what about these plans? What is changed?"

"We thought, you remember, about going to Tunbridge, in July."

"Well? Shall we not go there?"

"Perhaps. But there is something to be done first. Let me confide in you – "

"My dear lord – you have never confided in anybody."

"Except in you. I think you know all my secrets if I have any. In whom else can I confide? In the creatures who importune me for places? In friends of the green table? In friends of the race course? My dear Anastasia, you know, I assure you, as much about my personal affairs as I know myself."

"If you would always speak so kindly" – her eyes became humid but not tearful. A lady of fashion must not spoil her cheek by tears.

"Well, then, the case is this. You know of the condition of my affairs – no one better. An opportunity presents itself to effect a great improvement. I am invited by the highest personage to take a more active part in the affairs of state. No one is to know this. For reasons connected with this proposal I am to visit a certain town – a trading town – a town of rough sailors, there to conduct certain enquiries. There is to be a gathering at this town of the gentry and people of the county. Would you like to go, my dear friend? It will be next month."

"To leave town – and in May, just before the end of the season?"

"There will be opportunities, I am told, of holding a bank; and a good many sportsmen – 'tis a sporting county – may be expected to lay their money. In a word, Anastasia, it will not be a bad exchange."

"And how can I help you? Why should I go there?"

"By letting the people – the county people, understand the many virtues and graces which distinguish my character. No one knows me better than yourself."

The lady smiled – "No one," she murmured.

" – Or can speak with greater authority on the subject. There will be certain of our friends there – the parson – Sir Harry – the colonel – "

"Pah! a beggarly crew – and blown upon – they are dangerous."

"Not at this quiet and secluded town. They will be strangers to you as well as to me. And they will be useful. After all, in such a place you need an opening. They will lead the way."

The lady made no response.

"I may call it settled, then?" He still held her hand. "If you would rather not go, Anastasia, I will find some one else – but I had hoped – "

She drew away her hand. "You are right," she said, "no one knows you so well as myself. And all I know about you is that you are always contriving some devilry. What is it this time? But you will not tell me. You never tell me."

"Anastasia, you do me an injustice. This is a purely political step."

"As you will. Call it what you please. I am your servant – you know that – your handmaid – in all things – save one. Not for any other woman, Ludovick – not for any other – unfortunate – woman will I lift my little finger. Should you betray me in this respect – "

He laughed. "A woman? And in that company? Rest easy, dear child. Be jealous as much as you please but not with such a cause."

He touched her cheek with his finger: he stooped and kissed her hand and withdrew.

The Lady Anastasia stood awhile where he left her. The joy had gone out of her heart: she trembled: she was seized with a foreboding of evil. She threw herself upon the sofa and buried her face in her hands, and forgetful of paste and patch and paint she suffered the murderous tears to destroy that work of art – her finished face.

CHAPTER III

THE "SOCIETY" OF LYNN

It was about seven o'clock in the evening of early April, at the going down of the sun that I was at last able to drop into the dingy and go ashore. All day and all night and all the day before we had been beating through the shallows of the Wash and the narrow channel of the Ouse. We had laid her to her moorings off the Common Stath and made all taut and trim: the captain had gone ashore with the papers: the customhouse officer had been aboard: we were to begin breaking cargo on the morrow. The ship was *The Lady of Lynn*, 380 tons, Robert Jaggard, master marines, being captain, and I the mate or chief officer. There was no better skipper in the port of Lynn than Captain Jaggard: there was no better crew than that aboard *The Lady of Lynn*, not a skulker or a lubber in the whole ship's company; and though I say it myself, I dare affirm that the mate did credit to his ship as much as the captain and the crew. We were in the Lisbon trade: we had therefore come home laden with casks of the rich strong wine of the country: the Port and Lisbon Sherry and Malaga, besides Madeira and the wine of Teneriffe and the Grand Canary. Our people of the Marshland and the Fens and those of Lincolnshire and Norfolk where the strong air of the east winds kill all but the stoutest, cannot have too much of this rich wine: they will not drink the lighter wines of Bordeaux which neither fire the blood nor mount to the head. A prosperous voyage we had made: the Bay of Biscay suffered us to cross with no more than half a gale: *The Lady of Lynn*, in fact, was known in port to be a lucky ship – as lucky as her owner – lucky in her voyages and lucky in her cargoes.

At the stairs of the Common Stath Yard I made fast the painter and shipped the sculls. And there, waiting for me, was none other than my good old friend and patron, Captain Crowle.

The captain was by this time well advanced in life, being upwards of seventy: yet he showed little touch of time: his honest face being still round and full; his eyes still free from lines and crows'-feet; his cheek ruddy and freckled, as if with the salt sea breeze and the driving spray. He was also as upright as any man of thirty and walked with as firm a step and had no need of the stout stick which he carried in his hand, as a weapon and a cudgel for the unrighteous, more than a staff for the bending knees of old age.

"What cheer – ahoy?" He shouted from the quay as I dropped over the side into the dingy. "What cheer, Jack?" he repeated when I ran up the steps. "I've seen the skipper. Come with me to the *Crown*" – but the proper place for mates was the *Duke's Head*. "Nay, it shall be the *Crown*. A bowl of punch shall welcome back *The Lady of Lynn*." He turned and looked at the ship lying in the river at her moorings among the other craft. "She's as fine a vessel as this old port can show – and she's named after as fine a maid. Shalt see her to-morrow, Jack, but not to-night."

"I trust, sir, that she is well and in good spirits."

"Ay – ay. Nothing ails her – nothing ails her, Jack," he pointed with his stick. "Look how she flourishes. There are fifteen tall ships moored two and two off the King's Stath and half a dozen more off the Common Stath. Count them, Jack. Six of these ships belong to the little maid. Six of them – and two more are afloat, of which one is homeward bound and should be in port soon if all goes well. Eight noble ships, Jack, are hers. And the income of nigh upon eighteen years and houses and broad lands."

"She has a prudent guardian, captain."

"May be – may be. I don't deny, Jack, but I've done the best I could. Year after year, the money mounteth up more and more. You love her, Jack, and therefore I tell you these things. And you can keep counsel. I talk not in the market place. No one knows her wealth but you and me. They think that I am part owner. I let them think so, but you and I know better, Jack." He nodded his head looking mighty cunning.

"She cannot be too wealthy or too prosperous, captain. I knew full well that her prosperity only increases the gulf between us, but I had long ago understood that such an heiress was not for a mate on board a merchantman."

"She is not, Jack," the captain replied, gravely. "Already she is the richest heiress in all Norfolk – perhaps in the whole country. Who is to marry her? There, I confess, I am at a loss. I must find a husband for her. There's the rub. She may marry any in the land: there is none so high but he would desire a wife so rich and so virtuous. Where shall I look for a husband fit for her? There are admirals, but mostly too old for her: she ought to have a noble lord, yet, if all tales be true, they are not fit, most of them to marry a virtuous woman. Shall I give Molly to a man who gambles and drinks and rakes and riots? No, Jack, no. Not for twenty coronets. I would rather marry her to an honest sailor like yourself. Jack, my lad, find me a noble lord, as like yourself as one pea is like another, and he shall have her. He must be as proper a man; as strong a man; a clean liver; moderate in his cups ... find him for me, Jack, and he shall have her."

"Well, but, captain, there are the gentlemen of Norfolk."

"Ay... There are – as you say – the gentlemen. I have considered them, Jack. Molly is not a gentlewoman by birth, I know that very well: but her fortune entitles her to marry in a higher rank. Ay ... there are the gentlemen. They are good fox hunters: they are good at horse racing, but they are hard drinkers, Jack: they are fuddled most evenings: my little maid must not have a husband who is put to bed drunk every night."

"You must take her to London, captain, and let her be seen."

"Ay – ay ... if I only knew where to go and how to begin."

"She is young; there is no need for hurry: you can wait awhile, captain."

"Ay ... we can wait a while. I shall be loth to let her go, God knows – Come to-morrow, Jack. She was always fond of you: she talks about you: 'tis a loving little maid: you played with her and ran about with her. She never forgets. The next command that falls in – but I talk too fast. Well – when there is a ship in her fleet without a captain – But come, my lad."

He led the way, still talking of his ward and her perfections, through the narrow street they call Stath Lane into the great market place, where stands the Crown Inn.

The room appropriated to the "Society of Lynn," which met every evening all the year round, was that on the ground floor looking upon the market place. The "society," or club, which is never dissolved, consists of the notables or better sort of the town: the vicar of St. Margaret's; the curate of St. Nicholas; the master of the school – my own father: Captain Crowle and other retired captains; the doctor; some of the more substantial merchants; with the mayor, some of the aldermen, the town clerk, and a justice of the peace or two. This evening most of these gentlemen were already present.

Captain Crowle saluted the company and took his seat at the head of the table. "Gentlemen," he said, "I wish you all a pleasant evening. I have brought with me my young friend Jack Pentecrosse – you all know Jack – the worthy son of his worthy father. He will take a glass with us. Sit down beside me, Jack."

"With the permission of the society," I said.

Most of the gentlemen had already before them their pipes and their tobacco. Some had ordered their drink – a pint of port for one: a Brown George full of old ale for another; a flask of Canary for a third: and so on. But the captain, looking round the room, beckoned to the girl who waited. "Jenny," he said, "nobody calls for anything to-night except myself. Gentlemen, it must be a bowl – or a half dozen bowls. Tell your mistress, Jenny, a bowl of the biggest and the strongest and the sweetest. Gentlemen, you will drink with me to the next voyage of *The Lady of Lynn*."

But then a thing happened – news came – which drove all thoughts of *The Lady of Lynn* out of everybody's mind. That toast was forgotten.

The news was brought by the doctor, who was the last to arrive.

It was an indication of the importance of our town that a physician lived among us. He was the only physician in this part of the country: he practised among the better sort, among the noble gentlemen of the country round about Lynn and even further afield in the northern parts of the shire, and among the substantial merchants of the town. For the rest there were the apothecary, the barber and blood-letter, the bone-setter, the herbalist and the wise woman. Many there were even among the better sort who would rather consult the woman, who knew the powers of every herb that grows, than the physician who would write you out the prescription of Mithridates or some other outlandish name composed of sixty or seventy ingredients. However, there is no doubt that learning is a fine thing and that Galen knew more than the ancient dames who sit in a bower of dried herbs and brew them into nauseous drinks which pretend to cure all the diseases to which mankind is liable.

Doctor Worship was a person who habitually carried himself with dignity. His black dress, his white silk stockings, his gold shoe buckles, the whiteness of his lace and linen, his huge wig, his gold-headed cane with its pomander, proclaimed his calling, while the shortness of his stature with the roundness of his figure, his double chin, his thick lips and his fat nose all assisted him in the maintenance of his dignity. His voice was full and deep, like the voice of an organ and he spoke slowly. It has, I believe, been remarked that dignity is more easily attained by a short fat man than by one of a greater stature and thinner person.

