

BARING-GOULD SABINE

ARMINELL, VOL. 2

Sabine Baring-Gould

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Sabine Baring-Gould

Arminell, Vol. 2 / A Social Romance

CHAPTER XIX

LITTLE JOHN NOBODY

Giles Inglett Saltren had promised his mother to say nothing to any one of what had been told him, but the temptation had come strongly upon him to tell Arminell that he was not the nobody she and others supposed, and he had succumbed in the temptation. He and the girl had interests in common, sympathies that drew them together, and he felt that it would be of extraordinary benefit to her, and a pleasure to himself, if, in that great house, where each was so solitary, they could meet without the barrier which had hitherto divided them and prevented the frank interchange of ideas and the communication of confidences. Later on in the evening, it is true, that he felt some twinges of conscience, but they were easily stilled.

Jingles had greatly felt his loneliness. He had been without a friend, without even a companion. He could not associate with those of his mother's class, for he was separated from them by his education, and he made no friends in the superior class, from the suspicion with which he regarded its members. He had made acquaintances at college, but he could not ask them to stay at Chillacot when he was at the park, nor invite them as guests to Orleigh; consequently, these acquaintanceships died natural deaths. Nevertheless, that natural craving which exists in all hearts to have a familiar friend, a person with whom to associate and open the soul, was strong in Jingles.

If the reader has travelled in a foreign country – let us say in Bohemia – and is ignorant of the tongue, Czech, he has felt the irksomeness of a *table d'hôte* at which he has sat, and of which he has partaken, without being able to join in the general conversation. He has felt embarrassed, has longed for the dinner to be over, that he might retire to his solitary chamber. Yet, when there, he wearies over his loneliness, and descends to the coffee-room, there to sip his *café noir*, and smoke, and pare his nails, and turn over a Czech newspaper, make up his accounts, then sip again, again turn over the paper, re-examine his nails, and recalculate his expenditure, in weariful iteration, and long for the time when he can call for his bill and leave. But, if some one at an adjoining table says, "Ach! zu Englitsch!" how he leaps to eager dialogue, how he takes over his coffee-cup and cognac to the stranger's table; how he longs to hug the barbarian, who professes to "speaque a littelle Englitsch." How he clings to him, forgives him his blunders, opens a thirsty ear to his jargon, forces on him champagne and cigars, forgets the clock, his nails, his notes, the bill and the train, in the delight of having met one with whom he can for a moment forget his isolation.

If this be so when meeting with a foreigner, how much more cordial is our encounter with a pleasant Englishman. We at once seek out links of connection, to establish the fact of our having mutual acquaintances.

So did the impulse come on Saltren and overpower him. There was a community of ideas between him and Arminell: and he was swept away by his desire to find a companion, into forgetfulness of the promise he had made to his mother.

That he was doing wrong in telling the girl a secret, about which he had no right to let a hint fall without her father's knowledge and consent could hardly be hid from his conscience, but he refused to listen, and excused himself on grounds satisfactory to his vanity. It was good for Arminell herself to know the relationship, that she might be able to lean on him without reserve. Giles Inglett Saltren had been very solitary in Orleigh. He had not, indeed, been debarred the use of his mother-tongue; but he had been unable to give utterance to his thoughts; and of what profit is the gift of speech to a man, if he

may not speak out what is on his mind? The young are possessed with eager desire to turn themselves inside out, and to show every one their internal organisation. A polypus has the same peculiarity. It becomes weary of exposing one surface to the tide, and so frankly and capriciously inverts itself, so that what was coat of stomach becomes external tissue, and the outer skin accommodates itself to the exercise of digestive functions. Young people do the same, and do it publicly, in society, in a drawing-room, in unsympathetic company. As we grow older we acquire reserve, and gradually withdraw our contents within ourselves, and never dream of allowing any other surface to become exposed to the general eye, but that furnished us by nature as our proper external envelope.

The young tutor had his own crude, indigested notions, a mind in ferment, and an inflamed and irritable internal tissue, and he naturally and eagerly embraced the only opportunity he had of inverting himself.

Then, again, a still mightier temptation operated on Jingles, the temptation which besets every man to assume the rôle of somebody, who has been condemned to play the part of nobody, when an opening is given.

There is a poem in Percy's Reliques, that represents the grievances of the common Englishman at the time of the Reformation, who dislikes the change that is going on about him, the introduction of novelties, the greed that masqueraded under the name of religion: and every verse ends with the burden, "But I am little John Nobody, and durst not speak."

Jingles had been unable to express his opinion, to appear to have any opinion at all; he had been in the house, at table, everywhere, a little John Nobody who durst not speak. Now the rôle of little John Nobody is a rôle distasteful to every one, especially to one who has a good opinion of himself. Imagine the emotions of an actor who has been doomed for years to be a walking gentleman, to whom has been suddenly offered the part of Hamlet. Would he not embrace the chance with avidity?

When Arminell approached Jingles with a not exactly, "Me speaque a littelle Englitsch!" but with the confession that she understood his mind, and was asking of life the same questions that troubled him, then he warmed to her and longed for a closer intercourse. When, moreover, he found that it was possible for him to establish a tie of a close and binding nature between them, it was more than his moral courage could resist to break the seal of silence and tell her who he was.

But Jingles had entered into no particulars, and Arminell could not rest with the half-knowledge she possessed. She could not ask him to tell her more, nor could he explain the circumstances. She could not endure to be kept in partial ignorance, and immediately after breakfast, on the following morning, she went to Chillacot to see Mrs. Saltren.

The captain's wife was greatly alarmed when she heard what was wanted. Arminell spoke coldly, distantly, haughtily. Mr. Giles Inglett Saltren, she said, had let drop some words that implied a relationship. She must know whether there were any foundations for the implication. Mrs. Saltren trembled, and made excuses, and attempted evasions; but Arminell was determined to know the facts, and she forced the woman to repeat to her the story she had told on the previous night.

"But, oh, miss! I named no names; and Giles never ought to have breathed a word about it. I will go down on my knees to you to beg you to say nothing to any one about this matter."

"Do you suppose it is a subject I am likely to discuss – to Mrs. Cribbage, for instance? That I will talk freely of an affair which compromises the honour of my father?"

"There is scarce any one knows about it."

"Except my father, yourself, and your son."

"And the captain; but, miss, I beg you to bear witness that I named no names."

"I want to know no more, none of the details," said Arminell, "I only trust they may all be rolled up and cast away into oblivion."

She returned to the park, went into the music-room and began to practise on the piano. She was able to do the mechanical work and think at the same time. She believed the story she had been

told, not so much because Marianne Saltren had related it, as because Jingles so confidently believed it. He would never have spoken to her on the matter had he harboured the slightest shadow of doubt.

But the story was one on which her mind must busy itself. She began unconsciously to play Agatha's song "Leise, leise," from "Der Freischütz," and as she played, two tears rolled down her cheeks.

She had always regarded her father with respect as a man of principle and strict notions of honour, though she did not consider him as a man of ability. Now he appeared to her in a light that showed him guilty of conduct unworthy of a gentleman, inexpressibly base and cowardly. His behaviour towards her own mother had been bad, for Arminell was satisfied that her mother would never have married Lord Lamerton had she been allowed to suspect that his character was stained with such an ugly blur.

