

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**WHAT WILL HE DO
WITH IT? — VOLUME
07**

Эдвард Бульвер-Литтон

**What Will He Do
with It? — Volume 07**

«Public Domain»

Бульвер-Литтон Э. Д.

What Will He Do with It? — Volume 07 / Э. Д. Бульвер-Литтон —
«Public Domain»,

Содержание

BOOK VII	5
CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	9
CHAPTER III	11
CHAPTER IV	13
CHAPTER V	17
CHAPTER VI	22
CHAPTER VII	25
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	26

Edward Bulwer-Lytton

What Will He Do with It? — Volume 07

BOOK VII

CHAPTER I

VIGNETTES FOR THE NEXT BOOK OF BEAUTY.

"I quite agree with you, Alban; Honoria Vipont is a very superior young lady."

"I knew you would think so!" cried the Colonel, with more warmth than usual to him.

"Many years since," resumed Darrell, with reflective air, "I read Miss Edgeworth's novels; and in conversing with Miss Honoria Vipont, methinks I confer with one of Miss Edgeworth's heroines—so rational, so prudent, so well-behaved—so free from silly romantic notions—so replete with solid information, moral philosophy and natural history—so sure to regulate her watch and her heart to the precise moment, for the one to strike, and the other to throb—and to marry at last a respectable steady husband, whom she will win with dignity, and would lose with decorum! A very superior girl indeed."

["Darrell speaks—not the author. Darrell is unjust to the more exquisite female characters of a Novelist, admirable for strength of sense, correctness of delineation, terseness of narrative, and lucidity of style—nor less admirable for the unexaggerated nobleness of sentiment by which some of her heroines are notably distinguished.]

"Though your description of Miss Vipont is satirical," said Alban Morley, smiling, in spite of some irritation, "yet I will accept it as panegyric; for it conveys, unintentionally, a just idea of the qualities that make an intelligent coinpanion and a safe wife. And those are the qualities we must look to, if we marry at our age. We are no longer boys," added the Colonel sententiously.

DARRELL.—"Alas, no! I wish we were. But the truth of your remark is indisputable. Ah, look! Is not that a face which might make an octogenarian forget that he is not a boy?—what regular features! —and what a blush!"

The friends were riding in the park; and as Darrell spoke, he bowed to a young lady, who, with one or two others, passed rapidly by in a barouche. It was that very handsome young lady to whom Lionel had seen him listening so attentively in the great crowd, for which Carr Vipont's family party had been deserted.

Yes; Lady Adela is one of the loveliest girls in Loudon," said the Colonel, who had also lifted his hat as the barouche whirled by—"and amiable too: I have known her ever since she was born. Her father and I are great friends—an excellent man but stingy. I had much difficulty in arranging the eldest girl's marriage with Lord Bolton, and am a trustee in the settlement. If you feel a preference for Lady Adela, though I don't think she would suit you so well as Miss Vipont, I will answer for her father's encouragement and her consent. 'Tis no drawback to you, though it is to most of her admirers, when I add, 'There's nothing with her!'"

"And nothing in her! which is worse," said Darrell.

"Still, it is pleasant to gaze on a beautiful landscape, even though the soil be barren."

COLONEL MORLEY.—"That depends upon whether you are merely the artistic spectator of the landscape, or the disappointed proprietor of the soil."

"Admirable!" said Darrell; "you have disposed of Lady Adela. So ho! so ho!" Darrell's horse (his old high-nettled horse, freshly sent to him from Fawley, and in spite of the five years that had added to its age, of spirit made friskier by long repose) here put down its ears lashed out— and indulged in a bound which would have unseated many a London rider. A young Amazon, followed hard by some two or three young gentlemen and their grooms, shot by, swift and reckless as a hero at Balaclava. But With equal suddenness, as she caught sight of Darrell—whose hand and voice had already soothed the excited nerves of his steed—the Amazon wheeled round and gained his side. Throwing up her veil, she revealed a face so prettily arch, so perversely gay—with eye of radiant hazel, and fair locks half loosened from their formal braid—that it would have beguiled resentment from the most insensible—reconciled to danger the most timid. And yet there was really a grace of humility in the apologies she tendered for her discourtesy and thoughtlessness. As the girl reined her light palfrey by Darrell's side—turning from the young companions who had now joined her, their hackneys in a foam—and devoting to his ear all her lively overflow of happy spirits, not untempered by a certain deference, but still apparently free from dissimulation— Daxrell's grand face lighted up—his mellow laugh, unrestrained, though low, echoed her sportive tones; her youth, her joyousness were irresistibly contagious. Alban Morley watched observant, while interchanging talk with her attendant comrades, young men of high ton, but who belonged to that */jeunesse doree/* with which the surface of life patrician is fretted over—young men with few ideas, fewer duties—but with plenty of leisure—plenty of health—plenty of money in their pockets—plenty of debts to their tradesmen—daring at Melton—scheming at T'attersall's—pride to maiden aunts—plague to thrifty fathers—fickle lovers, but solid matches—in brief, fast livers, who get through their youth betimes, and who, for the most part, are middle-aged before they are thirty—tamed by wedlock—sobered by the responsibilities that come with the cares of property and the dignities of rank—undergo abrupt metamorphosis into chairmen of quarter sessions, county members, or decorous peers;—their ideas enriched as their duties grow—their opinions, once loose as willows to the wind, stiffening into the palisades of fenced propriety—valuable, busy men, changed as Henry V., when coming into the cares of state, he said to the Chief Justice, "There is my hand;" and to Sir John Falstaff,

"I know thee not, old roan;
Fall to thy prayers!"

