ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

DEVEREUX — VOLUME 02

Edward Bulwer-Lytton

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Bulwer-Lytton E. G.

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Содержание

Edward Bulwer-Lytton
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BOOK II

CHAPTER I

THE HERO IN LONDON.—PLEASURE IS OFTEN THE SHORTEST, AS IT IS THE EARLIEST ROAD TO WISDOM, AND WE MAY SAY OF THE WORLD WHAT ZEAL-OF-THE-LAND-BUSY SAYS OF THE PIG-BOOTH, "WE ESCAPE SO MUCH OF THE OTHER VANITIES BY OUR EARLY ENTERING."

IT had, when I first went to town, just become the fashion for young men of fortune to keep house, and to give their bachelor establishments the importance hitherto reserved for the household of a Benedict.

Let the reader figure to himself a suite of apartments, magnificently furnished, in the vicinity of the court. An anteroom is crowded with divers persons, all messengers in the various negotiations of pleasure. There, a French valet,—that inestimable valet, Jean Desmarais,—sitting over a small fire, was watching the operations of a coffee-pot, and conversing, in a mutilated attempt at the language of our nation, though with the enviable fluency of his own, with the various loiterers who were beguiling the hours they were obliged to wait for an audience of the master himself, by laughing at the master's Gallic representative. There stood a tailor with his books of patterns just imported from Paris,—that modern Prometheus, who makes a man what he is! Next to him a tall, gaunt fellow, in a coat covered with tarnished lace, a night-cap wig, and a large whip in his hands, comes to vouch for the pedigree and excellence of the three horses he intends to dispose of, out of pure love and amity for the buyer. By the window stood a thin starveling poet, who, like the grammarian of Cos, might have put lead in his pockets to prevent being blown away, had he not, with a more paternal precaution, put so much in his works that he had left none to spare. Excellent trick of the times, when ten guineas can purchase every virtue under the sun, and when an author thinks to vindicate the sins of his book by proving the admirable qualities of the paragon to whom it is dedicated.[1] There with an air of supercilious contempt upon his smooth cheeks, a page, in purple and silver, sat upon the table, swinging his legs to and fro, and big with all the reflected importance of a /billet-doux/. There stood the pert haberdasher, with his box of silver-fringed gloves, and lace which Diana might have worn. At that time there was indeed no enemy to female chastity like the former article of man-millinery: the delicate whiteness of the glove, the starry splendour of the fringe, were irresistible, and the fair Adorna, in poor Lee's tragedy of "Caesar Borgia," is far from the only lady who has been killed by a pair of gloves.

Next to the haberdasher, dingy and dull of aspect, a book-hunter bent beneath the load of old works gathered from stall and shed, and about to be re-sold according to the price exacted from all literary gallants who affect to unite the fine gentleman with the profound scholar. A little girl, whose brazen face and voluble tongue betrayed the growth of her intellectual faculties, leaned against the wainscot, and repeated, in the anteroom, the tart repartees which her mistress (the most celebrated

[1] Thank Heaven, for the honour of literature, /nous avons change tout cela!—ED.

actress of the day) uttered on the stage; while a stout, sturdy, bull-headed gentleman, in a gray surtout and a black wig, mingled with the various voices of the motley group the gentle phrases of Hockley-in-the-Hole, from which place of polite merriment he came charged with a message of invitation. While such were the inmates of the anteroom, what picture shall we draw of the /salon/ and its occupant?

A table was covered with books, a couple of fencing foils, a woman's mask, and a profusion of letters; a scarlet cloak, richly laced, hung over, trailing on the ground. Upon a slab of marble lay a hat, looped with diamonds, a sword, and a lady's lute. Extended upon a sofa, loosely robed in a dressing-gown of black velvet, his shirt collar unbuttoned, his stockings ungartered, his own hair (undressed and released for a brief interval from the false locks universally worn) waving from his forehead in short yet dishevelled curls, his whole appearance stamped with the morning negligence which usually follows midnight dissipation, lay a young man of about nineteen years. His features were neither handsome nor ill-favoured, and his stature was small, slight, and somewhat insignificant, but not, perhaps, ill-formed either for active enterprise or for muscular effort. Such, reader, is the picture of the young prodigal who occupied the apartments I have described, and such (though somewhat flattered by partiality) is a portrait of Morton Devereux, six months after his arrival in town.