"I am glad she died," said the girl with a sob, and then with a start she asked, "How was it that that woman was in the house with my mother? How could she bear it? No; my dearest mother knew nothing, had no suspicions, and it was generous of Mrs. Saltren to be so near, and never let her suspect what had been done to her."

She shook her head to shake out the conjectures that distressed her. It was a pity she did put these questions from her. Had she looked at them more closely she would have seen the incoherence in the story told her by Marianne. Then the same thought occurred to her which had presented itself to Jingles. Was it not possible that the marriage with the servant-maid had been a valid one, but that advantage had been taken of her ignorance to make her believe it was not, and so for Lord Lamerton to shake himself free from an encumbrance which had become irksome to him? but if this were the case, her own mother's marriage would be of questionable legality, and with it would go her own – Arminell's – legitimacy. A cold terror came over the girl at the thought. By all means Jingles must be induced to desist from investigating the matter and pressing his rights, if he had any. What a condition of affairs would ensue if the marriage of Marianne were a real one. Why the present Lady Lamerton would not be a proper wife, nor little Giles legitimate any more than herself.

Arminell was young, had no practical knowledge of the world, and her imagination had been fed by novels, not of the most wholesome quality. Such an incident, such a hideous entanglement involving so many was quite in accordance with romance, and the young are always expecting reality to take romantic lines, as the old are always mistrusting the romantic, as the garb of falsehood.

Arminell leaned her elbow on the music-stand, and her head in her palm. She felt faint and sick at the thought that had risen up in her.

At that precise moment Giles Inglett Saltren came into the room. He had heard the sound of the piano, and he knew that the girl spent an hour every morning in the music-room practising. She looked up, recovered her distracted thoughts, and resumed her mechanical play on the keys.

"Do you want to speak to me?" she asked, as he took his place beside the grand piano, ready to turn over the leaves of her exercises.

"Yes; what are you playing?"

"I am practising, not playing anything of importance, anything consecutive, a reverie; but one must hack every day, without it all execution goes out of the fingers. It is a pity that hacking with the tongue so many hours a day does not conduce to brilliancy of conversation."

"I should like a few words with you," said the tutor, "if you can spare me the time. I wish to express my regret for having spoken last night. I ought not to have revealed the secret of my birth; but it was burning in my heart, and flamed out at my mouth."

Arminell continued playing and said nothing.

"We must let the matter drop," he said in a low tone, "I will not presume again, if you will endeavour to forget."

"How can I forget? As well dash vitriol in my eyes, and say don't allow them to smart."

He saw that there were tears on her face.

“I am sincerely sorry,” he said, “I am heartily penitent. I see I have hurt you. My words were vitriol, and your eyes have overflowed.”

“Doubly do you hurt me now – in noticing what should have been left unobserved. I am crying over my dead respect for my father. I loved him in my own queer and wayward fashion, though there was little we had in common. I believed him to be upright and good, and now my faith is gone to pieces.”

“We must make allowances,” said Jingles. “This happened long ago – I am twenty-one – and Lord Lamerton was at the time young, under thirty. In token of his regret he has done much for me.”

“I have been accustomed,” said Arminell, “to look up to my father, and I have been full of a certain family pride – not pride in rank and wealth and all that sort of thing, but pride in the honour and integrity which I believed had been ours always; and now I find – ” she sobbed; she could not finish her sentence.

“I am very sorry. I shall ever reproach myself,” was the impotent remark of Jingles, but he did feel a sting of self-reproach. He had acted cruelly to kill a girl’s trust in her father.

“It cannot be helped,” she said, “it is done. Well, I know all, my eyes are opened, I accept you as my half-brother. When my father married again he sacrificed half his fatherhood in me, or so I felt it; and now of that half that remained something has been taken from me. Very little of my dear papa remains now – only a shadow.”

“And I,” said Jingles, “I am even in a worse plight than you, for I can not love a father who has so wronged my mother.” After a long pause, during which he held and fluttered a page of Arminell’s music, he added, “What a forlorn condition mine is. I am here by sufferance who ought to be here by right. Every one dins in my ears the great kindness which I have had shown me by his lordship, and yet I know that I am not receiving more than a fraction of the portion that should be mine. Her ladyship patronises me, Giles regards me as a hired tutor, the servants are barely civil, the guests either ignore me or cast gibes, as – ” he checked himself; he was again recurring to the half-shaved French poodle, when in at the door, or French window that led from the terrace, came Lord Lamerton, fresh and cheery.

“Saltren,” he said, “you here! I am glad of that. The man I want; do me a favour, my good fellow, and be the go-between ’twixt your father and me. Arminell, have you seen Giles this morning? He is better, dear rascal, and quite bright. What, doing drill on the keys? Saltren, I hope you will do your utmost endeavour with your father about his house. The company are in a quandary about it. We – I am a director, you know – we will give him a tip-top price, in fact, more than twice its value. The place is really not a pleasant one, and well deserves its chilly name. ’Pon my word I believe it was the cold and damp situation that sowed in you the seeds of pulmonary disease. I sent Macduff down, but he could effect nothing. I believe, on my very soul, that there is no man on earth but yourself who can move your father. He is a stubborn man, eh, Saltren? I would go myself and see him about it, but Macduff tells me your father is ruffled about the manganese. It is the deuce of a pity, but I cannot help myself. I wish he could be persuaded to sell. Why, Saltren, between you, me and the piano, I believe if I chose to dispute your father’s right to Chillacot I could beat him. Macduff says that there has been some sort of acknowledgment made every year, there was no lease of any sort, and I am the lord of the manor – but I won’t do that. I won’t be harsh or seem so, not only because I have the utmost respect for the captain, such a good and thoroughly upright man, but above all, because he is your father, my boy. However, my dear Saltren, something must be done, we are in a fix. The company will be put to the greatest possible inconvenience and much expense that might be avoided, if it has to carry the line below. Your father – ”

“Seven,” muttered Jingles.

“I beg your pardon?” asked my lord, raising his eyebrows.

“Nothing, my lord,” answered the young man. “I had no intention to interrupt. I was counting.”

“Counting – oh, whilst my daughter played. She has given over strumming, so give over counting, please. You will do what I ask, will you not?”

“I will see him, my lord, as it is your pleasure.”

“Use all your powers of persuasion. Tell him that I want to cut a new road, to find employment for the men; and if the station be at Chillacot, the road must go there. If your father – ”

“Eight,” whispered Jingles as an aside, and looked at Arminell.

“If your father is reasonable, we will begin at once. You see how we are situated. I can understand his reluctance to quit a house where he was born, and for which he has done so much; but then, consider the price offered for it. This offer comes in most fitly now that the mine is abandoned. Your father – ”

Again the tutor looked at Arminell.

“Your father must leave, as there is no work for him of the kind he is accustomed to, and a nice little capital would be very serviceable.”

“I will go, my lord, at once,” said Jingles.

“Thank you, Saltren, thank you. I have to be off to catch the 11.28 train.”

He went out of the room through the window by which he had entered.

“Did you hear?” asked the tutor, partly in scorn, partly in pain. “Nine times at the least did he speak of the manganese captain as my father, although he knew perfectly all the while that I am not his son. Did you notice the pointed way in which he spoke? It was as though he suspected that I had got wind of the truth, and would emphatically let me understand that he would never, never acknowledge it, emphatically bid me consider the mining captain as my father. But” – his face darkened with anger – “I am by no means assured that we know the whole truth.”