But meanwhile the elite of this */jeunesse doree/* glittered round Flora Vyvyan: not a regular beauty like Lady Adela—not a fine girl like Miss Vipont, but such a light, faultless figure—such a pretty radiant face—more womanly for affection to be manlike—Hebe aping Thalestris. Flora, too, was an heiress—an only child—spoilt, wilful—not at all accomplished—(my belief is that accomplishments are thought great bores by the *jeunesse doree*)—no accomplishment except horsemanship, with a slight knack at billiards, and the capacity to take three whiffs from a Spanish cigarette. That last was adorable—four offers had been advanced to her hand on that merit alone.—(N.B. Young ladies do themselves no good with the *jeunesse doree*, which, in our time, is a lover that rather smokes than "sighs, like furnace," by advertising their horror of cigars.) You would suppose that Flora Vyvyan must be coarse-vulgar perhaps; not at all; she was *pignaute*—original; and did the oddest things with the air and look of the highest breeding. Fairies cannot be vulgar, no matter what they do; they may take the strangest liberties—pinch the maids—turn the house topsy-turvy; but they are ever the darlings of grace and poetry. Flora Vyvyan was a fairy. Not peculiarly intellectual herself, she had a veneration for intellect; those fast young men were the last persons likely to fascinate that fast young lady. Women are so perverse; they always prefer the very people you would least suspect—the antithesis to themselves. Yet is it possible that Flora Vyvyan can have carried her crotchets to so extravagant a degree as to have designed the conquest of Guy Darrell—ten years older than her own father? She, too, an heiress—certainly not mercenary; she who had already refused better

worldly matches than Darrell himself was—young men, handsome men, with coronets on the margin of their note-paper and the panels of their broughams! The idea seemed preposterous; nevertheless, Alban Morley, a shrewd observer, conceived that idea, and trembled for his friend.

At last the young lady and her satellites shot off, and the Colonel said cautiously, "Miss Vyvyan is—alarming."

DARRELL.—"Alarming! the epithet requires construing."

COLONEL MORLEY.—"The sort of girl who might make a man of our years really and literally an old fool!"

DARRELL.—"Old fool such a man must be if girls of any sort are permitted to make him a greater fool than he was before. But I think that, with those pretty hands resting on one's arm-chair, or that sunny face shining into one's study windows, one might be a very happy old fool—and that is the most one can expect!"

COLONEL MORLEY (checking an anxious groan).—"I am afraid, my poor friend, you are far gone already. No wonder Honoria Vipont fails to be appreciated. But Lady Selina has a maxim—the truth of which my experience attests—the moment it comes to woman, the most sensible men are the'—"

"Oldest fools!" put in Darrell. "If Mark Antony made such a goose of himself for that painted harriidan Cleopatra, what would he have done for a blooming Juliet! Youth and high spirit! Alas! why are these to be unsuitable companions for us, as we reach that climax in time and sorrow —when to the one we are grown the most indulgent, and of the other have the most need? Alban, that girl, if her heart were really won—her wild nature wisely mastered, gently guided—would make a true, prudent, loving, admirable wife—"

"Heavens!" cried Alban Morley.

"To such a husband," pursued Darrell, unheeding the ejaculation, "as—"

Lionel Haughton. What say you?" "Lionel—oh, I have no objection at all to that; but he's too young yet to think of marriage—a mere boy.

Besides, if you yourself marry, Lionel could scarcely aspire to a girl of Miss Vyvyan's birth and fortune."

"Ho, not aspire! That boy at least shall not have to woo in vain from the want of fortune. The day I marry—if ever that day come—I settle on Lionel Haughton and his heirs five thousand a-year; and if, with gentle blood, youth, good looks, and a heart of gold, that fortune does not allow him to aspire to any girl whose hand he covets, I can double it, and still be rich enough to buy a superior companion in Honoria Vipont—"

MORLEY.—"Don't say buy—"

DARRELL.—" Ay, and still be young enough to catch a butterfly in Lady Adela—still be bold enough to chain a panther in Flora Vyvyan. Let the world know—your world in each nook of its gaudy auction-mart—that Lione: Haughton is no pauper cousin—no penniless fortune-hunter. I wish that world to be kind to him while he is yet young, and can enjoy it. Ah, Morley, Pleasure, like Punishment, hobbles after us, /pede claudo/. What would have delighted us yesterday does not catch us up till to-morrow, and yesterday's pleasure is not the morrow's. A pennyworth of sugar-plums would have made our eyes sparkle when we were scrawling pot- hooks at a preparatory school, but no one gave us sugar-plums then. Now every day at dessert France heaps before us her daintiest sugar-plums in gilt /bonbonnieres/. Do you ever covet them? I never do. Let Lionel have his sugar-plums in time. And as we talk, there he comes. Lionel, how are you?"