The door was suddenly thrown open with that unhesitating rudeness by which our friends think it necessary to signify the extent of their familiarity; and a young man of about eight-and-twenty, richly dressed, and of a countenance in which a dissipated /nonchalance/ and an aristocratic /hauteur/ seemed to struggle for mastery, abruptly entered.

"What! ho, my noble royster," cried he, flinging himself upon a chair, "still suffering from St. John's Burgundy! Fie, fie, upon your apprenticeship!—why, before I had served half your time, I could take my three bottles as easily as the sea took the good ship 'Revolution,' swallow them down with a gulp, and never show the least sign of them the next morning!"

"I really believe you, most magnanimous Tarleton. Providence gives to each of its creatures different favours,—to one wit, to the other a capacity for drinking. A thousand pities that they are never united!"

"So bitter, Count!—ah, what will ever cure you of sarcasm?"

"A wise man by conversation, or fools by satiety."

"Well, I dare say that is witty enough, but I never admire fine things of a morning. I like letting my faculties live till night in a deshabille; let us talk easily and sillily of the affairs of the day. / Imprimis/, will you stroll to the New Exchange? There is a black eye there that measures out ribbons, and my green ones long to flirt with it."

"With all my heart—and in return you shall accompany me to Master

Powell's puppet-show."

"You speak as wisely as Solomon himself in the puppet-show. I own that I love that sight: 'tis a pleasure to the littleness of human nature to see great things abased by mimicry; kings moved by bobbins, and the pomps of the earth personated by Punch."

"But how do you like sharing the mirth of the groundlings, the filthy plebeians, and letting them see how petty are those distinctions which you value so highly, by showing them how heartily you can laugh at such distinctions yourself? Allow, my superb Coriolanus, that one purchases pride by the loss of consistency."

"Ah, Devereux, you poison my enjoyment by the mere word 'plebeian'! Oh, what a beastly thing is a common person!—a shape of the trodden clay without any alloy; a compound of dirty clothes, bacon breaths, villanous smells, beggarly cowardice, and cattish ferocity. Pah, Devereux! rub civet on the very thought!"

"Yet they will laugh to-day at the same things you will, and consequently there would be a most flattering congeniality between you. Emotion, whether of ridicule, anger, or sorrow; whether raised at a puppet-show, a funeral, or a battle,—is your grandest of levellers. The man who would be always superior should be always apathetic."

"Oracular, as usual, Count,—but, hark, the clock gives tongue. One, by the Lord!—will you not dress?"

And I rose and dressed. We passed through the anteroom; my attendant assistants in the art of wasting money drew up in a row.

"Pardon me, gentlemen," said I ("gentlemen, indeed!" cried Tarleton), "for keeping you so long. Mr. Snivelship, your waistcoats are exquisite: favour me by conversing with my valet on the width of the lace for my liveries; he has my instructions. Mr. Jockelton, your horses shall be tried to-morrow at one. Ay, Mr. Rymer, I beg you a thousand pardons; I beseech you to forgive the ignorance of my rascals in suffering a gentleman of your merit to remain for a moment unattended to. I have read your ode; it is splendid,—the ease of Horace with the fire of Pindar; your Pegasus never touches the earth, and yet in his wildest excesses you curb him with equal grace and facility: I object, sir, only to your dedication; it is too flattering."

"By no means, my Lord Count, it fits you to a hair."

"Pardon me," interrupted I, "and allow me to transfer the honour to Lord Halifax; he loves men of merit; he loves also their dedications. I will mention it to him to-morrow: everything you say of me will suit him exactly. You will oblige me with a copy of your poem directly it is printed, and suffer me to pay your bookseller for it now, and through your friendly mediation; adieu!"

"Oh, Count, this is too generous."