Arminell shuddered. Jingles looked intently at her, and saw that she divined his thoughts.

“No,” said he calmly: “never fear that I will have the story published to the world. It would bring disgrace on too many persons. It would make my mother’s position now as the wife of Captain Saltren an equivocal one. To disclose the truth, whatever complexion the truth might be found to wear when examined, would cause incalculable misery. What I shall do, whither I shall turn, I cannot yet tell.”

Arminell also had noticed the manner in which Lord Lamerton had spoken of the captain to the tutor as his father, and she also, with her preconceptions, thought it was pointedly so done.

“No,” said Jingles. “I shall have to leave this house, and I shall let his lordship know that I am not as blind as he would wish me to be. But what I shall do is as yet undetermined. I shall ask you to help me to come to a decision.”

CHAPTER XX

HE BECOMES SOMEBODY

Arminell kept to herself that day. At lunch she had not much to say to her step-mother, and Lord Lamerton was out. Giles came down, and his mother talked to him and to the tutor, and seemed not to observe Arminell's silence.

The girl was unhappy. She had given way to a momentary weakness, or wave of regret at the thought of her father's unworthiness, but the feeling predominating in her mind was indignation that her mother should have been left unacquainted with the previous conduct of my lord. She repeated to herself, "Most certainly she never knew it, or she would never have married him, even if she knew that ceremony was worthless that had been performed over him and Marianne."

Arminell had idealised her mother. The girl had an affectionate heart, but she concentrated her affection on the memory of her mother. Ever since her father's re-marriage there had brooded over her a sense of wrong done to the memory of the mother. How could my lord, after having loved such a woman, take to himself his present wife?

Arminell was by no means easy in mind about Jingles' assurance that he would not speak. He had given the same assurance as Mrs. Saltren had told her, to his mother, and had broken his promise. She resolved to exert her powers of persuasion on him to deepen this determination to be silent.

It was unfortunate that Lord Lamerton had not been able to cultivate more freely his daughter's society, but a nobleman has ten thousand calls on his time; he is prevented from living that close life of familiar association with his children which is the privilege of those in an inferior station. He considered, and he was right in considering, that his country, his order, and his county had claims on him which must not be put aside. He was a poor orator indeed, and rarely spoke in the House, but he conscientiously voted with his party. In town he and Lady Lamerton saw a good deal of society, not because they cared particularly for it, but because they considered it a duty to entertain and keep up relations with friends and connexions. In the country Lord Lamerton, as Arminell contemptuously said, was kept on the gallop between school prize-givings, petty sessional meetings, quarter session, political and charitable institutions. He sat on boards, occupied chairs wherever there were boards and chairs placed for him. Moreover, at Orleigh, after the London season, the house was full of acquaintances, who came to shoot, hunt, drive, and be amused; and, with a house full of guests, Lord Lamerton had not opportunity for cultivating the society of his daughter. But he was a man full of kindness, and he made many attempts to gain her affection, and persuade her to be to him the close companion that a daughter often is to a father. These attempts had failed, chiefly because of the resentment she bore him for having married again. Had he remained a widower, and sought to associate her with him in his pursuits, it might have been otherwise; but, as he had looked elsewhere for a companion, she closed her heart in reserve against him.

Lord Lamerton was fond of hunting, and in this Arminell did not accord with him. Her Girton governess had scoffed at those who had nothing better to do or think of than the pursuit, over hedge and gate, of a creature hardly bigger than a cat; and the sneer had taken effect on the girl, and made her regard her father, because of his hunting, as somewhat grotesque and deficient in moral dignity. She could not accompany him when shooting, but she was out of sympathy with sport of this kind also. Her governess had spoken of those lords of creation who concentrated their vast intellects on the killing of a jack-snipe, and this remark stuck in her, as did the other about fox-hunting. She regarded sportsmen as fools, more or less. I once knew a man who had a mole with three white hairs growing out of it, on his nose; and, when I talked with him, one hemisphere of my brain was engaged in considering the mole, and asking how it came there – whether it had grown as he grew, or whether it had been of the same size when he was born, and whether his body had expanded and

elongated about it; why he did not disguise it with chalk or violet powder, or else darken the three white hairs with antimony; whether he had consulted a surgeon concerning its removal, and, if so, why the surgeon had not removed it? Was it the cork plugging an artery, so that the man would bleed to death were it to be cut away? Why he, of all men, was afflicted with this mole – was it hereditary? And if so, on which side did it come to him, on the paternal or maternal? And if it were a hereditary mole, whether it would be possible, by judicious crossing, to reduce and finally extirpate it? Then again, whether after long disappearance, in say three generations, the mole would declare itself in the fourth? what the mole had to do with the doctrine of evolution? whether the Anthropological Society had considered this mole? and other questions. Afterwards I did not know whether this man had blonde hair or swarthy, eyes brown or blue, an intellectual forehead or one retreating, nose aquiline, *rétroussé*, or sausage. Neither could I recall anything about his conversation – I could think of him only as the Man with the mole, or, to be more exact, as the Mole with the man.

Now, it sometimes happens that we see a blemish in a man's character, and that blemish entirely engrosses our attention, so that we cannot conceive of the man other than as the man with the blemish. He may have good, counterbalancing qualities, but of these we know nothing, we take no account, we see only the moral mole.

Moreover, this habit of seeing moles, and marking nothing but moles grows on us. I quite remember how that for a twelvemonth after I had talked with my gentleman with the mole, I examined the nose of every one I met, exploring it for moles, and expecting to find them hid under disguises, powdered or patched over; or to discover traces of the amputation of moles, suspicious, tell-tale scars, or else tokens that latent moles were on the eve of eruption, moles that had been hidden deep in the system, which were unsuspected by nearest and dearest, gradually, stealthily, inexorably working into publicity; and I began to calculate how long it would be before the suspected mole came to light. And I became radically convinced that all men had moles in their constitution – that is, all men but myself – and that all men therefore were to be mistrusted, and held at arms' length, lest their moles should communicate themselves to us, after the manner of warts.

Arminell had not indeed reached this stage, but she was in that condition in which she saw the faults of her father and step-mother, and the faults only. Unable to forgive him his second marriage, she was predisposed to judge unfairly and harshly all he did, and all he left undone.

That one special reason for his re-marriage was his desire to provide her with a step-mother, one who could guide and advise her, and counteract some of the mischief done by injudicious governesses, never for a moment occurred to her, and yet this had been the predominant motive in the mind of Lord Lamerton when he chose Lady Julia Chesterton. She was a woman spoken of as clever and well-read, and kind-hearted. Clever, well-read, and kind-hearted he had found her, and yet deficient in the very quality necessary for commanding Arminell's respect, and that was decision. Lady Julia, whatever Arminell might think, was an able woman, but her promiscuous reading had sapped the foundations of all independence of mind that she ever possessed, and had acted on her brain, as acids on osseous matter – reducing it to jelly. She was ever building with head, and hands, and heart, an indefatigable builder, but always on no foundations at all, because she argued that solid rock was no where discoverable, and sand was liable to shift, therefore she would erect her structures in the air, on nothing.