"I resign you to Lionel's charge now," said the Colonel, glancing at his watch. "I have an engagement—trouble some. Two silly friends of mine have been quarrelling—high words—in an age when duels are out of the question. I have promised to meet another man, and draw up the form for a mutual apology. High words are so stupid nowadays. No option but to swallow them up again if they were as high as steeples. Adieu for the present. We meet to-night at Lady Dulcett's concert?"

"Yes," said Darrell. "I promised Miss Vyvyan to be there, and keep her from disturbing the congregation. You Lionel, will come with me."

LIONELL (embarrassed).—"No; you must excuse me. I have long been engaged elsewhere."

"That's a pity," said the Colonel, gravely. "Lady Dulcett's conceit is just one of the places where a young man should be seen." Colonel Morley waved his hand with his usual languid elegance, and his hack cantered off with him, stately as a charger, easy as a rocking-horse.

"Unalterable man," said Darrell, as his eye followed the horseman's receding figure. "'Through all the mutations on Time's dusty high-road- stable as a milestone. Just what Alban Morley was as a school-boy he is now; and if mortal span were extended to the age of the patriarchs, just what Alban Morley is now, Alban Morley would be a thousand years hence. I don't mean externally, of course; wrinkles will come—cheeks will fade. But these are trifles: man's body is a garment, as Socrates said before me, and every seven years, according to the physiologists, man has a new suit, fibre and cuticle, from top to toe. The interior being that wears the clothes is the same in Alban Morley. Has he loved, hated, rejoiced, suffered? Where is the sign? Not one. At school, as in life, doing nothing, but decidedly somebody—respected by small boys, petted by big boys—an authority with all. Never getting honours—arm and arm with those who did; never in scrapes—advising those who were; imperturbable, immovable, calm above mortal cares as an Epicurean deity. What can wealth give that he has not got? In the houses of the richest he chooses his room. Talk of ambition, talk of power—he has their rewards without an effort. True prime minister of all the realm he cares for; good society has not a vote against him—he transacts its affairs, he knows its secrets—he yields its patronage. Ever requested to do a favour—no loan great enough to do him one. Incorruptible, yet versed to a fraction in each man's price; impeccable, yet confidant in each man's foibles; smooth as silk, hard as adamant; impossible to wound, vex, annoy him—but not insensible; thoroughly kind. Dear, dear Alban! nature never polished a finer gentleman out of a solider block of man!" Darrell's voice quivered a little as he completed in earnest affection the sketch begun in playful irony, and then with a sudden change of thought, he resumed lightly:

"But I wish you to do me a favour, Lionel. Aid me to repair a fault in good breeding, of which Alban Morley would never have been guilty. I have been several days in London, and not yet called on your mother. Will you accompany me now to her house and present me?"

"Thank you, thank you; you will make her so proud and happy; but may I ride on and prepare her for your visit?"

"Certainly; her address is—"

"Gloucester Place, No.—."

"I will meet you there in half an hour."

CHAPTER II

"Let observation, with expansive view,
Survey mankind from China to Peru,"

—AND OBSERVATION WILL EVERYWHERE FIND,
INDISPENSABLE TO THE HAPPINESS OF WOMAN, A VISITING
ACQUAINTANCE.

Lionel knew that Mrs. Haughton would that day need more than usual forewarning of a visit from Mr. Darrell. For the evening of that day Mrs. Haughton proposed "to give a party." When Mrs. Haughton gave a party, it was a serious affair. A notable and bustling housewife, she attended herself to each preparatory detail. It was to assist at this party that Lionel had resigned Lady Dulcett's concert. The young man, reluctantly acquiescing in the arrangements by which Alban Morley had engaged him a lodging of his own, seldom or never let a day pass without gratifying his mother's proud heart by an hour or two spent in Gloucester Place, often to the forfeiture of a pleasant ride, or other tempting excursion, with gay comrades. Difficult in London life, and at the full of its season, to devote an hour or two to visits, apart from the track chalked out by one's very mode of existence—difficult to cut off an hour so as not to cut up a day. And Mrs. Haughton was exacting-nice in her choice as to the exact slice in the day. She took the prime of the joint. She liked her neighbours to see the handsome, elegant young man dismount from his charger or descend from his cabriolet, just at the witching hour when Gloucester Place was fullest. Did he go to a levee, he must be sure to come to her before he changed his dress, that she and Gloucester Place might admire him in uniform. Was he going to dine at some very great house, he must take her in his way (though no street could be more out of his way), that she might be enabled to say in the parties to which she herself repaired "There is a great dinner at Lord So-and-so's to-day; my son called on me before he went there. If he had been disengaged, I should have asked permission to bring him here."