"A letter for me, my pretty page? Ah! tell her ladyship I shall wait upon her commands at Powell's: time will move with a tortoise speed till I kiss her hands. Mr. Fribbleden, your gloves would fit the giants at Guildhall: my valet will furnish you with my exact size; you will see to the legitimate breadth of the fringe. My little beauty, you are from Mrs. Bracegirdle: the play /shall/ succeed; I have taken seven boxes; Mr. St. John promised his influence. Say, therefore, my Hebe, that the thing is certain, and let me kiss thee: thou hast dew on thy lip already. Mr. Thumpen, you are a fine fellow, and deserve to be encouraged; I will see that the next time your head is broken it shall be broken fairly: but I will not patronize the bear; consider that peremptory. What, Mr. Bookworm, again! I hope you have succeeded better this time: the old songs had an autumn fit upon them, and had lost the best part of their /leaves/; and Plato had mortgaged one half his "Republic," to pay, I suppose, the exorbitant sum you thought proper to set upon the other. As for Diogenes Laertius, and his philosophers—"

"Pish!" interrupted Tarleton; "are you going, by your theoretical treatises on philosophy, to make me learn the practical part of it, and prate upon learning while I am supporting myself with patience?"

"Pardon me! Mr. Bookworm; you will deposit your load, and visit me to-morrow at an earlier hour. And now, Tarleton, I am at your service."

CHAPTER II

GAY SCENES AND CONVERSATIONS.—THE NEW EXCHANGE AND THE PUPPET-SHOW.—THE ACTOR, THE SEXTON, AND THE BEAUTY

"WELL, Tarleton," said I, looking round that mart of millinery and love-making, which, so celebrated in the reign of Charles II., still preserved the shadow of its old renown in that of Anne,—"well, here we are upon the classical ground so often commemorated in the comedies which our chaste grandmothers thronged to see. Here we can make appointments, while we profess to buy gloves, and should our mistress tarry too long, beguile our impatience by a flirtation with her milliner. Is there not a breathing air of gayety about the place?—does it not still smack of the Ethereges and Sedleys?"

"Right," said Tarleton, leaning over a counter and amorously eying the pretty coquette to whom it belonged; while, with the coxcombry then in fashion, he sprinkled the long curls that touched his shoulders with a fragrant shower from a bottle of jessamine water upon the counter,—"right; saw you ever such an eye? Have you snuff of the true scent, my beauty—foh! this is for the nostril of a Welsh parson—choleric and hot, my beauty,—pulverized horse-radish,—why, it would make a nose of the coldest constitution imaginable sneeze like a washed school-boy on a Saturday night.—Ah, this is better, my princess: there is some courtesy in this snuff; it flatters the brain like a poet's dedication. Right, Devereux, right, there is something infectious in the atmosphere; one catches good humour as easily as if it were cold. Shall we stroll on?—/my/ Clelia is on the other side of the Exchange.—You were speaking of the play-writers: what a pity that our Ethereges and Wycherleys should be so frank in their gallantry that the prudish public already begins to look shy on them. They have a world of wit!"

"Ay," said I; "and, as my good uncle would say, a world of knowledge of human nature, namely, of the worst part of it. But they are worse than merely licentious: they are positively villanous; pregnant with the most redemptionless /scoundrelism/,—cheating, lying, thieving, and fraud; their humour debauches the whole moral system; they are like the Sardinian herb,—they make you laugh, it is true, but they poison you in the act. But who comes here?"

"Oh, honest Coll!—Ah, Cibber, how goes it with you?"

The person thus addressed was a man of about the middle age, very grotesquely attired, and with a periwig preposterously long. His countenance (which, in its features, was rather comely) was stamped with an odd mixture of liveliness, impudence, and a coarse yet not unjoyous spirit of reckless debauchery. He approached us with a saunter, and saluted Tarleton with an air servile enough, in spite of an affected familiarity.

"What think you," resumed my companion, "we were conversing upon?"

"Why, indeed, Mr. Tarleton," answered Cibber, bowing very low, "unless it were the exquisite fashion of your waistcoat, or your success with my Lady Duchess, I know not what to guess."

"Pooh, man," said Tarleton, haughtily, "none of your compliments;" and then added in a milder tone, "No, Colley, we were abusing the immoralities that existed on the stage until thou, by the light of thy virtuous example, didst undertake to reform it."

"Why," rejoined Cibber, with an air of mock sanctity, "Heaven be praised, I have pulled out some of the weeds from our theatrical /parterre/—"

"Hear you that, Count? Does he not look a pretty fellow for a censor?"

"Surely," said Cibber, "ever since Dicky Steele has set up for a saint, and assumed the methodistical twang, some hopes of conversion may be left even for such reprobates as myself. Where, may I ask, will Mr. Tarleton drink to-night?"

"Not with thee, Coll. The Saturnalia don't happen every day. Rid us now of thy company: but stop, I will do thee a pleasure; know you this gentleman?"