Lord Lamerton had been disappointed at the result, but had no idea as to the cause of failure. And now, upon a mind in antagonism, this disclosure made by Mrs. Saltren came, and brought Arminell's antagonism to a climax.

The tears which young Saltren had surprised were the sole tribute of her filial affection. When they were dried only hostility remained.

Some while ago, Messrs. Pears published an advertisement of their soap, on which were a green spot and another red, and the curious were invited to study one spot at a time, and then look at a blank wall. When this was done, he who had contemplated the red spot, saw a green disc dance before his

eyes; but if, on the other hand, he had looked long on the green spot, he saw before him only a red ball. It is so with a good many people; and it was so with Arminell. Whenever Lord or Lady Lamerton wished her to see this or that, to take such a view of some particular matter, she invariably saw the complimentary colour, that is the reverse of what she was desired to see.

I, who write this, am ashamed to confess that I do the same, and I am not sure that, occasionally, you, my dear reader, may also do the same – now and then, of course, only when the wind is easterly, and the liver is out of order, or the next morning after a ball. I know that when I have read the *Saturday Review*, I rise from the perusal believing in Mr. Gladstone and ready to follow him to the bottom of the Red Sea, or wherever else he desires to lead us; and that when I have read the *Pall-Mall Gazette*, I am eager to drive my wife and daughters into the Primrose League. Also, I am quite sure that when some person has been warmly lauded in your hearing, dear reader, you take a low view of that individual, and when another has been much disparaged, you take up the cudgels to defend him, though he or she is an absolute stranger to you, and one of whom you have never heard before. I never recommend a watering-place to my friend, sure, if he goes there, he will call it a beastly hole, or dissuade him from buying a horse, by detailing its faults, so certain am I that my words will make him purchase the brute.

In the afternoon of the same day, as the sun was warm, and the air was soft, Saltren took little Giles upon the terrace, and Arminell, who saw them from her window, descended, and joined them there. She was uneasy and impatient to know what the tutor intended doing. Would he come to a full understanding with Lord Lamerton, and would my lord agree to provide for him, if he would depart and keep the secret of his birth undisclosed? Or would Jingles in London discover sufficient to make him suspect that his mother's marriage was valid, and be carried away by ambition to establish his legitimacy at all costs to others?

At the same moment that Arminell came out on the terrace, the rector's wife, Mrs. Cribbage, drove up in her wickerwork pony-carriage, and entered the house to pay a visit to Lady Lamerton.

Giles ran off to see his rabbits, and Jingles was left alone walking with Arminell.

"I suppose you are not burdening Giles with many lessons, now that he is convalescent?" said the girl.

"No, her ladyship does not wish him to be pressed. He is still heavy in his head with cold."

"Well," said Arminell, "I did not come here to talk about Giles, so we will dismiss him from our conversation. I have been considering this miserable matter, and I want to know what action you purpose taking on it."

"I also," said the tutor, "have been revolving the matter in my head, and I have resolved to leave Orleigh as soon as possible, and to ask my uncle, Mr. James Welsh, my mother's brother, to assist me to enter a literary career."

"Literary career! in what branch?"

"I intend to write for the press, I mean for the papers. Mr. Welsh lives by his profession, and I will do the same."

"That must be more interesting than teaching little boys Mensa – mensæ, Dominus – domini."

"The press is the sceptre that now rules the world, and I will wield it."

"Oh, how I envy you!" said Arminell. "You are about to do something, something worth the labour, something the thought of which kindles ambition. You will escape out of this wearisome round of hum-drum into the world of heroic action. Here is my lord spending his life in petty duties as he regards them and has no result at the end to show; my lady thinking, planning, executing, and also with no result appearing; and I, wasting my time practising at the piano, running my voice over scales, doing a little sketching, reading odds and ends, picking flowers – and nothing can come of it all. We are made for more serious work."

"I believe," said Jingles, "that the writer of leaders exercises more power, because he appeals to a wider circle, than even the member of Parliament. One out of every twenty who takes up a paper,

reads the speeches, but every one reads the leading articles. I believe that we stand at the beginning of a great social revolution, not in England only, but throughout the civilized world, and I have long desired to take part in it, I mean in directing it. I do not hold the extreme opinions of some, but I have my opinions, no, that is not the word, convictions, bred in me by my perception of the inequalities, injustices, and unrealities of life as it is now organised.”

“And you will work for your uncle?”

“I do not altogether hold with him,” said Jingles. “He takes too commercial an aspect of the mission imposed on a man with his power and faculties for reaching the ear of the people.”

“Do you intend to live with him?”

“I cannot tell. I have decided on nothing as to the particulars. I have sketched out the broad features of my future career.”

“And,” – Arminell’s voice faltered – “my father?”

“I will write to him after I am in town, informing him that I know all, and that, therefore, it was not possible for me, with self-respect, to remain in his house.”

Arminell looked down on the gravel.

“You will not go into this matter, not have my mother’s name brought in question?”

“I will do nothing that can cause you a moment’s pain,” answered Jingles patronisingly.

“I shall be very solitary,” she said. “More so than before. With you I can talk about matters of real interest, matters above the twaddle of common talk – Yes?”

This was addressed to the footman who appeared on the terrace and approached.

“What is it, Matthews?”

“My lady says, miss, that she will be glad if you could make it convenient to step into the parlour.”

“There,” said Arminell, when Matthews had withdrawn. “So she stands between me and the light at all times. I shall be back directly. She wants me about the choice of some new patterns for covering the sofas and chairs, I dare say. Here comes Giles from his rabbits.”

Arminell walked slowly to the drawing-room, with a frown of vexation on her brow. She never responded with alacrity to her step-mother’s calls.

Mrs. Cribbage, the rector’s wife, saw at once that Arminell was in a bad humour, as she entered the room.

“I am so sorry to interrupt you,” she said. “It was my doing. Lady Lamerton and I were speaking about old Samuel Ceely, and I have just heard how you have interested yourself about him.”

“I sent to ask you to come, dear,” said Lady Lamerton in her sweet, gentle tones, “because Mrs. Cribbage has been telling me about the man. He is unobjectionable now, but he was a bit of a rake once.”

“He was a gamekeeper to the late Lord Lamerton, and to the dowager,” put in Mrs. Cribbage, “and was dismissed. I could find out all the particulars. I believe he sold the game, and besides, was esteemed not to have the best moral character. However, I know no particulars. I will now make a duty of enquiring, and finding them out. Of late years – except for snaring rabbits and laying night-lines – I believe he has been inoffensive.”

“We are all miserable sinners,” said Arminell, “we were told so on Sunday – ”

“You were not at church on Sunday,” interrupted Mrs. Cribbage.

“And,” continued Arminell, “it is really satisfactory to know that poor Ceely is not an exception to that all-embracing rule, and that he has not the moral perfection which would make up for his physical short-comings.”

Arminell could not endure the rector’s wife, and took no pains to disguise her feelings. Lady Lamerton likewise disliked her, but was too sweet and ladylike to show it.