Not that Mrs. Haughton honestly designed, nor even wished to draw the young man from the dazzling vortex of high life into her own little currents of dissipation. She was much too proud of Lionel to think that her friends were grand enough for him to honour their houses by his presence. She had in this, too, a lively recollection of her lost Captain's doctrinal views of the great world's creed. The Captain had flourished in the time when Impertinence, installed by Brummell, though her influence was waning, still schooled her oligarchs, and maintained the etiquette of her court; and even when his /misalliance/ and his debts had cast him out of his native sphere, he lost not all the original brightness of an exclusive. In moments of connubial confidence, when owning his past errors, and tracing to his sympathising Jessie the causes of his decline, he would say: "'Tis not a man's birth, nor his fortune, that gives him his place in society—it depends on his conduct, Jessie. He must not be seen bowing to snobs, nor should his enemies track him to the haunts of vulgarians. I date my fall in life to dining with a horrid man who lent me L100, and lived in Upper Baker Street. His wife took my arm from a place they called a drawing-room (the Captain as he spoke was on a fourth floor), to share some unknown food which they called a dinner (the Captain at that moment would have welcomed a rasher). The woman went about blabbing—the thing got wind—for the first time my character received a soil. What is a man without character! and character once sullied, Jessie, man becomes reckless. Teach my boy to beware of the first false step—no association with parvenus. Don't cry, Jessie—I don't mean that he is to cut your—relations are quite different from other people—nothing so low as cutting relations. I continued, for instance, to visit Guy Darrell, though he lived at the back of Holborn, and I actually saw him once in brown beaver gloves. But he was a relation. I have even

dined at his house, and met odd people there— people who lived also at the back of Holborn. But he did not ask me to go to their houses, and if he had, I must have cut him." By reminiscences of this kind of talk, Lionel was saved from any design of Mrs. Haughton's to attract his orbit into the circle within which she herself moved. He must come to the parties she gave—illumine or awe odd people there. That was a proper tribute to maternal pride. But had they asked him to their parties, she would have been the first to resent such a liberty.

Lionel found Mrs. Haughton in great bustle. A gardener's cart was before the street door. Men were bringing in a grove of evergreens, intended to border the staircase, and make its exiguous ascent still more difficult. The refreshments were already laid out in the dining-room. Mrs. Haughton, with scissors in hand, was cutting flowers to fill the eperylene, but darting to and fro, like a dragonfly, from the dining-room to the hall, from the flowers to the evergreens.

"Dear me, Lionel, is that you? Just tell me, you who go to all those grandees, whether the ratafia-cakes should be opposite to the spauge- cakes, or whether they would not go better—thus—at cross-corners?"

"My dear mother, I never observed—I don't know. But make haste—take off that apron—have those doors shut come upstairs. Mr. Darrell will be here very shortly. I have ridden on to prepare you."

"Mr. Darrell—TO-DAY—HOW could you let him come? Oh, Lionel, how thoughtless you are! You should have some respect for your mother—I am your mother, sir."

"Yes, my own dear mother—don't scold—I could not help it. He is so engaged, so sought after; if I had put him off to-day, he might never have come, and—"

"Never have come! Who is Mr. Darrell, to give himself such airs?—Only a lawyer after all," said Mrs. Haughton, with majesty.

"Oh, mother, that speech is not like you. He is our benefactor—our—"

"Don't, don't say very more—I was very wrong—quite wicked—only my temper, Lionel dear. Good Mr. Darrell! I shall be so happy to see him— see him, too, in this house that I owe to him— see him by your side! I think I shall fall down on my knees to him."

And her eyes began to stream.

Lionel kissed the tears away fondly. "That's my own mother now indeed— now I am proud of you, mother; and how well you look! I am proud of that too."

"Look well—I am not fit to be seen, this figure—though perhaps an elderly quiet gentleman like good Mr. Darrell does not notice ladies much. John, John, makes haste with those plants. Gracious me! you've got your coat off!—put it on—I expect a gentleman—I'm at home, in the front drawing-room—no—that's all set out—the back drawing-room, John. Send Susan to me. Lionel, do just look at the supper-table; and what is to be done with the flowers, and—"

The rest of Mrs. Haughton's voice, owing to the rapidity of her ascent, which affected the distinctness of her utterance, was lost in air. She vanished at culminating point—within her chamber.

CHAPTER III

MRS. HAUGHTON AT HOME TO GUY DARRELL.

Thanks to Lionel's activity, the hall was disencumbered—the plants hastily stowed away—the parlour closed on the festive preparations—and the footman in his livery waiting at the door—when Mr. Darrell arrived. Lionel himself came out and welcomed his benefactor's footstep across the threshold of the home which the generous man had provided for the widow.

If Lionel had some secret misgivings as to the result of this interview, they were soon and most happily dispelled. For, at the sight of Guy Darrell leaning so affectionately on her son's arm, Mrs. Haughton mechanically gave herself up to the impulse of her own warm, grateful, true woman's heart. And her bound forward, her seizure of Darrell's hand—her first fervent blessing—her after words, simple but eloquent with feeling—made that heart so transparent, that Darrell looked it through with respectful eyes.

Mrs. Haughton was still a pretty woman, and with much of that delicacy of form and outline which constitutes the gentility of person. She had a sweet voice too, except when angry. Her defects of education, of temper, or of conventional polish, were not discernible in the overflow of natural emotion. Darrell had come resolved to be released if possible. Pleased he was, much more than he had expected. He even inly accepted for the deceased Captain excuses which he had never before admitted to himself. The linen-draper's daughter was no coarse presuming dowdy, and in her candid rush of gratitude there was not that underbred servility which Darrell had thought perceptible in her epistolary compositions. There was elegance too, void both of gaudy ostentation and penurious thrift, in the furniture and arrangements of the room. The income he gave to her was not spent with slatternly waste or on tawdry gewgaws. To ladies in general, Darrell's manner was extremely attractive—not the less winning because of a certain shyness which, implying respect for those he addressed, and a modest undervaluing of his own merit, conveyed compliment and soothed self-love. And to that lady in especial such gentle shyness was the happiest good-breeding.