"I have not that extreme honour."

"Know a Count, then! Count Devereux, demean yourself by sometimes acknowledging Colley Cibber, a rare fellow at a song, a bottle, and a message to an actress; a lively rascal enough, but without the goodness to be loved, or the independence to be respected."

"Mr. Cibber," said I, rather hurt at Tarleton's speech, though the object of it seemed to hear this description with the most unruffled composure—"Mr. Cibber, I am happy and proud of an introduction to the author of the 'Careless Husband.' Here is my address; oblige me with a visit at your leisure."

"How could you be so galling to the poor devil?" said I, when Cibber, with a profusion of bows and compliments, had left us to ourselves.

"Ah, hang him,—a low fellow, who pins all his happiness to the skirts of the quality, is proud of being despised, and that which would excruciate the vanity of others only flatters his. And now for my Clelia."

After my companion had amused himself with a brief flirtation with a young lady who affected a most edifying demureness, we left the Exchange, and repaired to the puppet-show.

On entering the Piazza, in which, as I am writing for the next century, it may be necessary to say that Punch held his court, we saw a tall, thin fellow, loitering under the columns, and exhibiting a countenance of the most ludicrous discontent. There was an insolent arrogance about Tarleton's good-nature, which always led him to consult the whim of the moment at the expense of every other consideration, especially if the whim referred to a member of the /canaille/ whom my aristocratic friend esteemed as a base part of the exclusive and despotic property of gentlemen.

"Egad, Devereux," said he, "do you see that fellow? he has the audacity to affect spleen. Faith, I thought melancholy was the distinguishing patent of nobility: we will smoke him." And advancing towards the man of gloom, Tarleton touched him with the end of his cane. The man started and turned round. "Pray, sirrah," said Tarleton, coldly, "pray who the devil are you that you presume to look discontented?"

"Why, Sir," said the man, good-humouredly enough, "I have some right to be angry."

"I doubt it, my friend," said Tarleton. "What is your complaint? a rise in the price of tripe, or a drinking wife? Those, I take it, are the sole misfortunes incidental to your condition."

"If that be the case," said I, observing a cloud on our new friend's brow, "shall we heal thy sufferings? Tell us thy complaints, and we will prescribe thee a silver specific; there is a sample of our skill."

"Thank you humbly, gentlemen," said the man, pocketing the money, and clearing his countenance; "and seriously, mine is an uncommonly hard case. I was, till within the last few weeks, the under-sexton of St. Paul's, Covent Garden, and my duty was that of ringing the bells for daily prayers but a man of Belial came hitherwards, set up a puppet-show, and, timing the hours of his exhibition with a wicked sagacity, made the bell I rang for church serve as a summons to Punch,—so, gentlemen, that whenever your humble servant began to pull for the Lord, his perverted congregation began to flock to the devil; and, instead of being an instrument for saving souls, I was made the innocent means of destroying them. Oh, gentlemen, it was a shocking thing to tug away at the rope till the sweat ran down one, for four shillings a week; and to see all the time that one was thinning one's own congregation and emptying one's own pockets!"

"It was indeed a lamentable dilemma; and what did you, Mr. Sexton?"

"Do, Sir? why, I could not stifle my conscience, and I left my place. Ever since then, Sir, I have stationed myself in the Piazza, to warn my poor, deluded fellow-creatures of their error, and to assure them that when the bell of St. Paul's rings, it rings for prayers, and not for puppet-shows, and—Lord

help us, there it goes at this very moment; and look, look, gentlemen, how the wigs and hoods are crowding to the motion[2] instead of the minister."

"Ha! ha! ha!" cried Tarleton, "Mr. Powell is not the first man who has wrested things holy to serve a carnal purpose, and made use of church bells in order to ring money to the wide pouch of the church's enemies. Hark ye, my friend, follow my advice, and turn preacher yourself; mount a cart opposite to the motion, and I'll wager a trifle that the crowd forsake the theatrical mountebank in favour of the religious one; for the more sacred the thing played upon, the more certain is the game."

"Body of me, gentlemen," cried the ex-sexton, "I'll follow your advice."

"Do so, man, and never presume to look doleful again; leave dulness to your superiors."[3]

And with this advice, and an additional compensation for his confidence, we left the innocent assistant of Mr. Powell, and marched into the puppet-show, by the sound of the very bells the perversion of which the good sexton had so pathetically lamented.