Mrs. Cribbage was an indefatigable parish visitor. She worked the parish with the most conscientious ardour, considering a week lost unless she had visited every house in it and had

dispensed a few pious scriptural remarks, and picked up a pinch of gossip in each. She knew everything about every one in the place, and retailed what she knew, especially if it were too unpleasant to retain. She did not give out much scandal in the cottages, but she pecked here and there after grains of information, and swallowed what she found. And the people, well aware of her liking, with that courtesy and readiness to oblige which characterises the English lower orders, brought out and strewed before her all the nasty, and ill-natured, and suspicious scraps of information they had hoarded in their houses. Mrs. Cribbage carried away whatever she learned, and communicated it to her acquaintances in a circle superior to that where she gathered it, to the Macduffs, to the wives of the neighbouring parsons, to the curate, with caution to Lady Lamerton. She acted as a turbine wheel that forces water up from a low level to houses on a height. She thus impelled a current of tittle-tattle from the deep places of society to those who lived above; but in this particular she differed from the turbine, that forces up clean water, whereas, what Mrs. Cribbage pumped up was usually the reverse.

Mrs. Cribbage was nettled by Arminell's uncourteous tone, and said: "What charming weather we have been having. I hope, Miss Inglett, that you enjoyed your Sunday morning walk?"

"It was as delightful as the weather," answered Arminell, well aware that there were claws in the velvet paw that stroked her. "Would you wish to know where I went?"

"O, my dear Miss Inglett! I know."

Then Mrs. Cribbage left, and when she was gone, Lady Lamerton said gently, "You were too curt with that woman, dear. You should never forget your manners, never be rude to a visitor in your own house."

"I am not an adept at concealment, as are others."

"The best screen against such a person is politeness."

"She is like a snail, with eyes that she stretches forth to all parts of the parish. I hate her."

"Arminell, your father has been putting prickly wire about on fences where cattle or pigs force their way. The beasts scratch themselves against the spikes, and after one or two experiences, learn to keep within bounds, and lose the desire to transgress. The Mrs. Cribbages – and there are yards of them – are the spiky wires of society, hedging us about, and keeping us in our proper places, odious in themselves, but useful, and a protection to us against ourselves."

"Barbed or unbarbed, I would break through them."

"No, my dear, you would only tear yourself to pieces on them, without hurting them; they are galvanised, plated, incapable of feeling, but they can inflict, and it is their mission to inflict an incredible amount of pain. You have already committed an indiscretion, and the crooked spike of the Cribbage tongue has caught you. Instead of going to church on Sunday morning, you walked in the road with Mr. Saltren. Of course, this was an act of mere thoughtlessness, but so is the first plunge of the calf against the prickly wire. Be more judicious, dear Armie, in the future. Where were you on Sunday afternoon?"

"Sitting with Giles and Mr. Saltren," said Arminell, furious with anger and resentment, "talking Sabbath talk. We discussed Noah's ark."

"And this morning he went into the music-room to you. Your father told me he found him there turning over the leaves of your music, and counting time for you; and now Mrs. Cribbage arrives and sees you walking with him on the terrace. My dear Armie, Jingles is a nobody, and these nobodies are just those whom it is unsafe to trifle with. They so speedily lose their balance, and presume."

"Mr. Saltren is not such a nobody as you suppose," answered Arminell. "He is a man of ability and independence of thought, he is one who will before long prove himself to be a somebody, indeed."

"My dear, he is a somebody already who has established himself as a nuisance."

CHAPTER XXI

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

So, now, even this was denied Arminell, to talk with a rational man, the only rational man in the house, about the subjects that interested her. She must keep Mrs. Cribbage before her eyes, ever walk in daily fear of Mrs. Cribbage; consider, before she did anything she liked, what would Mrs. Cribbage's construction on it be. The opinion of Mrs. Cribbage was to be what she must strive to conciliate. All principle must be subordinated to the judgment of Mrs. Cribbage, all independence sacrificed to her.

It is one of those pleasant delusions under which we live in England, that we have only God and the Queen to look up to and obey. As a matter of fact Mrs. Cribbage is absolute in heaven and earth, and the Divine law has no force, unless subscribed by Mrs. Cribbage. We fear God, because Mrs. Cribbage is His vicegerent, and has the triple crown and power of the keys, and in addition bears the sword. Resistance is powerless before the all-reaching power of Mrs. Cribbage. The Holy Vehm was nothing in its might to the judgment of Mrs. Cribbage. Her ministers are everywhere executing her orders, and none of the condemned dare to remonstrate, or attempt escape. We may utter with impunity treasonable words against the Queen, and profess agnosticism towards God, but no one disputes the existence of Mrs. Cribbage and would not lick the dust under her feet.

No one loves this autocrat, but there is not a Nihilist in her realm.

Lady Lamerton had likened her to American barbed wire, and those who have dealings with Mrs. Cribbage touch her as I have seen porters handle a roll of spiked wire deposited on the railway platform, with caution, and impatience to consign it to its proper destination. And yet, though every one dreads, and some positively loathe Mrs. Cribbage, yet all agree that it would not be possible to live without her. She keeps society together as a paperweight compacts all kinds of scraps of correspondence, and bills and notices.

As long as young girls are in the nursery, and subject to governesses, they look forward to their coming out as to a time of emancipation. They have not reckoned on Mrs. Cribbage, who, as with a whoop they burst out of the school-room, confronts them and blocks their road.

Arminell had done with her schooling, and properly ought to have come out that year, but the event had been postponed, as Lord Lamerton did not wish to go to town that year. She was free from governesses, and by no means inclined to lay her neck under the wheels of Mrs. Cribbage's car. When my lord and my lady had gone to town during the season, Arminell and Giles had not attended them. Giles was better in health in the country, with his pony, and his cricket, that is, with the tutor bowling to him, and the coachman's son acting as long-stop; accordingly, he was left at Orleigh to his great delight, and Arminell was left as well, with the governess, to continue her lessons, till she put off governesses and other childish things. Arminell had not therefore been brought much in contact with the world, and did not know the force of public opinion, she no more considered it than she considered the pressure of the atmosphere. According to our best authorities, we are subjected to the weight of fifteen pounds to each square-inch of surface, and a man of ordinary size sustains a pressure on him of some thirty-thousand pounds of air. I am a man of ordinary size, but I no more knew that I laboured under the burden of thirty-thousand pounds than I did that I was subjected to the pressure of about the same burden of Mrs. Cribbage who sits on my shoulders all day and squats on my chest all night, till I turned up the matter in an encyclopædia. We no more think about the pressure of public opinion, I say, than we do about the pressure of the atmosphere. We make allowance for it, in all we undertake.

If we ascend great heights we suffer because we are no longer subjected to the pressure; our noses bleed, our breath comes short; and if, by any chance, we get out of the region where public

opinion weighs, we become alarmed, uneasy, gasp, and cry out to be brought back under its incubus once more.

When Arminell had left the room, and closed the door behind her, she stood for a minute, resting the fingers of her left hand on the lock.