At the very first appearance of the doctor this evening it was understood that something had happened. For he had assumed an increased importance that was phenomenal: he had swollen, so to speak: he had become rounder and fuller in front. Everybody observed the change: yes – he was certainly broader in the shoulders: he carried himself with more than professional dignity: his wig had risen two inches in the foretop and had descended four inches behind his back: his coat was not the plain cloth which he wore habitually in the town and at the tavern, but the black velvet which was reserved for those occasions when he was summoned by a person of quality or one of the county gentry, and he carried the gold-headed cane with the pomander box which also belonged to those rare occasions.

"Gentlemen," he said, looking around the room slowly and with emphasis, so that, taking his change of manner and of stature – for men so seldom grow after fifty – and the emphasis with which he spoke and looked, gathering together all eyes, caused the company to understand, without any possibility of mistake, that something had happened of great importance. In the old town of Lynn Regis it is not often that anything happens. Ships, it is true, come and go; their departures and their arrivals form the staple of the conversation: but an event, apart from the ships, a surprise, is rare. Once, ten years before this evening, a rumour of the kind which, as the journals say, awaits confirmation, reached the town, that the French had landed in force and were marching upon London. The town showed its loyalty by a resolution to die in the last ditch: the resolution was passed by the mayor over a bowl of punch; and though the report proved without foundation the event remained historical: the loyalty and devotion of the borough – the king's own borough – had passed through the fire of peril. The thing was remembered. Since that event, nothing had happened worthy of note. And now something more was about to happen: the doctor's face was full of importance: he clearly brought great news.

Great news, indeed; and news forerunning a time unheard of in the chronicles of the town.

"Gentlemen," the doctor laid his hat upon the table and his cane beside it. Then he took his chair, adjusted his wig, put on his spectacles, and then, laying his hand upon the arms of the chair he once more looked round the room, and all this in the most important, dignified, provoking, interesting manner possible. "Gentlemen, I have news for you."

As a rule this was a grave and a serious company: there was no singing: there was no laughing: there was no merriment. They were the seniors of the town: responsible persons; in authority and office: substantial, as regards their wealth: full of dignity and of responsibility. I have observed that the possession of wealth, much more than years, is apt to invest a man with serious views. There was little

discourse because the opinions of every one were perfectly well-known: the wind: the weather: the crops: the ships: the health or the ailments of the company, formed the chief subjects of conversation. The placid evenings quietly and imperceptibly rolled away with some sense of festivity – in a tavern every man naturally assumes some show of cheerfulness and at nine o'clock the assembly dispersed.

Captain Crowle made answer, speaking in the name of the society, "Sir, we await your pleasure."

"My news, gentlemen, is of a startling character. I will epitomise or abbreviate it. In a word, therefore, we are all about to become rich."

Everybody sat upright. Rich? all to become rich? My father, who was the master of the Grammar school, and the curate of St. Nicholas, shook their heads like Thomas the Doubter.

"All you who have houses or property in this town: all who are concerned in the trade of the town: all who direct the industries of the people – or take care of the health of the residents – will become, I say, rich." My father and the curate who were not included within these limits, again shook their heads expressively but kept silence. Nobody, of course, expects the master of the Grammar school, or a curate, to become rich.

"We await your pleasure, sir," the captain repeated.

"Rich! you said that we were all to become rich," murmured the mayor, who was supposed to be in doubtful circumstances. "If that were true –"

"I proceed to my narrative." The doctor pulled out a pocketbook from which he extracted a letter. "I have received," he went on, "a letter from a townsman – the young man named Samuel Semple – Samuel Semple," he repeated with emphasis, because a look of disappointment fell upon every face.

"Sam Semple," growled the captain; "once I broke my stick across his back." He did not, however, explain why he had done so. "I wish I had broken two. What has Sam Semple to do with the prosperity of the town?"

"You shall hear," said the doctor.

"He would bring a book of profane verse to church instead of the Common Prayer," said the vicar.

"An idle rogue," said the mayor; "I sent him packing out of my countinghouse."

"A fellow afraid of the sea," said another. "He might have become a supercargo by this time."

"Yet not without some tincture of Greek," said the schoolmaster; "to do him justice, he loved books."

"He made us subscribe a guinea each for his poems," said the vicar. "Trash, gentlemen, trash! My copy is uncut."

"Yet," observed the curate of St. Nicholas, "in some sort perhaps, a child of Parnassus. One of those, so to speak, born out of wedlock, and, I fear me, of uncertain parentage among the Muses and unacknowledged by any. There are many such as Sam Semple on that inhospitable hill. Is the young man starving, doctor? Doth he solicit more subscriptions for another volume? It is the way of the distressed poet."

The doctor looked from one to the other with patience and even resignation. They would be sorry immediately that they had offered so many interruptions. When it seemed as if every one had said what he wished to say, the doctor held up his hand and so commanded silence.

CHAPTER IV

THE GRAND DISCOVERY

"Mr. Sam Semple," the doctor continued, with emphasis on the prefix to which, indeed, the poet was not entitled in his native town, "doth not ask for help: he is not starving: he is prosperous: he has gained the friendship, or the patronage, of certain persons of quality. This is the reward of genius. Let us forget that he was the son of a customhouse servant, and let us admit that he proved unequal to the duties – for which he was unfitted – of a clerk. He has now risen – we will welcome one whose name will in the future add lustre to our town."

The vicar shook his head. "Trash," he murmured, "trash."

"Well, gentlemen, I will proceed to read the letter."

He unfolded it and began with a sonorous hum.

"Honoured Sir," he repeated the words. "'Honoured Sir,' – the letter, gentlemen, is addressed to myself – ahem! to myself. 'I have recently heard of a discovery which will probably affect in a manner so vital, the interests of my beloved native town, that I feel it my duty to communicate the fact to you without delay. I do so to you rather than to my esteemed patron, the worshipful the mayor, once my master, or to Captain Crowle, or to any of those who subscribed for my volume of Miscellany Poems, because the matter especially and peculiarly concerns yourself as a physician, and as the fortunate owner of the spring or well which is the subject of the discovery' – the subject of the discovery, gentlemen. My well – mine." He went on. "'You are aware, as a master in the science of medicine, that the curative properties of various spas or springs in the country – the names of Bath, Tunbridge Wells, and Epsom are familiar to you, so doubtless are those of Hampstead and St. Chad's, nearer London. It now appears that a certain learned physician having reason to believe that similar waters exist, as yet unsuspected, at King's Lynn, has procured a jar of the water from your own well – that in your garden' – my well, gentlemen, in my own garden! – 'and, having subjected it to a rigorous examination, has discovered that it contains, to a much higher degree than any other well hitherto known to exist in this country, qualities, or ingredients, held in solution, which make this water sovereign for the cure of rheumatism, asthma, gout, and all disorders due to ill humours or vapours – concerning which I am not competent so much as to speak to one of your learning and skill.'"

"He has," said the schoolmaster, "the pen of a ready writer. He balances his periods. I taught him. So far, he was an apt pupil."

The doctor resumed.

"This discovery hath already been announced in the public journals. I send you an extract containing the news.' I read this extract, gentlemen."

It was a slip of printed paper, cut from one of the diurnals of London.

"It has been discovered that at King's Lynn in the county of Norfolk, there exists a deep well of clear water whose properties, hitherto undiscovered, form a sovereign specific for rheumatism and many similar disorders. Our physicians have already begun to recommend the place as a spa and it is understood that some have already resolved upon betaking themselves to this newly discovered cure. The distance from London is no greater than that of Bath. The roads, it is true, are not so good, but at Cambridge, it is possible for those who do not travel in their own carriages to proceed by way of barge or tilt boat down the Cam and the Ouse, a distance of only forty miles which in the summer should prove a pleasant journey.'

"So far" – the doctor informed us, "for the printed intelligence. I now proceed to finish the letter. 'Among others, my patron, the Right Honourable the Earl of Fylingdale, has been recommended by his physician to try the newly discovered waters of Lynn as a preventive of gout. He is a gentleman

of the highest rank, fashion, and wealth, who honours me with his confidence. It is possible that he may even allow me to accompany him on his journey. Should he do so I shall look forward to the honour of paying my respects to my former patrons. He tells me that other persons of distinction are also going to the same place, with the same objects, during the coming summer.'

"You hear, gentlemen," said the doctor, looking round, "what did I say? Wealth for all – for all. So. Let me continue. 'Sir, I would with the greatest submission venture to point out the importance of this event to the town. The nobility and gentry of the neighbourhood should be immediately made acquainted with this great discovery; the clergy of Ely, Norwich, and Lincoln; the members of the University of Cambridge: the gentlemen of Boston, Spalding, and Wisbech should all be informed. It may be expected that there will be such a concourse flocking to Lynn as will bring an accession of wealth as well as fame to the borough of which I am a humble native. I would also submit that the visitors should find Lynn provided with the amusements necessary for a spa. I mean music; the assembly; a pump room; a garden; the ball and the masquerade and the card room; clean lodgings; good wine; and fish, flesh and fowl in abundance. I humbly ask forgiveness for these suggestions and I have the honour to remain, honoured sir, your most obedient humble servant, with my grateful service to all the gentlemen who subscribed to my verses, and thereby provided me with a ladder up which to rise, Samuel Semple.'"

At this moment the bowl of punch was brought in and placed before the captain with a tray of glasses. The doctor folded his letter, replaced it in his pocketbook and took off his spectacles.

"Gentlemen, you have heard my news. Captain Crowle, may I request that you permit the society to drink with me to the prosperity of the spa – the prosperity of the spa – the spa of Lynn."

"Let us drink it," said the captain, "to the newly discovered spa. But this Samuel – the name sticks."

The toast was received with the greatest satisfaction, and then, when the punch was buzzed about, there arose a conversation so lively and so loud that heads looked out of windows in the square wondering what in the world had happened with the society. Not a quarrel, surely. Nay, there was no uplifting of voices: there was no anger in the voices: nor was it the sound of mirth: there was no note of merriment: nor was it a drunken loosening of the tongue: such a thing with this company was impossible. It was simply a conversation in which all spoke at the same time over an event which interested and excited all alike. Everybody contributed something.

"We must have a committee to prepare for the accommodation of the visitors."

"We must put up a pump room."

"We must engage a dipper."

"We must make walks across the fields."

"There must be an assembly with music and dancing."

"There must be a card room."

"There must be a long room for those who wish to walk about and to converse – with an orchestra."

"There must be public breakfasts and suppers."

"We shall want horns to play in the evening."

"We must have glass lamps of variegated colours to hang among the trees."

"I will put up the pump room," said the doctor, "in my garden, over the well."

"We must look to our lodgings. The beds in our inns are for the most part rough hewn boards on trestles with a flock bed full of knobs and sheets that look like leather. The company will look for bedsteads and feather beds."

"The ladies will ask for curtains. We must give them what they are accustomed to enjoy."