The first person I saw at the show, and indeed the express person I came to see, was the Lady Hasselton. Tarleton and myself separated for the present, and I repaired to the coquette. "Angels of grace!" said I, approaching; "and, by the by, before I proceed another word, observe, Lady Hasselton, how appropriate the exclamation is to /you/! Angels of /grace/! why, you have moved all your patches —one—two—three—six— eight—as I am a gentleman, from the left side of your cheek to the right! What is the reason of so sudden an emigration?"

"I have changed my politics, Count,[4] that is all, and have resolved to lose no time in proclaiming the change. But is it true that you are going to be married?"

"Married! Heaven forbid! which of my enemies spread so cruel a report?"

"Oh, the report is universal!" and the Lady Hasselton flirted her fan with the most flattering violence.

"It is false, nevertheless; I cannot afford to buy a wife at present, for, thanks to jointures and pin-money, these things are all matters of commerce; and (see how closely civilized life resembles the savage!) the English, like the Tartar gentleman, obtains his wife only by purchase! But who is the bride?"

"The Duke of Newcastle's rich daughter, Lady Henrietta Pelham."

"What, Harley's object of ambition![5] Faith, Madam, the report is not so cruel as I thought for!"

"Oh, you fop!—but is it not true?"

"By my honour, I fear not; my rivals are too numerous and too powerful. Look now, yonder! how they already flock around the illustrious heiress; note those smiles and simpers. Is it not pretty to see those very fine gentlemen imitating bumpkins at a fair, and grinning their best /for a gold ring/! But you need not fear me, Lady Hasselton, my love cannot wander if it would. In the quaint thought of Sidney,[6] love having once flown to my heart, burned its wings there, and cannot fly away."

"La, you now!" said the Beauty; "I do not comprehend you exactly: your master of the graces does not teach you your compliments properly."

"Yes, he does, but in your presence I forget them; and now," I added, lowering my voice into the lowest of whispers, "now that you are assured of my fidelity, will you not learn at last to discredit rumours and trust to me?"

"I love you too well!" answered the Lady Hasselton in the same tone, and that answer gives an admirable idea of the affection of every coquette! love and confidence with them are qualities that

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[2] An antiquated word in use for puppet-shows.

[3] See "Spectator," No. 14, for a letter from this unfortunate under-sexton.

[4] Whig ladies patched on one side of the cheek, Tories on the other.

[5] Lord Bolingbroke tells us that it was the main end of Harley's administration to marry his son to this lady. Thus is the fate of nations a bundle made up of a thousand little private schemes.

[6] In the "Arcadia," that museum of oddities and beauties.

have a natural antipathy, and can never be united. Our /tete-a-tete/ was at an end; the people round us became social, and conversation general.

"Betterton acts to-morrow night," cried the Lady Pratterly: "we must go!"

"We must go," cried the Lady Hasselton.

"We must go!" cried all.

And so passed the time till the puppet-show was over, and my attendance dispensed with.

It is a charming thing to be the lover of a lady of the mode! One so honoured does with his hours as a miser with his guineas; namely, nothing but count them!

CHAPTER III

MORE LIONS

THE next night, after the theatre, Tarleton and I strolled into Wills's. Half-a-dozen wits were assembled. Heavens! how they talked! actors, actresses, poets, statesmen, philosophers, critics, divines, were all pulled to pieces with the most gratifying malice imaginable. We sat ourselves down, and while Tarleton amused himself with a dish of coffee and the "Flying Post," I listened very attentively to the conversation. Certainly if we would take every opportunity of getting a grain or two of knowledge, we should soon have a chest-full; a man earned an excellent subsistence by asking every one who came out of a tobacconist's shop for a pinch of snuff, and retailing the mixture as soon as he had filled his box.[7]

While I was listening to a tall lusty gentleman, who was abusing Dogget, the actor, a well-dressed man entered, and immediately attracted the general observation. He was of a very flat, ill-favoured countenance, but of a quick eye, and a genteel air; there was, however, something constrained and artificial in his address, and he appeared to be endeavouring to clothe a natural good-humour with a certain primness which could never be made to fit it.