Should she obey her step-mother or defy her? She had promised young Saltren to return to the terrace. She wanted to have further talk with him. Why should she submit to the dictation of Lady Lamerton who was influenced by the hints of that detestable Mrs. Cribbage? If Lady Lamerton were allowed her own way in small matters, she would presume to dictate in those which were large, and Arminell would be allowed no will of her own. In her heart, the girl admitted that her step-mother had reason to reproach her. If Jingles were only the tutor, and the son of the mining captain, he was, as my lady said, a nobody, and it was unbecoming for her to frequent his society. Indeed, it was hardly decorous for her to be so much with him, were he any thing else but what she knew him to be, her brother. The possession of the knowledge of their relationship altered the aspect of her conduct radically, and justified it. Lady Lamerton, in her ignorance, interfered, and might be excused interfering, but she, Arminell, being better informed, was at liberty to act differently from what my lady advised. The young man was her brother, and what more delightful intercourse than that which subsists between brother and sister, when like-minded? There had taken place no open rupture between her ladyship and Arminell as yet; but it was inevitable that one would come, and that shortly; perhaps, the girl argued, the sooner the better, that her step-mother might be made clearly to understand that she – Arminell, stood on her independence.

The girl let go the handle of the drawing-room door, and with beating heart and heaving bosom, went deliberately out on the terrace and resumed her place at the side of Jingles.

“I have come,” she said, “as I undertook. My lady has read me a lecture.”

“About what?”

“About barbed wire, about Mrs. Cribbage. That creature saw me walking with you, and remonstrated with mamma, I mean my step-mother, and my lady retailed the remonstrance, as in duty bound; I am forsooth to be placed under Mrs. Cribbage, to have my feet strapped, compressed and distorted, like those of a Chinese lady, till I am unable to walk alone, and must lean on the shoulders of the Cribbage and my lady. This sort of thing is intolerable to me. Oh, that I were a man, that I might run away, as you are going to do, and stamp, and stride, and dance, and use every muscle in my feet freely. I detest this strapping and pinching and crippling.”

“I have felt the same,” said the young man. “And it has become unendurable to me. One must either submit or break away. The process must end in irremediable distortion, and fatal deprivation of the power of walking independently. Your whole future, your character for good or evil, depends on your conduct now. If you fall back in your chair unable to resist – ”

“No, I will kick and kick, I will not be disabled from walking.”

“If you make a brief attempt to resist, and do not maintain a stubborn and determined resistance, you will be cramped and crippled for life. As you put it, the whole social system of the upper classes is Chinese bandaging of the feet; not only so, but it is Indian flattening of the skull. I have felt, and so have you, that in this house our heads are strapped between boards to give them the requisite shape, and our brains to be not allowed to exceed the requisite measure.”

“What can I do? I have no one but yourself to advise me.”

“It will be impossible for you to escape the influences brought to bear on you, if you remain here; the Cribbages, great and small, will lie in wait till you are napping and then fall on you and bind you, and apply the laces to your feet, and the boards to your head.”

“But, whither could I go?” Arminell asked. She thought for a moment, and then said, “If I went to my Aunt Hermione, it would be going from beneath the shower under the shoot. There never was a more formal, society-laced creature in the whole world than my aunt, Lady Hermione

Flathead. Everything in her house, her talk, her manners, her mind, her piety, everything about her is conventional.”

Lady Lamerton approached, with little spots of colour in her cheeks, holding a parasol.

“My dear Arminell,” she said, “how can you be so inconsiderate as to come out without a sunshade?”

“You see,” said Arminell, turning contemptuously away and addressing the tutor; “everything is to order. I may not even take two steps without a parasol, in fine weather; and in bad, without an umbrella. The hand must never be free.”

“I think, Mr. Saltren,” said Lady Lamerton, “that it would be well if Giles went indoors, and, now that he is better, learnt a little Latin.”

“As your ladyship desires it, certainly,” answered the tutor.

“I am so glad, my dear,” said Lady Lamerton, “that you have waited for me on the terrace. I am sorry to have detained you one minute, but I was looking out the address of those Straceys. I will take your arm and we will look at the pansies.”

“Step-mothers, the Germans call them,” said Arminell. “I do not admire pansies.”

“We call them pansies, from *pensée*, dear, which means thought, kind thought, and forethought, which possibly, though not always acknowledged, is to be found in step-mothers.”

Arminell tossed her head.

“The homely name for these same flowers,” continued Lady Lamerton, “is hearts-ease, and I’m sure it is a misnomer, if hearts-ease be the equivalent for step-mother, especially when she has to do with a wayward step-daughter.”

“I think that step-mothers would find most hearts-ease, if they would turn their activity away from their step-daughters, and leave them alone.”

“My conscience will not suffer me to do this,” answered Lady Lamerton without losing her temper. “You may not acknowledge my authority, and you may hold cheap my intellectual powers and acquirements, but, after all, Armie, I *am* in authority, and I do not think I am quite a fool. I can, and I must, warn you against dashing yourself against the barbed wire. My dear, if we would listen to others, we would save ourselves many a tear and bitter experience. I love you too well, and your dear father too well, to leave you uncautioned when I see you doing what is foolish and dangerous.”

“But do you not know that experience is the one thing that must be bought, and cannot be accepted as a gift?”

“I beg your pardon. Our whole system of social culture is built upon experience accepted and not bought. It is not the Catholics alone who hold by tradition, we all do it, or are barbarians. Progress without it is impracticable. We start from the accumulated experience of the past, handed on to us by the traditions of our fathers. If everyone began by rejecting the acquisitions of the past, advance would be limited to the term of man’s natural life, for everyone would begin from the beginning; whereas, each generation now starts where the last generation left off. It is like the hill of Hissarlik where there are cities superposed the one on the other, and each is an advance culturally and artistically on that below – above the Greek Ilium, below the Homeric Troy, under that the primeval hovel of the flint-chipper.”

“Each on the ruins of the other.”

“Each using up the material of the other, following the acquisitions of the earlier builders and pushing further on to structural perfection.”

“That may be true of material process,” said Arminell, “but, morally, it is not true. Besides, our forefathers made blunders. I have been speaking with Mr. Saltren about the Flatheads and the Chinese who compress the heads and double up the feet of children. But our ancestors were nearly as stupid. Look at the monument of the first Lord Lamerton in the church. See the swaddled babies represented on it, cross-gartered like Malvolio. Now we give freedom to our babies, let them stretch, and scramble, and sprawl. But you old ladies still treat us young girls as your great-grandmothers

treated their babies. You swaddle us, and keep us swaddled all our life long. No wonder we resent it. The babies got emancipated, and so will we. I have heard both papa and you say that when you were children you were not allowed to draw nearer the fire than the margin of the rug. Was there sense in that? Was the fire lighted to radiate its heat over an area circumscribed by the mat, and that the little prim mortals with blue noses and frosty fingers must shiver beyond the range of its warmth? We do not see it. We will step across the rug, and if we are cold, step inside the fender.”

“And set fire to your skirts?”

“We will go for warmth where it is to be found, and not keep aloof from it because of the vain traditions of the elders.”

Lady Lamerton sighed.

“Well, dear,” she said, “we will not argue the matter. To shift the subject, I hardly think it was showing much good feeling in you to come straight out here after I had expressed my wish that you would not. It was not what I may term – pretty.”

“I had promised Mr. Saltren to return to him and resume the thread of our interrupted conversation. Why did you send for me about old Ceely’s past history, as if I cared a straw for that?”

“I sent for you, Armie, because you were walking with the tutor, and Mrs. Cribbage had observed it. She told me, also, that you had been seen with him when you ought to have been at church.”

“Well?”

“It was injudicious. She also said that you had been observed walking in the avenue last night with a gentleman; but I was able to assure her that the gentleman was your father.”

“This espionage is insufferable,” interrupted Arminell.