In short, all went off without a hitch, till, as Darrell was taking leave, Mrs. Haughton was reminded by some evil genius of her evening party, and her very gratitude, longing for some opportunity to requite obligation, prompted her to invite the kind man to whom the facility of giving parties was justly due. She had never realised to herself, despite all that Lionel could say, the idea of Darrell's station in the world—a lawyer who had spent his youth at the back of Holborn, whom the stylish Captain had deemed it a condescension not to cut, might indeed become very rich; but he could never be the fashion. "Poor man," she thought, "he must be very lonely. He is not, like Lionel, a young dancing man. A quiet little party, with people of his own early rank and habits, would be more in his way than those grand places to which Lionel goes. I can but ask him—I ought to ask him. What would he say if I did not ask him? Black ingratitude indeed, if he were not asked!" All these ideas rushed through her mind in a breath, and as she clasped Darrell's extended hand in both her own, she said: "I have a little party to- night!"—and paused. Darrell remaining mute, and Lionel not suspecting what was to ensue, she continued: "There may be some good music—young friends of mine—sing charmingly—Italians!"

Darrell bowed. Lionel began to shudder.

"And if I might presume to think it would amuse you, Mr. Darrell, oh, I should be so happy to see you!—so happy!"

"Would you?" said Darrell, briefly. "Then I should be a churl if I did not come. Lionel will escort me. Of course you expect him too?"

"Yes, indeed. Though he has so many fine places to go to—and it can't be exactly what he is used to—yet he is such a dear good boy that he gives up all to gratify his mother."

Lionel, in agonies, turned an unfilial back, and looked steadily out of the window; but Darrell, far too august to take offence where none was meant, only smiled at the implied reference to Lionel's superior demand in the fashionable world, and replied, without even a touch of his accustomed irony: "And to gratify his mother is a pleasure I thank you for inviting me to share with him."

More and more at her ease, and charmed with having obeyed her hospitable impulse, Mrs. Haughton, following Darrell to the landing-place, added:

"And if you like to play a quiet rubber—"

"I never touch cards—I abhor the very name of them, ma'am," interrupted Darrell, somewhat less gracious in his tones.

He mounted his horse; and Lionel, breaking from Mrs. Haughton, who was assuring him that Mr. Darrell was not at all what she expected, but really quite the gentleman—nay, a much grander gentleman than even Colonel Morley—regained his kinsman's side, looking abashed and discomfited. Darrell, with the kindness which his fine quick intellect enabled him so felicitously to apply, hastened to relieve the young guardsman's mind.

"I like your mother much—very much," said he, in his most melodious accents. "Good boy! I see now why you gave up Lady Dulcett. Go and take a canter by yourself, or with younger friends, and be sure you call on me so that we may be both at Mrs. Haughton's by ten o'clock. I can go later to the concert if I feel inclined."

He waved his hand, wheeled his horse, and trotted off towards the fair suburban lanes that still proffer to the denizens of London glimpses of rural fields, and shadows from quiet hedgerows. He wished to be alone; the sight of Mrs. Haughton had revived recollections of bygone days—memory linking memory in painful chain-gay talk with his younger schoolfellow—that wild Charlie, now in his grave—his own laborious youth, resolute aspirings, secret sorrows—and the strong man felt the want of the solitary self-commune, without which self-conquest is unattainable.

CHAPTER IV

MRS. HAUGHTON AT HOME MISCELLANEOUSLY. LITTLE PARTIES ARE USEFUL IN BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER. ONE NEVER KNOWS WHOM ONE MAY MEET.