"Ha, Steele!" cried a gentleman in an orange-coloured coat, who seemed by a fashionable swagger of importance desirous of giving the tone to the company,—"Ha, Steele, whence come you? from the chapel or the tavern?" and the speaker winked round the room as if he wished us to participate in the pleasure of a good thing.

Mr. Steele drew up, seemingly a little affronted; but his good-nature conquering the affectation of personal sanctity, which, at the time I refer to, that excellent writer was pleased to assume, he contented himself with nodding to the speaker, and saying,—

"All the world knows, Colonel Cleland, that you are a wit, and therefore we take your fine sayings as we take change from an honest tradesman,—rest perfectly satisfied with the coin we get, without paying any attention to it."

"Zounds, Cleland, you got the worst of it there," cried a gentleman in a flaxen wig. And Steele slid into a seat near my own.

Tarleton, who was sufficiently well educated to pretend to the character of a man of letters, hereupon thought it necessary to lay aside the "Flying Post," and to introduce me to my literary neighbour.

"Pray," said Colonel Cleland, taking snuff and swinging himself to and fro with an air of fashionable grace, "has any one seen the new paper?"

"What!" cried the gentleman in the flaxen wig, "what! the 'Tatler's' successor,—the 'Spectator'?"

"The same," quoth the colonel.

"To be sure; who has not?" returned he of the flaxen ornament. "People say Congreve writes it."

"They are very much mistaken, then," cried a little square man with spectacles; "to my certain knowledge Swift is the author."

"Pooh!" said Cleland, imperiously, "pooh! it is neither the one nor the other; I, gentlemen, am in the secret—but—you take me, eh? One must not speak well of one's self; mum is the word."

"Then," asked Steele, quietly, "we are to suppose that you, Colonel, are the writer?"

"I never said so, Dicky; but the women will have it that I am," and the colonel smoothed down his cravat.

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[7] "Tatler."

"Pray, Mr. Addison, what say you?" cried the gentleman in the flaxen wig; "are you for Congreve, Swift, or Colonel Cleland?" This was addressed to a gentleman of a grave but rather prepossessing mien; who, with eyes fixed upon the ground, was very quietly and to all appearance very inattentively solacing himself with a pipe; without lifting his eyes, this personage, then eminent, afterwards rendered immortal, replied,

"Colonel Cleland must produce other witnesses to prove his claim to the authorship of the 'Spectator:' the women, we well know, are prejudiced in his favour."

"That's true enough, old friend," cried the colonel, looking askant at his orange-coloured coat; "but faith, Addison, I wish you would set up a paper of the same sort, d'ye see; you're a nice judge of merit, and your sketches of character would do justice to your friends."

"If ever I do, Colonel, I, or my coadjutors, will study at least to do justice to you."[8]

"Prithee, Steele," cried the stranger in spectacles, "prithee, tell us thy thoughts on the subject: dost thou know the author of this droll periodical?"

"I saw him this morning," replied Steele, carelessly.

"Aha! and what said you to him?"

"I asked him his name."

"And what did he answer?" cried he of the flaxen wig, while all of us crowded round the speaker, with the curiosity every one felt in the authorship of a work then exciting the most universal and eager interest.

"He answered me solemnly," said Steele, "in the following words,—

"'Graeci carent ablativo, Itali dativo, ego nominativo.'"[9]

"Famous—capital!" cried the gentleman in spectacles; and then, touching

Colonel Cleland, added, "what does it exactly mean?"

"Ignoramus!" said Cleland, disdainfully, "every /schoolboy knows

Virgil/!"

"Devereux," said Tarleton, yawning, "what a d——d delightful thing it is to hear so much wit: pity that the atmosphere is so fine that no lungs unaccustomed to it can endure it long, Let us recover ourselves by a walk."

"Willingly," said I; and we sauntered forth into the streets.

"Wills's is not what it was," said Tarleton; "'tis a pitiful ghost of its former self, and if they had not introduced cards, one would die of the vapours there."

"I know nothing so insipid," said I, "as that mock literary air which it is so much the fashion to assume. 'Tis but a wearisome relief to conversation to have interludes of songs about Strephon and Sylvia, recited with a lisp by a gentleman with fringed gloves and a languishing look."

"Fie on it," cried Tarleton, "let us seek for a fresher topic. Are you asked to Abigail Masham's to-night, or will you come to Dame de la Riviere Manley's?"

"Dame de la what?—in the name of long words who is she?"