“I allow it is unpleasant, but we must be careful to give no occasion for ill-natured remark.”

“I can not. I will not be swaddled and have my feet crippled, and my head compressed, and then like a Chinese lady ask to be helped about by you and Mrs. Cribbage.”

“Better that than by any one you may pick up.”

“I do not ask to be helped about by any one I may pick up. Besides, Mr. Saltren was not picked up by me, but by my father. He introduced him to the house, gave him to be the guide and companion of Giles, and therefore I cannot see why I may not cultivate his acquaintance, and, if I see fit, lean on him. I will not be swaddled, and passed about from arm to arm – baby eternal!”

CHAPTER XXII

TOO LATE

Lady Lamerton said no more to Arminell, but waited till the return of his lordship, before dinner, and spoke to him on the matter.

She was aware that any further exertion of authority would lead to no good. She was a kind woman who laboured to be on excellent terms with everybody and who had disciplined herself to the perpetual bearing of olive branches. She had done her utmost to gain Arminell's goodwill, but had gone the wrong way to work. She had made concession after concession, and this made her step-daughter regard her as wanting in spirit, and the grey foliage of Lady Lamerton's olive boughs had become weariful in the eyes of the girl.

If my lady had taken a firm course from the first and had held consistently to it, Arminell might have disliked her, but would not have despised her. It does not succeed to buy off barbarians. Moreover, Arminell misconstrued her step-mother's motives. She thought that my lady's peace pledges were sham, that she endeavoured to beguile her into confidence, in order that she might establish a despotic authority over her.

"I do not know what to do with Armie!" sighed Lady Lamerton. "We have had a passage of arms to-day and she has shaken her glove in my face. Another word from me, and she would have thrown it at my feet."

She said no more, as she was afraid of saying too much, and she waited for her husband to speak. But, as he offered no remark, but looked annoyed, she continued, "I am sorry to speak to you. I know that I am in fault. I ought to have won her heart and with it her cheerful respect, but I have not. It is now too late for me to alter my conduct. Arminell was a girl of sense when I came here, and it really seems disgraceful that at my age I should have been unable to win the child, or master her. But I have failed, and I acknowledge the failure frankly, without knowing what to suggest as a remedy to the mischief done. I accept all the blame you may be inclined to lay on me –"

Lord Lamerton went up to his wife, took her face between his hands and kissed her.

"Little woman, I lay no blame on you."

"Well, dear, then I do on myself. I told you last night how I accounted for it. One can look back and see one's faults, but looking forward one is still in ignorance what road to pursue. It really seems to me, Lamerton, that on life's way all the direction posts are painted so as to show us where we have diverged from the right way and not whither we are to go."

"Julia, I exercise as little control over Armie as yourself. It is a painful confession for a father to make, that he has not won the respect of his child – of his daughter, I mean; as for Giles – dear monkey –" his voice softened and had a slight shake in it.

"And I am sure," said Lady Lamerton, putting her arms round his neck, and drawing his fresh red cheek to her lips, "that there is nothing, nothing whatever in you to make her lack the proper regard."

"I will tell you what it is," said Lord Lamerton, "Armie is young and believes in heroes. We are both of us too ordinary in our ways, in our ideas, in our submission to the social laws, in our arm-in-arm plod along the road of duty, to satisfy her. She wants some one with great ideas to guide her; with high-flown sentiment; to such an one alone will she look up. She is young, this will wear off, and she will sober down and come to regard hum-drum life with respect."

"In the meantime much folly may be perpetrated," said Lady Lamerton sadly. "Do look how much has been spent in the restoration of Orleigh. You have undone all that your grandfather had done. He overlaid the stone with stucco, and knocked out the mullions of the windows for the insertion of sashes, and painted over drab all the oak that was not cut away. So are we in later years restoring

the mistakes made in ourselves, perhaps by our parents in our bringing up, but certainly, also, by our own folly and bad taste in youth. And well for us if there is still solid stone to be cleared of plaster, and rich old oak to be cleared of the paint that obscures it. What I dread is lest the iconoclastic spirit should be so strong in the girl that she may hack and tear down in her violent passion for change what can never be recovered and re-erected.”

“She is not without principle.”

“She mistakes her caprices for principles. Her own will is the ruling motive of all her actions, she has no external canon to which she regulates her actions and submits her will.”

“What caprice has she got now?”

“She has taken a violent fancy to the society of young Saltren.”

“Oh! he is harmless.”

“I am not so certain of that. He is morbid and discontented.”

“Discontented! About what? Faith – he must be hard to please then. Everything has been done for him that could be done.”

“Possibly for that reason he is discontented. Some men like to make their own fortunes, not to have them made for them. You have, in my opinion, done too much for the young fellow.”

“He was consumptive and would certainly have died, had I not sent him abroad.”

“Yes – but after that?”

“Then he was unfit for manual labour, and he was an intelligent lad, refined, and delicate still. So I had him educated.”

“Are you sure he is grateful for what you have done for him?”

Lord Lamerton shrugged his shoulders. “I never gave a thought to that. I suppose so.”

“I am not sure that he is. Look at children, they accept as their due everything given them, all care shown them, and pay no regard to the sacrifices made for them. There is no conscious gratitude in children. I should not be surprised if it were the same with young Saltren. I do not altogether trust him. There is something in him I do not like. He does his duty by Giles. He is respectful to you and me – and yet – I have no confidence in him.”

“Julia,” said Lord Lamerton with a laugh. “I know what it is, you mistrust him because he is not a gentleman by birth.”

“Not at all,” answered his wife, warmly. “Though I grant that there is a better guarantee for a man of birth conducting himself properly in a place of trust, because he has deposited such stakes. Even if he have not principle in himself, he will not act as if he had none, for fear of losing caste. Whereas one with no connections about him to hold him in check will only act aright if he have principle. But we have gone from our topic, which was, not Jingles, but Arminell. I want to speak about her, and about him only so far as he influences her for good or bad. I will tell you my cause of uneasiness.”

Then she related to her husband what she knew about the Sunday walk in the morning, and the Sunday talk in the afternoon, and the music-room meeting on the following morning.

“Oh!” said his lordship, “he only went there to turn over the pages of her music.”

“You see nothing in that?”

“Pon my soul, no.”

“Then I must tell you about her conduct this afternoon, when she disobeyed me in a marked, and – I am sorry to use the expression – offensive manner.”

“That I will not tolerate. I can not suffer her to be insolent to you.”

“For pity’s sake do not interfere. You will make matters worse. She will hate me for having informed you of what occurred. No – take some other course.”

“What course?”

“Will it not be well to get rid of Saltren? And till he has departed, let Arminell go to Lady Hermione Woodhead.”

Within parenthesis be it said that Woodhead was Aunt Hermione's real name, only in scorn, and to signify her contraction of mind, had Arminell called her Flathead, after the tribe of Indians which affects the compression of infants' skulls.

"I cannot dismiss him at a moment's notice, like a servant who has misconducted himself. I'll be bound it is not his fault – it is Armie's."

"Let Arminell go to her aunt's at once."

"By all means. I'll have a talk with Saltren."

"Not a word about Arminell to him."

"Of course not, Julia. Now, my dear, it is time for me to dress for dinner."