"We must learn the fashionable dance."

"We must talk like beaux and dress like the gentlefolk of Westminster."

The captain looked on, meanwhile, whispering in my ear, from time to time. "Samuel is a liar," he said. "I know him to be a liar. Yet why should he lie about a thing of so much importance? If he tells the truth, Jack – I know not – I misdoubt the fellow – yet – again – he may tell the truth – And why should he lie, I say? Then – one knows not – among the company we may even find a husband for the girl. As for taking her to London – but we shall see."

So he shook his head, not wholly carried away like the rest, but with a certain amount of hope. And then, waiting for a moment when the talk flagged a bit, he spoke.

"Gentlemen, if this news is true – and surely Samuel would not invent it, then the old town is to have another great slice of luck. We have our shipping and our trade: these have made many of us rich and have given an honest livelihood to many more. The spa should bring in, as the doctor has told us, wealth by another channel. I undertake to assure you that we shall rise to the occasion. The town shall show itself fit to receive and to entertain the highest company. We tarpaulins are too old to learn the manners of fashion. But we have men of substance among us who will lay out money with such an object: we have gentlemen of family in the country round: we have young fellows of spirit," he clapped me on the shoulder, "who will keep up the gaieties: and, gentlemen, we have maidens among us – as blooming as any in the great world. We shall not be ashamed of ourselves – or of our girls."

These words created a profound sigh of satisfaction. The men of substance would rise to the occasion.

Before the bowl was out a committee was appointed, consisting of Captain Crowle, the vicar of St. Margaret's, the curate of St. Nicholas – the two clergymen being appointed as having imbibed at the University of Cambridge some tincture of the fashionable world – and the doctor. This important body was empowered to make arrangements for the reception and for the accommodation and entertainment of the illustrious company expected and promised. It was also empowered to circulate in the country round about news of the extraordinary discovery and to invite all the rheumatic and the gouty: the asthmatic and everybody afflicted with any kind of disease to repair immediately to Lynn Regis, there to drink the sovereign waters of the spa.

"It only remains, gentlemen," said the doctor in conclusion, "that I myself should submit the water of my well to an examination." He did not think it necessary to inform the company that he had received from Samuel Semple an analysis of the water stating the ingredients and their proportions as made by the anonymous physician of London. "Should it prove – of which I have little doubt – that the water is such as has been described by my learned brother in medicine, I shall inform you of the fact."

It was a curious coincidence, though the committee of reception were not informed of the fact, that the doctor's analysis exactly agreed with that sent to him.

It was a memorable evening. For my own part, – I know not why – during the reading of the letter my heart sank lower and lower. It was the foreboding of evil. Perhaps it was caused by my knowledge of Samuel of whom I will speak presently. Perhaps it was the thought of seeing the girl whom I loved, while yet I had no hope of winning her, carried off by some sprig of quality who would teach her to despise her homely friends, the master mariners young and old. I know not the reason. But it was a foreboding of evil and it was with a heavy heart that I repaired to the quay and rowed myself back to the ship in the moonlight.

They were going to drink to the next voyage of *The Lady of Lynn*. Why, the lady herself, not her ship, was about to embark on a voyage more perilous – more disastrous – than that which awaited any of her ships. Cruel as is the ocean I would rather trust myself – and her – to the mercies of the Bay of Biscay at its wildest – than to the tenderness of the crew who were to take charge of that innocent and ignorant lady.

CHAPTER V

THE PORT OF LYNN

This was the beginning of the famous year. I say famous because, to me and to certain others, it was certainly a year eventful, while to the people of the town and the county round it was the year of the spa which began, ran a brief course, and terminated, all in one summer.

Let me therefore speak for a little about the place where these things happened. It is not a mushroom or upstart town of yesterday but on the other hand a town of venerable antiquity with many traditions which may be read in books by the curious. It is important on account of its trade though it is said that in former days its importance was much greater.

I have sailed over many seas: I have put in at many ports: I have taken in cargoes of many countries – the ways of sailors I have found much the same everywhere. And as for the food and the drink and the buildings I say that Lynn is behind none. Certainly the port of London whether at Wapping or at Limehouse or Shadwell cannot show anything so fine as the market place of Lynn or St. Margaret's church or our customhouse. Nor have I found anywhere, people more civil of speech and more obliging and well disposed, than in my own town; in which, apart from the sailors and their quarters, the merchants and shipowners are substantial: trade is always brisk: the port is always lively: continually there is a coming and a going: sometimes, week after week, one ship arrives and another ship puts out: the yards are always busy: the hammer and the anvil resound all day long: carpenters, rope makers, boat builders, block makers, sail makers, all the people wanted to fit out a ship – they say that a ship is like a woman, in always wanting something – are at work without intermission all the year round from five in the morning till eight in the evening. They stand at good wages: they live well: they dress warm: they drink of the best. It is a city of great plenty. Wine there is of the most generous, to be had at reasonable price – have I not myself brought home cargoes from Lisbon of Spanish and Portuguese – strong and heady – rich and sweet; and from Bordeaux of right claret? All the things that come from abroad are here in abundance, brought hither by our ships and distributed by our barges up the river and its tributaries through eight counties at least, serving the towns of Peterborough, Ely, Stamford, Bedford, St. Ives, Huntingdon, St. Neots, Northampton, Cambridge, Bury St. Edmund's, and Thetford. We send them not only wine but also coals (which come to us, sea-borne, from Newcastle), deal and timber from Norway and the Baltic, iron and implements; sugar, lemons, spices, tea (but there is little of that infusion taken in the county), turpentine, and I know not what: and we receive for export wheat, barley, oats and grain of all kinds.

In other places you may hear lamentations that certain imported luxuries have given out: the lemons will fail so that the punch is spoiled: or the nutmegs give out – which is a misfortune for the pudding: or the foreign wine has been all consumed. Our cellars and our warehouses, however, are always full, there is always wine of every kind: there are always stores of everything that the cook can want for his most splendid banquet.

Nor are we less fortunate in our food. There is excellent mutton fattened in the Marshland: the bacon of Norfolk is famous: there are no geese like the geese of the fens – they are kept in farmhouses, each in its own hutch, and all driven out to feed in the fens and the ditches of the fens. Every day you may see the boy they call the gozzard driving them out in the morning and bringing them home in the evening. Then, since all the country on the west side is lowland reclaimed from the sea, it is, like all such land, full of ponds and haunted by starlings and ducks, widgeon, teal and other wild birds innumerable, which are shot, decoyed, and caught in great numbers. Add to this that the reclaimed land is most fertile and yields abundantly of wheat and barley, fruit and vegetables: and that fish are found in plenty in the Wash and outside and you will own that the town is a kind of promised land,

where everything that the heart of man can desire is plentiful and cheap and where the better sort are rich and comfortable and the baser sort are in good case and contented.

Another circumstance, which certain scholars consider fortunate for Lynn, is that the modern town abounds with ancient buildings, walls, towers, arches, churches, gateways, fragments which proclaim its antiquity and speak of its former importance. You think, perhaps, that a plain and simple sea captain has no business to know anything about matters which concern scholars. That is a reasonable objection. The Lord forbid that I should speak as if I knew anything of my own reading. I am but a plain sailor: I have spent most of my life navigating a merchantman. This is an honourable condition. Had I to choose another life upon the world I would desire of Providence no higher station and no happier lot. A sea captain is king: his vessel is an island over which he rules: he is a servant yet not in a state of servitude: he is a dependent yet is independent: he has no cares about money for he is well paid: he keeps what hours he pleases: dresses as he likes: eats and drinks as he likes: if he carries passengers he has society. No. Let me not even seem to be pretending to the learning of a scholar. I do but repeat the things which my father was wont to repeat in my hearing. He was for forty years master of the Grammar school; a master of arts of Christ's college, Cambridge: a learned scholar in Latin, Greek, Hebrew and Chaldee: and, like many of his calling, an antiquary and one who was most happy when he was poring over old manuscripts in the Archives of the Guildhall, and amassing materials which he did not live to put together for the history of Lynn Regis, sometime Lynn Episcopi. The collections made by him still lie among the chests where the corporation keep their papers. They will doubtless be found there at some future time and will serve for some other hand engaged upon the same work.

It is not to be expected that among a trading and a shipping community there should be much curiosity on such matters as the past history of their borough: the charter which it obtained from kings; the creation of a mayor: the destruction of the monasteries when the glorious Reformation restored the sunlight of the gospel and of freedom to this happy land. For the most part my father worked without encouragement save from the vicar of St. Margaret's, the Reverend Mark Gentle, S.T.P., to whose scholarly mind the antiquities and charters and leases of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, were of small account indeed compared with a newly found coin of an obscure Roman usurper, or an inscription on a Roman milestone, or the discovery of a Roman urn. Yet my father would willingly discourse upon the subject and, indeed, I think that little by little he communicated to me the whole of his knowledge, so that I became that rare creature, a sailor versed in antiquity and history: one to whom the streets and old buildings of Lynn spoke in a language unknown by the people, even unheard by them.

It pleases me to recall the tall form of my father: his bent shoulders: his wig for the most part awry: his round spectacles; his thin face. In school he was a figure of fear, always terrible, wielding the rod of office with justice Rhadamanthine, and demanding, with that unrelenting alternative, things impossible in grammar. In school hours he was a very Jupiter, a thundering Jupiter: our school was an ancient hall with an open timber roof in which his voice rolled and echoed backwards and forwards. Nor did he spare his only son. In consequence of some natural inability to cope with the niceties of syntax I was often compelled to become a warning and an admonition to the rest. I have sometimes, since those days, in considering things during the night-watch, asked myself why men of tender hearts force their children to undergo this fierce discipline of grammar – a thing instantly forgotten when a boy goes to sea: and I have thought that perhaps it was invented and encouraged by divines in order that boys might learn something of the terrors of the law divine. Out of school, however, no child ever had a parent more indulgent or more affectionate. The post of schoolmaster is honourable and one that should be desired, yet I have sometimes wished, when the disagreeable moments of swishing were upon me, that the hand of the executioner had belonged to some other boy's father – say, the father of Sam Semple.

I will tell you how he used to talk. I remember one day – it might be yesterday – he was standing on the Lady's Mount and looking down upon the gardens and fields which now lie between the ancient walls and the modern town. "Look, boy," he said, "you see fields and gardens: on those fields stood formerly monasteries and convents: these gardens were once enclosed – you may still discern some of the stone walls which surrounded them, for monk and friar. All the friars were here, so great was the wealth of the town. On that green field behind the church of St. Nicholas was the house of the Austin Friars: some fragments of these buildings have I discovered built into the houses on the west side of the field: I should like to pull down the modern houses in order to display those fragments: almost at our feet lay the house of the Black Friars, yonder to the south, between the road to the gate and the river Var, was the friary of the White Friars or Carmelites: there is the tower of the Grey Friars, who were Franciscans. On the south side of St. Margaret's there are walls and windows, with carved mullions and arches – they belong to a college of priests or perhaps a Benedictine House – there must have been Benedictines in the town; or perhaps they belonged to a nunnery: many nunneries stood beside parish churches.