"Oh! Learning made libidinous: one who reads Catullus and profits by it."

"Bah, no, we will not leave the gentle Abigail for her. I have promised to meet St. John, too, at the Mashams'."

"As you like. We shall get some wine at Abigail's, which we should never do at the house of her cousin of Marlborough."

And, comforting himself with this belief, Tarleton peaceably accompanied me to that celebrated woman, who did the Tories such notable service, at the expense of being termed by the Whigs one great want divided into two parts; namely, a great want of every shilling belonging to other people, and a great want of every virtue that should have belonged to herself. As we mounted the

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[8] This seems to corroborate the suspicion entertained of the identity of Colonel Cleland with the Will Honeycomb of the "Spectator."

[9] "The Greek wants an ablative, the Italians a dative, I a nominative."

staircase, a door to the left (a private apartment) was opened, and I saw the favourite dismiss, with the most flattering air of respect, my old preceptor, the Abbe Montreuil. He received her attentions as his due, and, descending the stairs, came full upon me. He drew back, changed neither hue nor muscle, bowed civilly enough, and disappeared. I had not much opportunity to muse over this circumstance, for St. John and Mr. Domville—excellent companions both—joined us; and the party being small, we had the unwonted felicity of talking, as well as bowing, to each other. It was impossible to think of any one else when St. John chose to exert himself; and so even the Abbe Montreuil glided out of my brain as St. John's wit glided into it. We were all of the same way of thinking on politics, and therefore were witty without being quarrelsome,—a rare thing. The trusty Abigail told us stories of the good Queen, and we added /bons mots/ by way of corollary. Wine, too, wine that even Tarleton approved, lit up our intellects, and we spent altogether an evening such as gentlemen and Tories very seldom have the sense to enjoy.

O Apollo! I wonder whether Tories of the next century will be such clever, charming, well-informed fellows as we were!

CHAPTER IV

AN INTELLECTUAL ADVENTURE

A LITTLE affected by the vinous potations which had been so much an object of anticipation with my companion, Tarleton and I were strolling homeward when we perceived a remarkably tall man engaged in a contest with a couple of watchmen. Watchmen were in all cases the especial and natural enemies of the gallants in my young days; and no sooner did we see the unequal contest than, drawing our swords with that true English valour which makes all the quarrels of other people its own, we hastened to the relief of the weaker party.

"Gentlemen," said the elder watchman, drawing back, "this is no common brawl; we have been shamefully beaten by this here madman, and for no earthly cause."

"Who ever did beat a watchman for any earthly cause, you rascal?" cried the accused party, swinging his walking cane over the complainant's head with a menacing air.

"Very true," cried Tarleton, coolly. "Seigneurs of the watch, you are both made and paid to be beaten; /ergo/—you have no right to complain. Release this worthy cavalier, and depart elsewhere to make night hideous with your voices."

"Come, come," quoth the younger Dogberry, who perceived a reinforcement approaching, "move on, good people, and let us do our duty."

"Which," interrupted the elder watchman, "consists in taking this hulking swaggerer to the watchhouse."

"Thou speakest wisely, man of peace," said Tarleton; "defend thyself;" and without adding another word he ran the watchman through—not the body but the coat; avoiding with great dexterity the corporeal substance of the attacked party, and yet approaching it so closely as to give the guardian of the streets very reasonable ground for apprehension. No sooner did the watchman find the hilt strike against his breast, than he uttered a dismal cry and fell upon the pavement as if he had been shot.

"Now for thee, varlet," cried Tarleton, brandishing his rapier before the eyes of the other watchman, "tremble at the sword of Gideon."

"O Lord, O Lord!" ejaculated the terrified comrade of the fallen man, dropping on his knees, "for Heaven's sake, sir, have a care."

"What argument canst thou allege, thou screech-owl of the metropolis, that thou shouldst not share the same fate as thy brother owl?"

"Oh, sir!" cried the craven night-bird (a bit of a humourist in its way), "because I have a nest and seven little owlets at home, and t' other owl is only a bachelor."

"Thou art an impudent thing to jest at us," said Tarleton; "but thy wit has saved thee; rise."

At this moment two other watchmen came up.

"Gentlemen," said the tall stranger whom we had rescued, "we had better fly."

Tarleton cast at him a contemptuous look, and placed himself in a posture of offence.