Dinner passed with restraint on all sides. Lord Lamerton was uncomfortable because he felt he must speak to Arminell, and must give his *congé* to the tutor. Arminell was in an irritable frame of mind, suspecting that something was brewing, and Lady Lamerton was uneasy because she saw that her husband was disturbed in his usually placid manner.

After dinner, Lord Lamerton said to his daughter as she was leaving the room, "Armie, dear, are you going into the avenue? If so, I shall be glad of your company, as I intend to go there with a cigar presently."

"If you wish it, papa; but – Mrs. Cribbage heard that you and I had been walking there last night, and it meets with her disapproval. May James first run to the rectory with our compliments and ask Mrs. Cribbage's kind permission?"

She looked, as she spoke, at her step-mother, and there was defiance in her eye.

"Nonsense, dear," said her father. "I shall be out there in ten minutes. Will you have a whitewash, Saltren, and then I will leave for my cigar? You are not much of a wine-drinker. I am glad, however, you are not a teetotaler like your father."

Again a reference to the captain. Jingles looked towards the door, and caught Arminell's eye as she went through. She also had heard the reference, and understood it, as did the tutor. Certainly his lordship was very determined to have the past buried, and to refuse all paternity in the young fellow.

"Very well," said the girl to herself, "I will let my father understand that I know more than he supposes. He has no right to shelve his responsibilities. If a man has done wrong, let him be manful, and bear the consequences. I would do so. I would be ashamed not to do so."

She set her teeth, and her step was firm. She threw a light shawl over her head and shoulders and went into the avenue, where she paced with a rebellious, beating heart a few minutes alone, till her father joined her.

"I know, papa, what you want; or rather what you have been driven to. My lady has been peaching of me, and has constituted you her executioner."

"Arminell, I dislike this tone. You forget that courtesy which is due to a father."

"Exacted of a father," corrected the girl.

"And due to him as a father," said Lord Lamerton, gravely. His cigar was out. He struck a fusee and lighted it again. His hand was not steady, Arminell looked in his face, illumined by the fusee, and her heart relented. That was a good, kind face, a guileless face, very honest, and she could see by the flare of the match that it was troubled. But her perverse mood gained the upper hand again in a moment. She possessed the feminine instinct in dealing with men, when threatened, to attack, not wait to be attacked.

"I do not think it fair, papa, that my lady should hide herself behind you, and thrust you forward, as besiegers attack a fortress, from behind a screen."

"You are utterly mistaken, Arminell, if you imagine that your mother – your step-mother – has intentions of attacking you. Her heart overflows with kindness towards you, the warmest kindness."

"Papa, when Vesuvius is in eruption, the villagers in proximity pray to heaven to divert into the sea, anywhere but towards them, the warm gush of incandescent lava."

“Arminell,” said her father, “you pain me inexpressibly. I suppose that it is inevitable that a daughter by a first wife should not agree thoroughly with her father’s second choice; but, ’pon my soul, I can see no occasion for you to take up arms against your step-mother, she has been too forbearing with you. She is the kindest, most considerate and conscientious of women.”

“You may spare me the enumeration of her good qualities, papa; I am sure she is a paragon in your eyes, and I would not disturb the happy conviction. I suppose marriage is much like the transfusion of blood practised by the *rénaissance* physicians. An injection of rabbit’s blood into the arm of a turbulent man made him sensible to fear, and one of lion’s blood into the arteries of a coward infused heroism into his soul. When there was an interchange of blood between two individuals they came to think alike, feel alike, and act alike; it is a happy condition. But as there has been no infusion of my lady’s blood into me – I think and feel and act quite differently from her.”

“We will leave her out of the question,” said Lord Lamerton, dropping his daughter’s arm which at first he had taken affectionately. “Confound it, my cigar is out again, the tobacco must be bad. I will not trouble to relight it.”

“By all means let us leave my lady out of the question,” said Arminell. “I suppose I am not to be court-martialed for having discussed Noah’s Ark on Sunday with the tutor. I assure you we did not question the universality of the Flood, we talked only of the packing of the animals in the Ark.”

“Was there any necessity for Mr. Saltren to come to you in the music-room?”

“No necessity whatever. He came for the pleasure of talking to me, not even to turn over my music leaves.”

“You must not forget, my dear, who he is.”

“I do not, I assure you, papa, it is precisely *that* which makes me take such an interest in him.”

“Well, my dear, I am glad of that; but you must not allow him to forget what is due to you. It will not do for you to encourage him. He is only a mining captain’s son.”

“Papa,” said Arminell, slowly and emphatically, “I know very well whose son he is.”

“Of course you do; all I say is, do not forget it. He is a nice fellow, has plenty of brains, and knows his place.”

“Yes, papa,” said Arminell, “he knows his place, and he knows how equivocal that place is. He is regarded as one thing, and he *is* another.”

“I daresay I made a mistake in bringing him here so near to his father.”

“So very near to his father, and yet so separated from him.”

“I suppose so,” said Lord Lamerton, “education does separate.”

“It separates so widely that those who are divided by it hardly regard each other as belonging to the same human family.”

“I daresay it is so; the miners cannot judge me fairly about the manganese, because we stand on different educational levels.”

“It is not only those beneath the line who misjudge those above; it is sometimes the superiors who misunderstand those below.”

“Very possibly; but, my dear, that lower class, with limited culture and narrow views, is nowadays the dominating class. It is, in fact, the privileged class, it pays no taxes, and yet elects our rulers; our class is politically swamped, we exist upon sufferance. Formerly the castle dominated the cottage, but now the cottages command the castle. We, the educated, and wealthy are maintained as parochial cows, to furnish the parishioners with milk, and when we run dry are cut up to be eaten, and our bones treated with sulphuric acid and given to the earth to dress it for mangel-wurzel.”

Arminell was vexed at the crafty way in which, according to her view, her father shifted ground, when she approached too nearly the delicate secret. She wondered whether she had spoken plainly enough to let him understand how much she knew. It was not her desire to come to plain words, she would spare him that humiliation. It would be quite enough, it would answer her purpose fully to let him understand that she knew the real facts as to the relationship in which she stood to the tutor.

“Papa,” said Arminell, “Giles Inglett Saltren strikes me as standing towards us much in the same relation as do those apocryphal books the names of which my lady was teaching the children on Sunday. He is not canonical, of questionable origin, and to be passed over.”

“I do not understand you, Armie.”

“I am sorry, papa, that I do not see my way to express my meaning unenigmatically.”

“Armie, I have been talking to mamma about your paying a visit to Aunt Hermione. You really ought to see the Academy this year, and, as mamma and I do not intend to go to town, it will be an opportunity for you.”

“Aunt Hermione!” – Arminell stood still. “I don’t want to go to her. Why should I go? I do not like her, and she detests me.”

“My dear, I wish it.”

“What? That I should see the Academy? I can take a day ticket, run up, race through Burlington House, and come home the same evening.”

“No, my dear, I wish you to stay a couple of months at least, with Hermione.”

“I see – you want to put me off, out of the way of the tutor, so as to have no more talk, no more confidences with him. That is my lady’s scheme. It is too late, papa, do you understand me? It is too late.”

“What do you mean?”

“What I say. This is locking the door after the horse is stolen. Send me away! It will not alter matters one scrap. As I said before, the precautions have come too late.”

CHAPTER XXIII
“FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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