"This is part of the wall of the town. 'Tis a pity that it should fall into decay, but when walls are no longer wanted for defence they are neglected. First the weather loosens the stones of the battlements; or perhaps they fall into the moat: or the people take them away for building. I wonder how much of the wall of Lynn is built into the churches and the houses and the garden walls; then the whole face of the wall disappears; then if it is a Roman wall there is left a core of concrete as in London wall which I have seen here and there where the houses are not built against it. And here is a point which I cannot get over. The wall of Lynn is two miles long: that of London is three miles long, as I am credibly informed by Stow and others. Was then, the town of Lynn at any time able to raise and to defend a wall two miles in length? It seems incredible. Yet why build a wall longer than could be defended? Were these fields and gardens once streets between the religious houses? Certain it is that Lynn Episcopi, as it was then called, was formerly a very busy place yet, I apprehend, more busy than at present in proportion only to the increased wealth and population of the country."

So he would talk to me, I suppose, because he could never find anybody else who would listen to him. Those who read this page will very likely resemble the company to whom my father ventured upon such discourse of ancient things. They would incline their heads; they would take a drink: they would sigh: they would say, "Why, sir, since you say so, doubtless it is so. No one is likely to dispute the point, but if you think upon it the time is long ago and ... I think, neighbours, the wind has shifted a point to the nor'east."

The town preserves, in spite of neglect and oblivion, more of the appearance of the age than most towns. The Guildhall, where they show the sword and the silver cup of King John, is an ancient and noteworthy building: there are the old churches: there are almshouse and hospitals: there is a customhouse which the Hollanders enviously declare must have been brought over from their country and set up here, so much does it resemble their own buildings. Our streets are full of remains: here a carving in marble: here a window of ancient shape, cut in stone: here a piece of carved work from some ancient chantry chapel: here a deserted and mouldering court: here a house overhanging, gabled, with carved front: here a courtyard with an ancient house built round it; and with the narrow streets such as one finds only in the most ancient parts of our ancient cities. We have still our winding lanes with their irregularities: houses planted sideways as well as fronting the street: an irregular alignment: gables instead of a flat coping: casement windows not yet transformed by the modern sash: our old taverns; our old walls; our old market places; and the ancient bridges which span the four streams running through the midst of our town. By the riverside you may find the sailors and the craftsmen who belong to a seaport: at the customhouse you may meet the merchants and the shippers: in the market places you may find the countrymen and countrywomen – they talk an uncouth language and their manners are rough, but they are honest: and if you go to the church of St. Margaret's or St. Nicholas any day for morning prayers but especially on Sunday you may find among the congregation

maidens and matrons in rich attire, the former as beautiful as in any town or country may be met; the latter stately and dignified and gracious withal.

CHAPTER VI

THE MAID OF LYNN

My earliest recollection as a child shows me Captain Crowle, full-wigged, with a white silk cravat round his neck, the lace ends hanging down before, a crimson silk sash to his sword, long lace ruffles, his brown coat with silver buttons, his worsted hose, and his shoes with silver clocks. In my memory he is always carrying his hat under his arm; a stout stick always dangled from his wrist, in readiness; and he always presents the same honest face, weather-beaten, ruddy, lined, with his keen eyes under thick eyebrows and his nose long and broad and somewhat arched – such a nose as lends authority to a man. In other words, I never saw any change in the captain, though, when I first remember him he must have been fifty-five, and when he ceased to be seen in his old haunts he was close upon eighty.

I have seen, however, and I remember, many changes in the captain's ward. She is a little thing of two or three at first; then she is a merry child of six; next she is a schoolgirl of ten or eleven; she grows into a maiden of sixteen, neither girl nor woman; she becomes a woman of eighteen. I remember her in every stage. Strange to say I do not remember her between those stages.

Molly had the misfortune to lose her father in infancy. He was carried off, I believe, by smallpox. He was a ship owner, and general merchant of the town, and was generally reputed to be a man of considerable means. At his death he bequeathed the care of his widow and his child to his old servant, Captain John Crowle, who had been in the service of the house since he was apprenticed as a boy. He directed, further, that Captain Crowle should conduct the business for the child, who by his will was to inherit the whole of his fortune whatever that might prove to be, on coming of age, after subtracting certain settlements for his widow.

It was most fortunate for the child that her guardian was the most honest person in the world. He was a bachelor; he was bound by ties of gratitude to the house which he had served; he had nothing to do and nothing to think about except the welfare of the child.

I would have no secrets with my reader. Let it be known, therefore, that on looking into the position of affairs, the executor found that there was a much greater fortune for his ward than any one, even the widow, ever guessed. There were houses in the town; there were farms in Marshland; there were monies placed out on mortgage; there were three or four tall ships, chiefly in the Lisbon trade; and there were boxes full of jewels, gold chains, and trinkets, the accumulation of three or four generations of substantial trade. He kept this knowledge to himself: then, as the expenses of the household were small and there was always a large balance after the year in favour of the house, he went on adding ship to ship, house to house, and farm to farm, besides putting out monies on the security of mortgage, so that the child, no one suspecting, grew richer and richer, until by the time she was eighteen, if the captain only knew it, she became the richest heiress not only in the town of Lynn, but also in the whole county of Norfolk and even, I verily believe, in the whole country.

I think that the captain must have been what is called a good man of business by nature. A simple sailor, one taught to navigate; to take observations; to keep a log and to understand a chart, is not supposed to be thereby trained for trade. But it must have been a far-seeing man who boldly launched out into new branches, and sent whalers to the Arctic seas; ships to trade in the Baltic; and ships into the Mediterranean, as well as ships in the old trade for which Lynn was always famous, that with Lisbon for wine. He it was who enlarged the quay and rebuilt the Common Stath Yard: his countinghouse – it was called his and he was supposed to be at least a partner – was filled with clerks, and it was counted good fortune by the young men of the place to enter his service whether as prentices on board his ships, or as bookkeepers in his countinghouse, or as supercargoes or pursers in his fleet. For my own part it was always understood between us that I too was to enter his service,

but as a sailor, not as a clerk. This I told him as a little boy, with the impudence of childhood: he laughed; but he remembered and reminded me from time to time. "Jack is to be a sailor – Jack will have none of your quill driving – Jack means to walk his own quarter-deck. I shall live to give Jack his sword and his telescope" ... and so on, lest perchance I should forget and fall off and even accept the vicar's offer to get me a scholarship at some college of Cambridge, so that I might take a degree, and become my father's usher and presently succeed him as master of the Grammar school. "Learning," said the captain, "is a fine thing, but the command of a ship is a finer. Likewise it is doubtless a great honour to be a master of arts, such as your father, but, my lad, a rope's end is, to my mind, a better weapon than a birch." And so on. For while he knew how to respect the learning of a scholar, as he respected the piety of the vicar, he considered the calling of the sailor more delightful than that of the schoolmaster, even though not so highly esteemed by the world.

There were plenty of children in the town of Lynn to play with: but it came about in some way or other, perhaps because I was always a favourite with the captain, and was encouraged to go often to the house, that Molly became my special playfellow. She was two years younger than myself, but being forward in growth and strength the difference was not a hindrance, while there was no game or amusement pleasing to me which did not please her. For instance, every boy of Lynn, as soon as he can handle a scull, can manage a dingy; and as soon as he can haul a rope, can sail a boat. For my own part I can never remember the time when I was not in my spare time out on the river. I would sail up the river, along the low banks of the sluggish stream up and down which go the barges which carry the cargoes of our ships to the inland towns and return for more. There are also tilt boats coming down the river which are like the waggons on the road, full of passengers, sailors, servants, soldiers, craftsmen, apprentices and the like. Or I would row down the river with the current and the tide as far as the mouth where the river flows into the Wash. Then I would sail up again watching the ships tacking across the stream in their slow upward progress to the port. Or I would go fishing and bring home a basket full of fresh fish for the house: or I would paddle about in a dingy among the ships, watching them take in and discharge cargo: or receive from the barges alongside the casks of pork and beef; of rum and beer and water, for the next voyage: happy indeed, if I could get permission to tie up the painter to the rope ladder hanging over the side and so climb up and ramble over every part of the ship. And I knew every ship that belonged to the port: every Dutchman which put in with cheese and tallow, hardware and soft goods; every Norwegian that brought deal: I knew them all and when they were due and their tonnage and the name of the captain.

More than this, Molly knew as much as I did. She was as handy with her sculls; she knew every puff of wind and where to expect it at the bend of the river; she was as handy with the sails. While her mother made her a notable housewife and taught her to make bread, cakes, puddings and pies; to keep the still-room; to sew and make and mend; to brew the ale, both the strong and the small; and the punch for the captain's friends at Christmas and other festivals – while, I say, this part of Molly's education was not neglected, it was I who made her a sailor, so that there was nowhere in the place any one, man or boy or girl, who was handier with a boat or more certain with a sail than Molly. And I know not which of these two accomplishments pleased her guardian the more. That she should become a good housewife was necessary: that she should be a handy sailor was an accomplishment which, because it was rare in a girl, and belonged to the work of the other sex, seemed to him a proper and laudable object of pride.

The captain, as you have already learned, nourished a secret ambition. When I was still little more than a boy, he entrusted his secret to me. Molly's mother, the good homely body who was so notable a housekeeper, and knew nothing, as she desired to know nothing concerning the manners and customs of gentlefolk, was not consulted. Nor did the good woman even know how great an heiress her daughter had become. Now, the captain's ambition was to make his ward, by means of her fortune, a great lady. He knew little – poor man! – of what was meant by a great lady, but he wanted the heiress of such great wealth to marry some man who would lift her out of the rank and

condition to which she was born. It was a fatal ambition, as you shall learn. Now, being wise after the event and quite able to lock the door after the horse has been stolen I can understand that with such an ambition the captain's only plan was to have taken the girl away; perhaps to Norwich, perhaps to London itself; to have placed her under the care of some respectable gentlewoman; to have had her taught all the fashionable fal-lals, with the graces and the sprawls and the antics of the fashionable world; to let it be buzzed abroad that she was an heiress, and then, after taking care to protect her against adventurers, to find a man after his own mind, of station high enough to make the girl's fortune equal to his own; not to overshadow it: and not to dazzle him with possibilities of spending. However, it is easy to understand what might have been done.