"Hark ye," said I, "let us effect an honourable peace. Messieurs the watch, be it lawful for you to carry off the slain, and for us to claim the prisoners."

But our new foes understood not a jest, and advanced upon us with a ferocity which might really have terminated in a serious engagement, had not the tall stranger thrust his bulky form in front of the approaching battalion, and cried out with a loud voice, "Zounds, my good fellows, what's all this for? If you take us up you will get broken heads to-night, and a few shillings perhaps to-morrow. If you leave us alone, you will have whole heads, and a guinea between you. Now, what say you?"

Well spoke Phaedra against the dangers of eloquence. The watchmen looked at each other. "Why really, sir," said one, "what you say alters the case very much; and if Dick here is not much hurt, I don't know what we may say to the offer."

So saying, they raised the fallen watchman, who, after three or four grunts, began slowly to recover himself.

"Are you dead, Dick?" said the owl with seven owlets.

"I think I am," answered the other, groaning.

"Are you able to drink a pot of ale, Dick?" cried the tall stranger.

"I think I am," reiterated the dead man, very lack-a-daisically. And this answer satisfying his comrades, the articles of peace were subscribed to.

Now, then, the tall stranger began searching his pockets with a most consequential air.

"Gad, so!" said he at last; "not in my breeches pocket!—well, it must be in my waistcoat. No. Well, 'tis a strange thing—demme it is! Gentlemen, I have had the misfortune to leave my purse behind me: add to your other favours by lending me wherewithal to satisfy these honest men."

And Tarleton lent him the guinea. The watchmen now retired, and we were left alone with our portly ally.

Placing his hand to his heart he made us half-a-dozen profound bows, returned us thanks for our assistance in some very courtly phrases, and requested us to allow him to make our acquaintance. We exchanged cards and departed on our several ways.

"I have met that gentleman before," said Tarleton. "Let us see what name he pretends to. 'Fielding—Fielding;' ah, by the Lord, it is no less a person! It is the great Fielding himself."

"Is Mr. Fielding, then, as elevated in fame as in stature?"

"What, is it possible that you have not yet heard of Beau Fielding, who bared his bosom at the theatre in order to attract the admiring compassion of the female part of the audience?"

"What!" I cried, "the Duchess of Cleveland's Fielding?"

"The same; the best-looking fellow of his day! A sketch of his history is in the 'Tatler,' under the name of 'Orlando the Fair.' He is terribly fallen as to fortune since the day when he drove about in a car like a sea-shell, with a dozen tall fellows, in the Austrian livery, black and yellow, running before and behind him. You know he claims relationship to the house of Hapsburg. As for the present, he writes poems, makes love, is still good-natured, humorous, and odd; is rather unhappily addicted to wine and borrowing, and rigidly keeps that oath of the Carthusians which never suffers them to carry any money about them."

"An acquaintance more likely to yield amusement than profit."

"Exactly so. He will favour you with a visit—to-morrow, perhaps, and you will remember his propensities."

"Ah! who ever forgets a warning that relates to his purse!"

"True!" said Tarleton, sighing. "Alas! my guinea, thou and I have parted company forever! / vale, vale, inquit Iolas/!"

CHAPTER V

THE BEAU IN HIS DEN, AND A PHILOSOPHER DISCOVERED

MR. FIELDING having twice favoured me with visits, which found me from home, I thought it right to pay my respects to him; accordingly one morning I repaired to his abode. It was situated in a street which had been excessively the mode some thirty years back; and the house still exhibited a stately and somewhat ostentatious exterior. I observed a considerable cluster of infantine ragamuffins collected round the door, and no sooner did the portal open to my summons than they pressed forward in a manner infinitely more zealous than respectful. A servant in the Austrian livery, with a broad belt round his middle, officiated as porter. "Look, look!" cried one of the youthful gazers, "look at the Beau's /keeper/!" This imputation on his own respectability and that of his master, the domestic seemed by no means to relish; for, muttering some maledictory menace, which I at first took to be German, but which I afterwards found to be Irish, he banged the door in the faces of the intrusive impertinents, and said, in an accent which suited very ill with his Continental attire,—

"And is it my master you're wanting, Sir?"

"It is."

"And you would be after seeing him immediately?"

"Rightly conjectured, my sagacious friend."

"Fait then, your honour, my master's in bed with a terrible fit of the megrims."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.