Great kingdoms grew out of small beginnings. Mrs. Haughton's social circle was described from a humble centre. On coming into possession of her easy income and her house in Gloucester Place, she was naturally seized with the desire of an appropriate "visiting acquaintance." The accomplishment of that desire had been deferred awhile by the excitement of Lionel's departure for Paris, and the IMMENSE TEMPTATION to which the attentions of the spurious Mr. Courtenay Smith had exposed her widowed solitude: but no sooner had she recovered from the shame and anger with which she had discarded that showy impostor, happily in time, than the desire became the more keen; because the good lady felt that with a mind so active and restless as hers, a visiting acquaintance might be her best preservative from that sense of loneliness which disposes widows to lend the incautious ear to adventurous wooers. After her experience of her own weakness in listening to a sharper, and with a shudder at her escape, Mrs. Haughton made a firm resolve never to give her beloved son a father-in-law. No, she would distract her thoughts—she would have a VISITING ACQUAINTANCE. She commenced by singling out such families as at various times had been her genteelst lodgers—now lodging elsewhere. She informed them by polite notes of her accession of consequence and fortune, which she was sure they would be happy to hear; and these notes, left with the card of "Mrs. Haughton, Gloucester Place," necessarily produced respondent notes and correspondent cards. Gloucester Place then prepared itself for a party. The ci-devant lodgers urbanely attended the summons. In their turn they gave parties. Mrs. Haughton was invited. From each such party she bore back a new draught into her "social circle." Thus, long before the end of five years, Mrs. Haughton had attained her object. She had a "VISITING ACQUAINTANCE!" It is true that she was not particular; so that there was a new somebody at whose house a card could be left, or a morning call achieved—who could help to fill her rooms, or whose rooms she could contribute to fill in turn. She was contented. She was no tuft-hunter. She did not care for titles. She had no visions of a column in the Morning Post. She wanted, kind lady, only a vent for the exuberance of her social instincts; and being proud, she rather liked acquaintances who looked up to, instead of looking down on her. Thus Gloucester Place was invaded by tribes not congenial to its natural civilised atmosphere. Hengists and Horsas, from remote Anglo-Saxon districts, crossed the intervening channel, and insulted the British nationality of that salubrious district. To most of such immigrants, Mrs. Haughton, of Gloucester Place, was a personage of the highest distinction. A few others of prouder status in the world, though they owned to themselves that there was a sad mixture at Mrs. Haughton's house, still, once seduced there, came again—being persons who, however independent in fortune or gentle by blood, had but a small "visiting acquaintance" in town; fresh from economical colonisation on the Continent or from distant provinces in these three kingdoms. Mrs. Haughton's rooms were well lighted. There was music for some, whist for others; tea, ices, cakes, and a crowd for all.

At ten o'clock—the rooms already nearly filled, and Mrs. Haughton, as she stood at the door, anticipating with joy that happy hour when the staircase would become inaccessible—the head attendant, sent with the ices from the neighbouring confectioner, announced in a loud voice: "Mr. Haughton—Mr. Darrell."

At that latter name a sensation thrilled the assembly—the name so much in every one's mouth at that period, nor least in the mouths of the great middle class, on whom—though the polite may call them "a sad mixture," cabinets depend—could not fail to be familiar to the ears of Mrs. Haughton's "visiting acquaintance." The interval between his announcement and his ascent from the hall to the

drawing-room was busily filled up by murmured questions to the smiling hostess: "Darrell! what! the Darrell! Guy Darrell! greatest man of the day! A connection of yours? Bless me, you don't say so?" Mrs. Haughton began to feel nervous. Was Lionel right? Could the man who had only been a lawyer at the back of Holborn really be, now, such a very, very great man—greatest man of the day? Nonsense!

"Ma'am," said one pale, puff-cheeked, flat-nosed gentleman, in a very large white waistcoat, who was waiting by her side till a vacancy in one of the two whist-tables should occur. "Ma'am, I'm an enthusiastic admirer of Mr. Darrell. You say he is a connection of yours? Present me to him."

Mrs. Haughton nodded flutteringly, for, as the gentleman closed his request, and tapped a large gold snuff-box, Darrell stood before her—Lionel close at his side, looking positively sheepish. The great man said a few civil words, and was gliding into the room to make way for the press behind him, when he of the white waistcoat, touching Mrs. Haughton's arm, and staring Darrell full in the face, said, very loud: "In these anxious times, public men dispense with ceremony. I crave an introduction to Mr. Darrell." Thus pressed, poor Mrs. Haughton, without looking up, muttered out: "Mr. Adolphus Poole—Mr. Darrell," and turned to welcome fresh comers.

"Mr. Darrell," said Mr. Poole, bowing to the ground, "this is an honour."

Darrell gave the speaker one glance of his keen eye, and thought to himself: "If I were still at the bar I should be sorry to hold a brief for that fellow." However, he returned the bow formally, and, bowing again at the close of a highly complimentary address with which Mr. Poole followed up his opening sentence, expressed himself "much flattered," and thought he had escaped; but wherever he went through the crowd, Mr. Poole contrived to follow him, and claim his notice by remarks on the affairs of the day—the weather—the funds—the crops. At length Darrell perceived, sitting aloof in a corner, an excellent man whom indeed it surprised him to see in a London drawing-room, but who, many years ago, when Darrell was canvassing the enlightened constituency of Ouzelford, had been on a visit to the chairman of his committee—an influential trader—and having connections in the town—and, being a very high character, had done him good service in the canvass. Darrell rarely forgot a face, and never a service. At any time he would have been glad to see the worthy man once more, but at that time he was grateful indeed.

"Excuse me," he said bluntly to Mr. Poole, "but I see an old friend." He moved on, and thick as the crowd had become, it made way, with respect as to royalty for the distinguished orator. The buzz of admiration as he passed—louder than in drawing-rooms more refined—would have had sweeter music than Grisi's most artful quaver to a vainer man—nay, once on a time to him. But—sugar plums come too late! He gained the corner, and roused the solitary sitter.

"My dear Mr. Hartopp, do you not remember me—Guy Darrell?"

"Mr. Darrell!" cried the ex-mayor of Gatesboro', rising, "who could think that you would remember me?"