What was done, you understand. At nineteen, Molly was a fine tall girl, as strong as any man, her arms stout and muscular like mine; her face rosy and ruddy with the bloom of health; her eyes blue and neither too large nor too small but fearless; her head and face large; her hair fair and blowing about her head with loose curls; her figure full; her neck as white as snow; her hands large rather than small, by reason of the rowing and the handling of the ropes, and by no means white; her features were regular and straight; her mouth not too small but to my eyes the most beautiful mouth in the world, the lips full, and always ready for a smile, the teeth white and regular. In a word, to look at as fine a woman, not of the delicate and dainty kind, but strong, tall, and full of figure, as one may wish for. As to her disposition she was the most tender, affectionate, sweet soul that could be imagined; she was always thinking of something to please those who loved her; she spared her mother and worked for her guardian; she was always working at something; she was always happy; she was always singing. And never, until the captain told her, did she have the least suspicion that she was richer than all her friends and neighbours – nay – than the whole town of Lynn with its merchants and shippers and traders, all together.

You think that I speak as a lover. It is true that I have always loved Molly: there has never been any other woman in the world for whom I have ever felt the least inclination or affection. She possessed my whole soul as a child; she has it still – my soul – my heart – my whole desire – my all. I will say no more in her praise, lest I be thought to exaggerate.

Let me return for a moment to our childhood. We ran about together: we first played in the garden: we then played in the fields below the wall: we climbed over what is left of the wall: from the top of the Grey Friars' Tower; from the chapel on the Lady's Mount; we would look out upon the broad expanse of meadows which were once covered over at every high tide: there were stories which were told by old people of broken dams and of floods and inundations: children's imagination is so strong that they can picture anything. I would pretend that the flood was out again; that my companion was carried away in a hencoop and that I was swimming to her assistance. Oh! we had plays and pretences enough. If we went up the river there was beyond – what we could never reach – a castle with a giant who carried off girls and devoured them; he carried off my companion. Heavens! How I rushed to the rescue and with nothing but the boathook encountered and slaughtered him. Or if we went down the river as far as the mouth where it falls into the Ouse, we would remember the pirates and how they seized on girls and took them off to their caves to work for them. How many pirates did I slay in defence and rescue of one girl whom they dared to carry off!

Or we rambled about the town, lingering on the quays, watching the ships and the sailors and the workmen, and sometimes in summer evenings when from some tavern with its red curtain across the window came the scraping of a fiddle, and the voices of those who sang, and the stamping of those who danced, we would look in at the open door and watch the sailors within who looked so happy. Nobody can ever be so happy as sailors ashore appear to be: it is only the joy of a moment, but when one remembers it, one imagines that it was the joy of a life-time. You think that it was a bad thing for children to look on at sailors and to listen to their conversation if one may use the word of such talk as goes on among the class. You are wrong. These things do not hurt children, because they do not understand. Half the dangers in the world, I take it, come from knowledge: only the other

half from ignorance. Everybody knows the ways and the life of Jack ashore. Children, however, see only the outside of things. The fiddler in the corner puts his elbow into the tune; the men get up and dance the hornpipe; the girls dance to the men, setting and jetting and turning round and round and all with so much mirth and good nature and so much kindness and so much singing and laughing, that there can be no more delightful entertainment for children than to look on at a sailors' merrymaking behind the red curtain of the tavern window.

I recall one day. It was in the month of December, in the afternoon and close upon sunset. The little maid was about eight and I was ten. We were together as usual; we had been on the river, but it was cold and so we came ashore and were walking hand in hand along the street they call Pudding Lane which leads from the Common Stath Yard to the market-place. In this lane there stands a sailors' tippling house, which is, I dare say, in all respects, such a house as sailors desire, provided and furnished according to their wants and wishes. As we passed, the place being already lit up with two or three candles in sconces, the door being wide open, and the mingled noise of fiddle, voices, and feet announcing the assemblage of company, Molly pulled me by the hand and stopped to look in. The scene was what I have already indicated. The revelry of the evening had set in: everybody was drinking: one was dancing: the fiddler was playing lustily.

We should have looked on for a minute and left them. But one of the sailors recognised Molly. Springing to his feet, he made a respectful leg and saluted the child. "Mates," he cried, "'tis our owner! The little lady owns the barky. What shall we do for her?"

Then they all sprang to their feet with a huzza for the owner, and another for the ship – and, if you will believe it, their rough fo'c'sle hands in half a minute had the child on the table in a chair like a queen. She sat with great dignity, understanding in some way that these men were in her own service, and that they designed no harm or affright to her but only to do her honour. Therefore she was not in any fear and smiled graciously; for my own part I followed and stood at the table thinking that perhaps these fellows were proposing some piratical abduction and resolving miracles of valour, if necessary.

Then they made offerings. One man pulled a red silk handkerchief from his neck and laid it in her lap; and another lugged a box of sweetmeats from his pocket: it came from Lisbon but was made, I believe, in Morocco by the Moors. A third had a gold ring on his finger – everybody knows the extravagancies of sailors – which he drew off and placed in her hand. Another offered a glass of punch. The little maid did what she had so often seen the captain do. She looked round and said, "Your good health, all the company," and put her lips to the glass which she then returned. And another offered to dance and the fiddler drew his bow across the catgut – it is a sound which inclines the heart to beat and the feet to move whenever a sailor hears it.

"I have often seen you dance," said Molly; "let the fiddler play and you shall see me dance."

I never thought she would have had so much spirit. For, you see, I had taught her to dance the hornpipe: every boy in a seaport town can dance the hornpipe: we used to make music out of a piece of thin paper laid over a tortoise-shell comb – it must be a comb of wide teeth and none of them must be broken – and with this instead of a fiddle we would dance in the garden or in the parlour. But to stand up before a whole company of sailors – who would have thought it? However, she jumped up and on the table performed her dance with great seriousness and so gracefully that they were all enchanted: they stood around, their mouths open, a broad grin on every face: the women, neglected, huddled together in a corner and were quite silent.

When she had finished, she gathered up her gifts – the silk handkerchief – it came from Calicut, the sweetmeats from Morocco, the gold ring from I know not where. "Put me down, if you please," she said. So one of them gently lifted her to the ground. "I thank you all," she curtsied very prettily. "I wish you good-night, and when you set sail again, a good voyage."

So she took my hand and we ran away.

At the age of thirteen I went to sea. Then for ten years I sailed out and home again; sometimes to the Baltic; sometimes to Bordeaux; sometimes to Lisbon. After every voyage I found my former

companion grown, yet always more lovely and more charming: the time came when we no longer kissed at parting; when we were no longer brother and sister; when, alas! we could not be lovers, because between us lay that great fortune of hers, which it would be improper to bestow upon the mate of a merchantman.

Said my father to me once by way of warning, "Jack, build not hopes that will be disappointed. This maiden is not for thee, but for thy betters. If she were poor – but she is rich – too rich, I fear me, for her happiness. Let us still say in the words of Agur, 'Give me neither poverty nor riches.' Thou art as yet young for thoughts of love. When the time comes, my son, cast your eyes among humbler maidens and find virtues and charms in one of them. But think no more – I say it for thy peace – think no more of Molly. Her great riches are like a high wall built round her to keep thee off, Jack, and others like unto thee."

They were wise words, but a young man's thoughts are wilful. There was no other maiden in whom I saw either virtues or charms because Molly among them all was like the silver moon among the glittering stars.

You have heard of the great and unexpected discovery, how the town found itself the possessor of a spa – and such a spa! – compared with which the waters of Tunbridge were feeble and those of Epsom not worth considering. That was in the year 1750, when Molly was already nineteen years of age and no longer a little maid, but a woman grown, as yet without wooers, because no one so far had been found fit, in the captain's eyes, for the hand and the purse of his lovely ward.

CHAPTER VII

THE POET

You have heard the opinions of the "Society" as to Sam Semple. You have also witnessed the humiliation and the basting of that young man. Let me tell you more about him before we go on to relate the progress of the conspiracy of which he was the inventor and the spring.

He was the son of one John Semple who was employed at the customhouse. The boy could look forward, like most of us, to a life of service. He might go to sea, and so become in due course, apprentice, mate, and skipper; or he might be sent on board as supercargo; or he might enter the countinghouse of a merchant and keep the books; or he might follow his father and become a servant of the customhouse.

He was two years older than myself and therefore, so much above me at school. Of all the boys (which alone indicates something contemptible in his nature) he was the most disliked, not by one or two, but by the whole school; not only by the industrious and the well-behaved, but also by the lazy and the vicious.

There is always in every school, one boy at least, who is the general object of dislike: he makes no friends: his society is shunned: he may be feared, but he is hated. There are, I dare say, many causes for unpopularity: one boy is perhaps a bully who delights to ill-treat the younger and the weaker; one is a braggart: one plays games unfairly: one is apt to offend that nice sense of honour and loyalty which is cultivated by schoolboys: another is treacherous to his comrades; he tells tales, backbites and makes mischief: perhaps he belongs to an inferior station and has bad manners: perhaps he takes mean advantages: perhaps he is a coward who will not fight: perhaps he cannot do the things which boys respect.

Sam Semple was disliked for many of these reasons. He was known to be a telltale; he was commonly reported to convey things overheard to the usher, by means of which that officer was enabled to discover many little plots and plans and so bring their authors to pain and confusion. He was certainly a coward who would never fight it out, but after a grand pretence and flourish would run away at the first blow. But if he would not fight he would bear malice and would take mean revenges; he was a most notorious liar, insomuch that no one would believe any statement made by him, if it could be proved to be connected with his own advantage; he could not play any games and affected to despise the good old sports of cocking, baiting the bear, drawing the badger, playing at cricket, hockey, wrestling, racing, and the other things that make boys skilful, courageous and hardy. He was, in a word, a poor soft, cowardly creature, more like a girl – and an inferior kind of girl – than an honest lad.

He was much addicted to reading: he would, by choice, sit in a corner reading any book that he could get more willingly than run, jump, row, or race. When we had holidays he would go away by himself, sometimes on the walls, if it were summer, or in some sheltered nook, if it were winter, contented to be left alone with his printed page. He borrowed books from my father who encouraged him in reading, while he admonished him on account of his faults, and from the vicar, who lent him books, while he warned him against the reports of his character which were noised abroad. Now – I know not how – the boy became secretly inflamed with the ambition of becoming a poet. How he fell into this pitfall, which ended in his ruin, I know not. Certainly it was not from any boys in the school, or from any friend in the town, because there are no books of poetry in Lynn, save those which belong to the parson and the schoolmaster. However, he did conceive the ambition of becoming a poet – secretly, at first, because he was naturally ashamed of being such a fool, but it came out. He read poetry from choice, and rather than anything else. Once, I remember, he was flogged for taking a volume of miscellany poems into church instead of the Book of Common Prayer. The boys were

astonished at the crime, because certainly one would much rather read the Book of Common Prayer, in which one knows what to expect, than a book of foolish rhymes.

I myself was the first to find out his ambition. It was in this way. Coming out of school one day I picked up a paper which was blown about the square. It was covered with writing. I read some of it, wondering what it might mean. There was a good deal and not a word of sense from beginning to end: the writing was all scored out and corrected over and over again. Thus, not to waste your time over this nonsense, it ran something like this:

When the refulgent rays of Sol began prevail
early Day Morn
To Awakened all the maidens of the dale
Lawn
Drove Morpheus shrieking from the beds away
– from the maids and swains.

and so on. One is ashamed to repeat such rubbish. While I was reading it however, Sam Simple came running back.

"That paper is mine," he cried, with a very red face, snatching it out of my hands.

"Well – if it is yours, take it. What does it mean?"

"It's poetry, you fool."

"If you call me a fool, Sam, you'll get a black eye." He was three inches taller than myself as well as two years older – but this was the way all the boys spoke to him.

"You can't understand," he said, "none of you can understand. It's poetry, I tell you."

I told my father, who sent for him and in my presence admonished him kindly, first ordering him to submit his verses for correction, as if they were in Latin. It was after school hours: the room was empty save for the three of us – my father sat at his desk where he assumed authority. Outside the schoolroom he was but a gentle creature.

"Boy," he said, "as for these verses – I say nothing. They are but immature imitations. You would be a poet. Learn, however, that the lot of him who desires that calling is the hardest and the worst that fate can have in store for an honest man. There are many who can write rhymes: for one who has read Ovid and Virgil, the making of verse is easy. But only one or two here and there, out of millions, are there whose lips are touched with the celestial fire: only one or two whose verses can reach the heart and fire the brain of those who read them."

"Sir, may not I, too, form one of that small company?" His cheek flamed and his eyes brightened. For once Sam was handsome.

"It may be so. I say nothing to the contrary. Learn, however, that even if genius has been granted, much more will be required. He who would be a great poet must attain, if he can, by meditation and self-restraint, to the great mind. He must be sincere – truthful – courageous – think of that, boy; he must meditate. Milton's thoughts were ever on religious and civil freedom; therefore he was enabled to speak as a prophet."

He gazed upon the face of his scholar: the cheek was sallow again; the eyes dull; upon that mean countenance no sign of noble or of lofty thought. My father sighed and went on.

"It seems, to a young man, a great thing to be a poet. He will escape – will he? – the humiliations of life. He thinks that he will be no man's servant; he will be independent; he will work as his genius inclines him. Alas! he little knows the humiliations of the starveling poet. No man's servant? There is none – believe me – not even the African slave, who has to feel more of the contempts, the scorns, the servitude of the world. Such an one have I known. He had to bend the knee to the patron, who treated him with open scorn; and to the bookseller, who treated him with contempt undisguised. One may be a poet who is endowed with the means of a livelihood. Such is the ingenious Mr. Pope; or

one who has an office to maintain him: such was the immortal John Milton; but, for you and such as you, boy, born in a humble condition, and ordained by Providence for that condition, there is no worse servitude than that of a bookseller's hack. Go, boy – think of these things. Continue to write verses, if by their aid you may in any way become a better man and more easily attain to the Christian life. But accept meanwhile, the ruling of Providence and do thy duty in that station of life to which thou hast been called."

So saying he dismissed the boy, who went away downcast and with hanging head.

Then my father turned to me. "Son," he said, "let no vain repinings fill thy soul. Service is thy lot. It is also mine. It is the lot of every man except those who are born to wealth and rank. I do not envy these, because much is expected of them – a thing which mostly they do not understand. And too many of these are, truth to say, in the service of Beelzebub. We are all servants of each other; let us perform our service with cheerfulness and even with joy. The Lord, who knows what is best for men, hath so ordained that we shall be dependent upon each other in all things. Servants, I say, are we all of each other. We may not escape the common lot – the common servitude."

Let me return to Sam. At the age of fourteen he was taken from school and placed in a countinghouse where his duty was to clean out, sweep, and dust the place every morning; to be at the beck and call of his master; to copy letters and to add up figures. I asked him how he liked this employment.

"It is well enough," he said, "until I can go whither I am called. But to serve at adding up the price of barrels of tarpaulin all my life! No, Jack, no. I am made of stuff too good."

He continued for three years in this employment. We then heard that he had been dismissed for negligence, his master having made certain discoveries that greatly enraged him. He then went on board ship in the capacity of clerk or assistant to the supercargo, but at the end of his first voyage he was sent about his business.

"It is true," he told me, "that there were omissions in the books. Who can keep books below, by the light of a stinking tallow candle, when one can lie on the deck in the sun and watch the waves? But these people – these people – among them all, Jack, there is not one who understands the poet, except your father, and he will have it that the poet must starve. Well, there is another way." But he would tell me no more.

That way was this. You know, because it led to the basting. The day after the adventure in the captain's garden, Sam put together all he had, borrowed what money his mother would give him and went off to London by the waggon.

After a while a letter came from him. It was addressed to his mother, who brought it to the school because she could not understand what was meant. Sam (I believe he was lying) said that he had been received into the Company of the Wits; his verse, he said, was regarded with respect at the coffee house; he was already known to many poets and booksellers; he asked for a small advance of money and he entreated his mother to let it be known in the town that he was publishing a volume of verse by subscription. His former patrons, he said, would doubtless assist him by giving their names and guineas. The book, he added, would certainly place him among the acknowledged poets of the day – even with Pope and Gay.

There was much difference of opinion as to sending the guineas: but a few of the better sort consented, and in due course received their copies. It was a thin quarto with a large margin. The title page was as follows:

"Miscellany Poems

by

SAM SEMPLE,

Gentleman."

"Gentleman!" said the vicar. "How long has Sam been a gentleman? He will next, no doubt, describe himself as esquire. As for the verses – trash – two-penny trash! Alas! And they cost me a guinea!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE OPENING OF THE SPA

The wonderful letter from Sam Semple was received in April. No one from the outset questioned his assertions. This seems wonderful – but they could only be tried by a letter to London or a journey thither. Now our merchants had correspondents in the city of London, but not in the fashionable quarters, and nothing is more certain than that the merchants of this city concerned themselves not at all with the pursuits of fashion or even with the gatherings of the wits in the coffee house. As for the journey to London no one will willingly undertake it unless he is compelled – You may go by way of Ely and Cambridge – but the road nearly all the way to Cambridge lies through the soft and treacherous fen when if a traveller escape being bogged, a hundred to one he will probably acquire an ague which will trouble him for many days afterwards. Or you may go by way of Swaffham and East Dereham through Norwich. By this way there are no fens, but the road to Norwich is practicable only by broad wheeled waggons or on horseback, and I doubt if the forty miles could be covered in less than two days. At Norwich, it is true, there is a better road and a stage coach carries passengers to London in twelve hours.

It is therefore a long and tedious journey from Lynn to London and one not to be undertaken without strong reasons. Then – even if the society had entertained suspicions and deputed one or more to make that journey and to inquire as to the truth of the letter, how and where, in so vast a city, would one begin the enquiry.

In truth, however, the letter was received without the least suspicion. Yet it was from beginning to end an artfully concocted lie – part of a conspiracy; an invention devised by the desire for revenge; an ingenious device – let us give the devil his due – by one whose only weapon was his cunning.

Every man of the "Society" went home brimful of the discovery. The next day the doctor's garden was crowded with people all pressing together, trampling over his currant and gooseberry bushes, drawing up the bucket without cessation in order to taste the water which was to cure all diseases – even like the Pool of Bethesda. Many among them had used the water all their lives without discovering any peculiarity in taste – in fact as if it had been ordinary water conferred upon man by Providence for the brewing of his beer and the making of his punch and the washing of his linen. Now, however, so great is the power of faith, they drank it as it came out of the well – a thing abhorrent to most people who cannot abide plain water. They held it up to the light, admiring its wonderful clearness: they called attention to the beads of air rising in the glass, as a plain proof of its health-giving qualities; they smacked their lips over it, detecting the presence of unknown ingredients: those who were already rheumatic resolved to drink it every day at frequent intervals: after a single draught they felt relief in their joints; they declared that the rheumatic pains were subsiding rapidly: nay, were already gone, and they rejoiced in the strength of their faith as if they were driving an unwelcome guest out through an open door.

The doctor made haste to issue and to print his own examination of the water. In this document as I have told you, he very remarkably agreed with the analysis sent down by the egregious Samuel. He appended to his list of ingredients certain cases which he indicated by initials in which the water had proved beneficial: most of them at the outset, were the cases of those who, on the first day, found relief from a single glass. Many more cases afterwards occurred.

After the town, the country. The report of the valuable discovery spread rapidly. The farmer folk who brought their produce, pigs, sheep, poultry and cattle to our markets carried the news home with them: the whole town – indeed, in a few hours was as they say, all agog with the discovery and eager, even down to the fo'c'sle seamen to drink of a well which was by this time reported among the ignorant class not only to cure but also to prevent diseases. Then gentlemen began to ride in;

on market day there are always gentlemen in the town; they have an ordinary of their own at the *Crown*; they were at first incredulous but they would willingly taste of the spring. As fresh water was comparatively strange to them it is not surprising that some of them detected an indescribable taste which they were readily persuaded to believe was proof of a medicinal character. They were followed by ladies also curious to taste, to prove, and, in many cases, to be cured.

Meantime everybody, both of the town and of the country, rejoiced at hearing that it had been decided to take advantage of the discovery in order to convert Lynn Regis, previously esteemed as on the same level as Gosport in the south of England or Wapping by the port of London, into a place of fashionable resort and another Bath or Tunbridge Wells. It was difficult, however, to believe that the old town with its narrow and winding streets, its streams, its bridges, its old decayed courts and ancient pavements could accommodate itself to the wants and the taste – or even the presence of the polite world.

Then the news spread further afield. The reverend canons in their secluded close beside their venerable cathedral – whether at Peterborough, Lincoln, Ely or Norwich, heard the story magnified and exaggerated, how at Lynn had been found a spring of water that miraculously healed all wounds, cured all diseases and made the halt to run and the cripple to stand. Better than all it restored the power of drinking port wine to the old divines who had been compelled by their infirmities to give up that generous wine.

In their great colleges, a world too wide for the young men who entered them as students, the fellows heard the news and talked about the discovery in the dull combination rooms where the talk was ever mainly of the rents and the dinners, the last brew at the college brewery, yesterday's cards, or the approaching vacancy in a college living. They, too, pricked up their ears at the news because for them as well as their reverend brethren of the cathedral gout and rheumatism were deadly enemies. If only Providence would remove from mankind those two diseases which plague and pester those to whom their lives would otherwise be full of comfort and happiness, cheered by wine and punch, stayed and comforted by the good things ready to the hand of the cook and the housewife.

And from all the towns around – from Boston, Spalding, Wisbeach, Bury, Wells, there came messengers and letters of inquiry all asking if the news was true – if people had been already treated and already cured – if lodgings were to be had and so forth.

And then the preparations began. The committee went from house to house encouraging and stimulating the people to make ready for such an incursion as the place had never before known even at fair time, and promising a golden harvest. Who would not wish to share in such a harvest?