"What! not remember those ten stubborn voters, on whom, all and singly, I had lavished my powers of argument in vain? You came, and with the brief words, 'John—Ned—Dick—oblige me—vote for Darrell!' the men were convinced—the votes won. That's what I call eloquence"—(sotto voce- "Confound that fellow! still after me! "Aside to Hartopp)—"Oh! may I ask who is that Mr. What's-his-name—there—in the white waistcoat?"

"Poole," answered Hartopp. "Who is he, sir? A speculative man. He is connected with a new Company—I am told it answers. Williams (that's my foreman—a very long head he has too) has taken shares in the Company, and wanted me to do the same, but 'tis not in my way. And Mr. Poole may be a very honest man, but he does not impress me with that idea. I have grown careless; I know I am liable to be taken in—I was so once—and therefore I avoid 'Companies' upon principle—especially when they promise thirty per cent., and work copper mines—Mr. Poole has a copper mine."

"And deals in brass—you may see it in his face! But you are not in town for good, Mr. Hartopp? If I remember right, you were settled at Gatesboro' when we last met."

"And so I am still—or rather in the neighbourhood. I am gradually retiring from business, and grown more and more fond of farming. But I have a family, and we live in enlightened times, when children require a finer education than their parents had. Mrs. Hartopp thought my daughter Anna Maria was in need of some 'finishing lessons'—very fond of the harp is Anna Maria—and so we have taken a house in London for six weeks. That's Mrs. Hartopp yonder, with the bird on her head—bird of paradise, I believe; Williams says birds of that kind never rest. That bird is an exception—it has rested on Mrs. Hartopp's head for hours together, every evening since we have been in town."

"Significant of your connubial felicity, Mr. Hartopp."

"May it be so of Anna Maria's. She is to be married when her education is finished—married, by the by, to a son of your old friend Jessop, of Ouzelford; and between you and me, Mr. Darrell, that is the reason why I consented to come to town. Do not suppose that I would have a daughter finished unless there was a husband at hand who undertook to be responsible for the results."

"You retain your wisdom, Mr. Hartopp; and I feel sure that not even your fair partner could have brought you up to London unless you had decided on the expediency of coming. Do you remember that I told you the day you so admirably settled a dispute in our committee-room, 'it was well you were not born a king, for you would have been an irresistible tyrant'?"

"Hush! hush!" whispered Hartopp, in great alarm, "if Mrs. H. should hear you! What an observer you are, sir. I thought I was a judge of character—but I was once deceived. I dare say you never were."

"You mistake," answered Darrell, wincing, "you deceived! How?"

"Oh, a long story, sir. It was an elderly man—the most agreeable, interesting companion—a vagabond nevertheless—and such a pretty bewitching little girl with him, his grandchild. I thought he might have been a wild harumscarum chap in his day, but that he had a true sense of honour"—(Darrell, wholly uninterested in this narrative, suppressed a yawn, and wondered when it would end).

"Only think, sir, just as I was saying to myself, 'I know character—I never was taken in,' down comes a smart fellow—the man's own son—and tells me—or rather he suffers a lady who comes with him to tell me—that this charming old gentleman of high sense of honour was a returned convict—been transported for robbing his employer."

Pale, breathless, Darrell listened, not unheeding now. "What was the name of—of—"

"The convict? He called himself Chapman, but the son's name was Losely—Jasper."

"Ah!" faltered Darrell, recoiling. "And you spoke of a little girl?"

"Jasper Losely's daughter; he came after her with a magistrate's warrant. The old miscreant had carried her off,—to teach her his own swindling ways, I suppose."

"Luckily she was then in my charge. I gave her back to her father, and the very respectable-looking lady he brought with him. Some relation, I presume."

"What was her name, do you remember?"

"Crane."

"Crane!—Crane!" muttered Darrell, as if trying in vain to tax his memory with that name. "So he said the child was his daughter—are you sure?"

"Oh, of course he said so, and the lady too. But can you be acquainted with their, sir?"

"I?—no! Strangers to me, except by repute. Liars—infamous liars! But have the accomplices quarrelled—I mean the son and father—that the father should be exposed and denounced by the son?"

"I conclude so. I never saw them again. But you believe the father really was, then, a felon, a convict—no excuse for him—no extenuating circumstances? There was something in that man, Mr. Darrell, that made one love him—positively love him; and when I had to tell him that I had given up the child he trusted to my charge, and saw his grief, I felt a criminal myself."

Darrell said nothing, but the character of his face was entirely altered—stern, hard, relentless—the face of an inexorable judge. Hartopp, lifting his eyes suddenly to that countenance, recoiled in awe.

"You think I was a criminal!" he said, piteously.

"I think we are both talking too much, Mr. Hartopp, of a gang of miserable swindlers, and I advise you to dismiss the whole remembrance of intercourse with any of them from your honest breast, and never to repeat to other ears the tale you have poured into mine. Men of honour should crush down the very thought that approaches them to knaves."