First, lodgings had to be got ready – they must be clean at least and furnished with necessaries. People at the spa do not ask for great things in furniture – they do not desire to sit in their lodgings which are only for sleeping and dressing – a blind in the window or a curtain to keep out the sun and prying eyes, – a bed – a chair – a cupboard – a looking-glass – a table – not even the most fashionable lady asks for more except that the bed be soft and the wainscot and floor of the room be clean. The better houses would be kept for the better sort: the sailors' houses by the Common Stath and the King's Stath would do for the visitors' servants who could also eat and drink in the taverns of the riverside. Houses deserted and suffered to fall into decay in the courts of the town were hastily repaired, the roofs patched up, the windows replaced, the doors and woodwork painted. Everywhere rooms were cleaned: beds were put up, all the mattresses, all the pillows, all the blankets and sheets in the town were brought up and more were ordered from Boston and other places accessible by river or by sea. Certainly the town had never before had such a cleaning while the painters worked all night as well as all day to get through their orders.

It was next necessary to provide supplies for the multitude, when they should arrive. I have spoken of the plenty and abundance of everything in the town of Lynn. The plenty is due to the great fertility of the reclaimed land which enables the farmers to grow more than they can sell for want of a market. There is sent abroad, as a rule, to the low countries, much of the produce of the farms.

There was therefore no difficulty in persuading the farmers to hold their hands for a week or two, and when the company began to arrive, to send into the town quantities of provisions of all kinds – pork, bacon, mutton, beef, poultry, eggs, vegetables and milk. Boats were engaged for the conveyance of these stores down the river. There would be provided food in abundance. And as for drink there was no difficulty at all in a town which imported whole cargoes of wine every year.

I must not forget the preparation made in the churches. There are two in Lynn, ancient and venerable churches both. I believe that they were always much larger than was ever wanted considering the number of the people, but in Norfolk the churches are all too large, being so built for the greater praise and glory of God. However, both in St. Margaret's and in St. Nicholas, the congregations had long since shrunk so that there were wide spaces between the walls and the pews. These spaces were now filled up with new pews for the accommodation of the expected invasion of visitors. I confess that I admire the simple faith in the coming success of the spa which at this time animated not only those most interested as the doctor himself, but also the people of the town who knew nothing except what they were told, namely that the well in the doctor's garden had properties, which were sovereign against certain diseases, and that all the world had learned this fact and were coming to be cured.

There were next the public preparations. The necessity of despatch caused the structures to be of wood which, however, when brightly painted, may produce a more pleasing effect than brick. First, there was the pump room. This was built, of course, over the well in the doctor's garden, which it almost covered: it was a square or oblong building, having the well in one corner, and containing a simple room with large sash windows, unfurnished save for a wooden bench running round the wall and two others in the middle of the room. The water was pumped up fresh and cool – it was really a very fine well of water always copious – into a large basin; a long counter ran across the room in front of the basin: the counter was provided with glasses of various sizes and behind the counter were two girls hired as dippers. The doctor's door opened out of the pump room so as to afford readiness and convenience for consultation.

Lastly it was necessary to provide for the amusement of the visitors. Everybody knows that for one person who visits a spa for health, there are two who visit it for the amusements and the pleasures and entertainments provided at these places. I have mentioned the open fields within the walls of the town which were anciently covered with the buildings and the gardens of the monks and friars and the nuns. They are planted in some places with trees: for instance below the Lady's Mount, in which is the ancient chapel, there lie fields on which now stand many noble trees. The committee chose this spot for the construction of the assembly rooms. They first enclosed a large portion with a wooden fence: they then laid out the grounds with paths: this done they erected a long room where the assembly might be held, with a smooth and level floor fit for dancing. This room was also to be the resort of the company in the mornings and when the weather was rainy: adjoining the long room was the card room, with one long table and several small tables: and the tea room, where that beverage could be served with drinks and cordials to counteract its (possibly) evil effects. A gallery at one end was ready for the music – outside there was another building for the music to play on fine evenings.

I must not forget the decoration of the trees. Nothing could be more beautiful than this avenue after nightfall: lamps of various colours hung on festoons from branch to branch: across the avenue in arches, and from tree to tree in parallel lines: these in the evening produced an appearance of light and colour that ravished the eye of every beholder. Those who knew London declared that in the daytime this place could compare favourably with the Mall in St. James's Park, and in the evening after dark even with the Marylebone Gardens or Vauxhall.

All these preparations were pushed forward with the utmost diligence, so that everything, might be ready by the first of May, on which day it was hoped that the season of the spa would commence. Musicians and singers were engaged: they came from London, bringing good recommendation from some of the pleasure gardens where they had performed with credit. They were to play for the dancing on the nights of the assembly; they were also to play in the morning when engaged or bespoke by the

gentlemen. They brought with them two or three fiddlers; players on various instruments of brass, and the horns. A dancing master, Mr. Prappit, came from Norwich: he was busy for three weeks before the opening, with the young folks of the town, who had never before danced anything more ambitious than a hey or a jig or a country dance, or a frolic round the May pole. Mr. Prappit was also engaged as master of the ceremonies, a post of great responsibility and distinction.

A theatre is a necessary part of every public place: therefore a troop of strolling players received permission to perform three evenings in the week in the large room of the *Duke's Head* inn: I know not what reputation they had as actors, but I can bear witness that they made as much as they could out of a passion, tearing it, so to speak, to rags, and bawling themselves hoarse, so that at least they earned their money, which was not much, I fear.

The cock pit was newly repaired for the lovers of that manly and favourite sport to which the gentlemen of Norfolk are, as is well known, much addicted. For those who prefer the more quiet games there was the bowling green. And lastly, for those who incline to the ruder sports, there were provided masters of fence who could play with quarter staff or cudgel, jugglers and conjurers, with rope dancers, tumblers, merry andrews and such folk, together with a tent for their performance.

These details are perhaps below the dignity of history. I mention them in order to let it be understood that the invention – the lying invention of Sam Semple, was bearing the fruit which he most desired in the deception of the whole town. There was never, I believe, so great a deception attempted or carried into effect.

Meantime, the work of the town continued as usual. The port had nothing to do with the spa. For my own part I was discharging cargo from *The Lady of Lynn*, and making ready to take in a new cargo. All day I was engaged on board: I slept on board: but in the evening I went ashore and looked on at the preparations, and at this new world of fashion and pleasure the like of which I had never seen before. And, as usual, the ships came into port and dropped anchor off the Stath: or they cleared out and went down the river with the current and the tide. There were two kinds of life in the place when there had never before been more than one: and while the people in one part of the town had nothing to think of but amusement, those at the other part were as usual, engaged in their various work. The clerks ran about with their quills behind their ears; the porters rolled the casks, the bargemen brought their unwieldy craft alongside with many loud sounding oaths and the yohoing without which they can do nothing; and in the taverns the sailors drank and danced and sang, quite unmindful of the people in the streets behind them.

The first arrivals were the gentlefolk from the country round Lynn. They learned when everything would be ready and they came in as soon as the gardens were laid out, the long room finished and the first evening announced – they had but a few miles to travel; they engaged the best lodgings and demanded the best provisions. As for wine, they could not have better because there is no better wine than fills the cellars of our merchants or our vintners.

As these good people came to the spa it was thought necessary to drink the waters and this they did with much importance, every morning. The natives of Norfolk are, I verily believe, the longest lived and the most healthy people in the whole world. With the exception of ague – they call it the bailiff of Marshland – the people in this county seldom suffer from any disorder and live to a good old age. Yet all with one consent began the day by drinking a glass of the cold bright water served in the pump room. Very few of them, I say, were troubled with any kind of complaint: though the gentlemen are hard drinkers, they are also hard riders and the open air and cold winds of the morning drive out and dissipate the fumes of the evening and its wine. For this reason, though many of our sea captains drink hard at sea, they are never a bit the worse for the fresh salt air is the finest restorative, and a sailor may be drunk once every twenty-four hours and yet live to a hundred and be none the worse. Most of those who drank the waters had never felt any symptoms of gout or rheumatism, lumbago, sciatica, pleurisy, consumption or asthma, or any other disease whatever. They flocked to the pump room in order to drive away even the possibility of these symptoms. To drink

the waters for a month, or even for a fortnight, was considered sovereign for the keeping off of all kinds of sickness for at least a whole year to come. It was strange how quite young men and young maidens suddenly conceived this superstitious belief – I can call it nothing but superstition – that those who were perfectly well would be maintained in health —*although* young people of this age do not commonly contract the diseases above enumerated – by drinking a glass of water every morning. That old men, who will catch at anything that offers to restore health, should resort to this newly discovered universal medicine was not so strange. Captain Crowle, who, to my certain knowledge, had never suffered a day's sickness in the seventy years of his life; who kept his teeth firm and sound; whose hair had not fallen off; who stood firm on his legs and square in his shoulders; who still drank free and devoured his rations as eagerly as any able-bodied sailor, marched every morning to the pump room and took his glass. "Jack," he said, "the discovery is truly miraculous. By the Lord! it will make us all live to be a hundred. Already I feel once more like a man of thirty. I shall shake a leg, yet, at the wedding of Molly's grandchildren."

They all consulted the doctor – the sick and the well alike – the former in order to be cured and the latter in order to guard against disease. Now that one knows the foundation of the whole business it is wonderful to reflect upon the number of cures the doctor was able to register in his book: cures about which there could be neither doubt nor dispute, so that one is fain to think that faith alone may be sufficient to drive out rheumatism. The prescription of the worthy doctor rested entirely on the curative power of the water. "You will take," he said to every one who came to him, "every morning before breakfast for choice, a glass of the water. Or, if you prefer first to take a dish of tea, a cup of chocolate, or a draught of beer, do so by all means. In that case take your glass an hour – not more – after breakfast. I prescribe in your case, a dose in a glass numbered A or B – or C" – as the case might be. "It contains seven ounces and six drachms" – or some other weight as the case might be. He was very exact in the size of the glass and the weight of the dose. "This is the exact quantity which operates efficaciously in your case. Do not take more which will not expedite your cure: nor less which will hinder it. Seven ounces and six drachms."

The doctor's dignity and gravity indeed were a credit to the town. Out of London, I believe, there was no physician with such outward tokens of science. The velvet coat he now wore habitually: a new wig greatly delayed had been brought from Norwich: his lace and his linen were clean every morning: his fingers became curly from the continual clasp of the guinea. No one, I am sure, expected to find so grave and dignified a physician in a town occupied mainly by rude tarpaulins and their ladies. Where nothing better than a mere apothecary could be expected there was found a physician in manner and in appearance equal to the most fashionable doctor of medicine in London itself.

"Before breakfast, madam," he repeated. "Fasting, if possible. If that is not convenient, after breakfast. Think not to hasten the operation of the waters by too generous a use of them. Seven ounces and six drachms in weight. Let that be your daily allowance: that and no more. For your diet, let it be ample, generous, and of the best quality that the market supplies. It is providentially, considering the wants of the spa – the best market in Norfolk, provided with birds of all kinds, both wild and of the farmyard: with beef and mutton fattened on the pastures of Marshland; and with fruit and other things of the very best. Partake plentifully, madam. Do not deny yourself. Tea, you may take if you desire it: very good tea can be obtained of the apothecary at a guinea a pound. For my own part I allow the beverage to be sometimes useful in clearing the brain of noxious vapours and the body of corrupt humours. For wine I recommend Port, Malmesey, Madeira or Lisbon – but not more than one measured pint in the day. You must take exercise gently by walking in the gardens, or in the long room, or by dancing in the evening. And you may maintain cheerfulness of mind, which is beneficial in any case whether of sickness or of health, by taking a hand in the card room."

To the gentlemen who had not as yet fallen victims to any of the prevalent diseases he would discourse much after the same fashion.

"Put out your tongue, sir – I believe it to be furred – So... Dear me! Worse than I suspected. And your pulse? I believe it to be strong. So. As I thought. A little too strong, perhaps even febrile. Your habits, I suppose, include a hearty appetite and a full allowance of strong ale and wine. You ride – you hunt – you attend races, cockpit and sport of all kinds; you are not addicted to reading or to study, and you sometimes play cards."

"The doctor," said his patients afterwards, "knew exactly and could tell by my pulse and my tongue my daily way of living. 'Tis wonderful!"

"It is my duty to warn you, sir, that you have within you the seeds of gout – of inflammatory gout – which will fix itself first upon the big toe and thus become like a bag of red hot needles. Afterwards it will mount higher – but I will spare you the description of your dying agonies. You may, however, avert this suffering, or postpone it, so that it will only seize upon you should you live to a hundred and twenty, or thereabouts. The surest method is by drinking these waters every year for a week or two. One tumbler every morning fasting. You will take a measured weight of seven ounces and six drachms – " or as I said before some other weight. "I prescribe in your case, no other medicine. Let your diet be generous. Confine yourself to a single bottle of wine a day. Ride as usual and, in fact, live as you are accustomed. Nature, sir, abhors a revolution: she expects to perform her usual work in the usual manner."

If any came to him already afflicted with gout or rheumatism he prescribed for them in a similarly easy and simple fashion.

"You have been taking colchicum – " or whatever it might have been. "I recommend you on no account to discontinue a medicine to which you are accustomed. Gout is an enemy which may be attacked from many points. While it is resisting so far successfully the attack by the drugs which have been administered to you, I shall attack it from an unsuspected quarter. Ha! I shall fall upon the unguarded flank with an infallible method. You will take, sir, three glasses of water daily; each before meals. Each glass contains the measured weight of seven ounces and six drachms," or some other weight was carefully prescribed. "You will, in other respects, follow the diet recommended by your former physicians."

"The doctor," said his patients, "is not one who scoffs at his brethren. On the contrary, he continues their treatment, only adding the water. And you see what I am now."

"Observe," the doctor continued, "my treatment is simple. It is so simple that it must command success. I shall expect therefore, to find in you, for your own share in the cure, that faith which assists nature. Nothing so disconcerts an enemy as the confidence of victory on the other side. Before that faith, gout flies, terrified; and nature, triumphant, resumes that nice balanced equilibrium of all the functions which the unlearned call health."

The doctor also encouraged his dippers, one of whom was a young woman of attractive appearance and great freedom of tongue, to relate for the benefit of those who drank the waters, cases of cure and rapid recovery. This encouragement caused the girl who had a fine natural gift of embellishment or development, to sing the praises of the spa with a most audacious contempt for the structure of fact.

"Lawk, madam!" she would say, using the broad Norfolk accent which I choose to convert into English, because her discourse would be unintelligible save to the folk of the county. "To think what this blessed water can do! That poor gentleman who has just gone out – you saw yourself that he now walks as upright as a lance and as stiff as a recruiting sergeant. He first came to the pump room, was it a fortnight ago or three weeks, Jenny? Twelve days? To be sure. You ought to know – Jenny dipped for him, madam. He was carried in: his very crutches were no good to him; and as for his poor feet, they dangle for all the world like lumps of pork. And his groans, – Lawk! – they would move a heart of stone. Jenny here, who has a feeling heart, though but a humble dipper at your service, madam, like myself and pleased to be of service to so fine a lady, burst into tears when she saw him – didn't you, Jenny, my dear? Before all the people, she did. Well, he drank three tumblers every day – each

exactly seven ounces and six drachms in weight – oh! the doctor knows what to do for his patients – did your ladyship ever see a wiser doctor? On the third day he left off groaning: on the fourth he said, 'I feel better, give me my third tumbler.' Didn't he say those very words, Jenny? 'Give me my third,' he said. On the fifth day he walked in by himself. It was on crutches, it is true, for even this water takes its time. Lord forbid that I should tell your ladyship anything but gospel. On the sixth day he used a walking stick: on the seventh, he said, walking upright, his stick over his shoulder, 'If it was not Sunday,' he said, 'I should cut a caper – cut a caper,' he said. Jenny heard him. And now he talks of going home where a sweet young lady, almost as beautiful as your ladyship, waits for him with a fortune of twenty thousand pounds. She couldn't marry a man, could she, madam, with both feet, as a body might say, in the grave? Nobody except the doctor and us dippers, knows the secrets of the spa. If we could talk – but there we are bound to secrecy, because ladies would not let the world know that they have had ailments – but if we could talk, you would be astonished. Tell her ladyship, Jenny, about the old gammer of ninety, while I attend to the company. Yes, sir, coming, sir."

And so she rattled on, talking all day long and never tired of inventing these stories. The people listened, laughed, affected disbelief, yet believed. They drank the waters, and put down their twopences, which went into a box kept for the doctor. What with the patients' guineas and the daily harvest of this box he, at least, was in a fair way of proving the truth of his own prophecy that everybody in Lynn would be enriched by the grand discovery.

CHAPTER IX

SENT TO THE SPA

At the outset, though the pump room was full every morning and the gardens and long room in the evening were well attended, the spa lacked animation. The music pleased, the singers pleased, the coloured lamps dangled in chains between the branches and pleased. Yet the company was dull; there was little noise of conversation, and no mirth or laughter; the family groups were not broken up; the people looked at each other and walked round and round in silence; after the first round or so, when they had seen all the dresses, the girls yawned and wanted to sit down.

The master of the ceremonies exerted himself in vain. He had hoped so much and promised so much that it was sad to see him standing in front of the orchestra and vainly endeavouring to find couples for the minuet. How should they dance a minuet when there were no leaders to begin? And where were the gentlemen? Most of them were at the tavern or the cockpit, drinking and cockfighting, and making bets. What was the use of calling a country dance when there were none to stand up except ladies and old men? Mr. Prappet, in a blue silk coat and embroidered waistcoat, hat under arm, and flourishing his legs as a fencing master flourishes his arms, fell into despondency. "I make no progress, Mr. Pentecrosse," he said. "I cannot begin with the beaux of the town; they are nautical or rustical, to tell the truth, and they are beneath the gentry of the county. If I begin with them none of the gentry will condescend either to dance with them or to follow them, and so the character of the assembly will be gone. We must obey the laws of society. We want rank, sir. We want a leader. We want two or three people of fashion, otherwise these county families, none of whom will yield precedence to any other, and will not endure that one should stand up before the other, will never unbend. They are jealous. Give me a leader – a nobleman – a baronet – a lady of quality – and you shall see how they will fall in. First, the nobility, according to rank; after them, the gentry; then the town degrees must be observed. But, in order to observe degrees, sir, we must have rank among us. At present we are a mob. An assembly in the polite world should be like the English Constitution, which, Mr. Pentecrosse, consists of Lords and Commons – Ladies, and the wives and daughters of commoners."

To me it was amusing only to see the people in their fine dresses marching round and round while the music played, trailing their skirts on the floor, swinging their hoops, and handling their fans; for the lack of young men, talking to the clergy from the cathedrals and the colleges, and casting at each other glances of envy if one was better dressed, or of scorn when one was worse dressed than themselves.

"As for the men, Jack," said Captain Crowle, "I keep looking about me. I try the pump room in the morning, the ordinary at dinner, the taverns after dinner. My lad, there is not one among them all who is fit to be mated with our Molly. Gentlemen, are they? I like not the manner of these gentlemen. They are mostly young, but drink hard already. If their faces are red and swollen at twenty-five, what will they be at forty? My girl shall marry none of them. Nor shall she dance with them. She shall stay at home."

In fact, during the first week or two after the opening of the spa, Molly remained at home and was not seen in the long room or in the gardens.

The town was nearly full, many of the visitors having to put up with mean lodgings in the crazy old courts, of which there are so many in Lynn, when the first arrival from London took place. It was that of a clergyman named Benjamin Purdon, Artium Magister, formerly of Trinity College, Cambridge. He was a man of insignificant presence, his figure being small and thin, but finely dressed. His head was almost hidden by a full ecclesiastical wig. Apparently he was between forty and fifty years of age; he looked about him and surveyed the company with an air of superiority, as if he had

been a person of rank. He spoke with a loud, rather a high voice; his face was pale and his hands, which he displayed, were as white as any woman's, on one finger he wore a large ring with a stone on which were carved three graces, or Greek goddesses, standing in a row. To some the ring was a stumbling-block, as hardly in accordance with the profession of a divine. "Art," however, he was wont to say, "knows nothing of Eve's apple and its consequences. Art is outside religion;" and so forth. Fustian stuff, it seems to me, looking back; but at that time we were carried away by the authority of the man.

He came to us down the river by a tilt boat from Cambridge, and accepted, contentedly, quite a humble lodging, barely furnished with a chair and a flock bed. "Humility becomes a divine," he said, in a high, authoritative voice. "The room will serve. A coal fire and an open window will remove the mustiness. Who am I that I should demand the luxuries of Lucullus? The Cloth should daily offer an example. We must macerate the flesh." He was thin, but he certainly practised not maceration. "We must subdue the body. To him who meditates a hovel becomes a palace. There is an ordinary, you say, daily at the 'Crown' – At two shillings? For the better subjugation of the carnal appetite it should have been one and sixpence. Nevertheless, I have heard of the green goslings of Lynn. Perhaps I shall now be privileged to taste them. There were excellent ruffs and reeves when I was at college that came to the market-place from the fens in the May time. You have a Portuguese trade I am told – in wine, I hope, otherwise we are not likely to get anything fit for a gentleman to drink. It is, indeed, little that I take; were it not for my infirmities, I should take none. Your port, I hope, is matured. More sickness is caused by new wine than by any other cause. Give me wine of twenty years – but that is beyond hope in this place. If it is three, four, or five years old, I shall be fortunate beyond my expectation." He did not say all these fine things at once, or to one person; but by bits to his brother clergyman, the vicar of St. Margaret's; to Captain Crowle, to the mayor, to the landlady of the Crown Inn, to the ladies in the long room. "You see me as I am, a poor scholar, a humble minister of the church —*servus servorum*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.