Thus saying, Darrell moved off with abrupt rudeness, and passing quickly back through the crowd, scarcely noticed Mrs. Haughton by a retreating nod, nor heeded Lionel at all, but hurried down the stairs. He was impatiently searching for his cloak in the back parlour, when a voice behind said: "Let me assist you, sir—do:" and turning round with petulant quickness, he beheld again Mr. Adolphus Poole. It requires an habitual intercourse with equals to give perfect and invariable control of temper to a man of irritable nerves and frank character; and though, where Darrell really liked, he had much sweet forbearance, and where he was indifferent much stately courtesy, yet, when he was offended, he could be extremely uncivil. "Sir," he cried almost stamping his foot, "your importunities annoy me I request you to cease them."

"Oh, I ask your pardon," said Mr. Poole, with an angry growl. "I have no need to force myself on any man. But I beg you to believe that if I presumed to seek your acquaintance, it was to do you a service sir—yes, a private service, sir." He lowered his voice into a whisper, and laid his finger on his nose: "There's one Jasper Losely, sir—eh? Oh, sir, I'm no mischief-maker. I respect family secrets. Perhaps I might be of use, perhaps not."

"Certainly not to me, sir," said Darrell, flinging the cloak he had now found across his shoulders, and striding from the house. When he entered his carriage, the footman stood waiting for orders. Darrell was long in giving them. "Anywhere for half an hour—to St. Paul's, then home." But on returning from this objectless plunge into the City, Darrell pulled the check-string: "To Belgrave Square—Lady Dulcett's."

The concert was half over; but Flora Vyvyan had still guarded, as she had promised, a seat beside herself for Darrell, by lending it for the present to one of her obedient vassals. Her face brightened as she saw Darrell enter and approach. The vassal surrendered the chair. Darrell appeared to be in the highest spirits; and I firmly believe that he was striving to the utmost in his power—what? to make himself agreeable to Flora Vyvyan? No; to make Flora Vyvyan agreeable to himself. The man did not presume that a fair young lady could be in love with him; perhaps he believed that, at his years, to be impossible. But he asked what seemed much easier, and was much harder—he asked to be himself in love.

CHAPTER V

IT IS ASSERTED BY THOSE LEARNED MEN WHO HAVE DEVOTED THEIR LIVES TO THE STUDY OF THE MANNERS AND HABIT OF INSECT SOCIETY, THAT WHEN A SPIDER HAS LOST ITS LAST WEB, HAVING EXHAUSTED ALL THE GLUTINOUS MATTER WHEREWITH TO SPIN ANOTHER, IT STILL. PROTRACTS ITS INNOCENT EXISTENCE, BY OBTRUDING ITS NIPPERS ON SOME LESS WARLIKE BUT MORE RESPECTABLE SPIDER, POSSESSED OF A CONVENIENT HOME AND AN AIRY LARDER. OBSERVANT MORALISTS HAVE NOTICED THE SAME PECULIARITY IN THE MANEATER, OR POCKET-CANNIBAL.

Eleven o'clock, A.M., Samuel Adolphus Poole, Esq., is in his parlour, —the house one of those new dwellings which yearly spring up north of the Regent's Park,—dwellings that, attesting the eccentricity of the national character, task the fancy of the architect and the gravity of the beholder —each tenement so tortured into contrast with the other, that, on one little rood of ground, all ages seemed blended, and all races encamped. No. 1 is an Egyptian tomb!—Pharaohs may repose there! No. 2 is a Swiss chalet—William Tell may be shooting in its garden! Lo! the severity of Doric columns—Sparta is before you! Behold that Gothic porch—you are rapt to the Norman days! Ha! those Elizabethan mullions— Sidney and Raleigh, rise again! Ho! the trellises of China—come forth, Confucius, and Commissioner Yeh! Passing a few paces, we are in the land of the Zegri and Abencerrage:

'Land of the dark-eyed maid and dusky Moor.'

Mr. Poole's house is called Alhambra Villa! Moorish verandahs—plate- glass windows, with cusped heads and mahogany sashes—a garden behind, a smaller one in front—stairs ascending to the doorway under a Saracenic portico, between two pedestalled lions that resemble poodles—the whole new and lustrous—in semblance stone, in substance stucco-cracks in the stucco denoting "settlements." But the house being let for ninety-nine years—relet again on a running lease of seven, fourteen, and twenty-one- the builder is not answerable for duration, nor the original lessee for repairs. Take it altogether, than Alhambra Villa masonry could devise no better type of modern taste and metropolitan speculation.

Mr. Poole, since we saw him between four and five years ago, has entered the matrimonial state. He has married a lady of some money, and become a reformed man. He has eschewed the turf, relinquished Belcher neckcloths and Newmarket coats-dropped his old-bachelor acquaintances. When a man marries and reforms, especially when marriage and reform are accompanied with increased income, and settled respectably in Alhambra Villa— relations, before estranged, tender kindly overtures: the world, before austere, becomes indulgent. It was so with Poole—no longer Dolly. Grant that in earlier life he had fallen into bad ways, and, among equivocal associates, had been led on by that taste for sporting which is a manly though a perilous characteristic of the true-born Englishman; he who loves horses is liable to come in contact with blacklegs; the racer is a noble animal; but it is his misfortune that the better his breeding the worse his company:—Grant that, in the stables, Adolphus Samuel Poole had picked up some wild oats—he had sown them now. Bygones were bygones. He had made a very prudent marriage. Mrs. Poole was a sensible woman— had rendered him domestic, and would keep him straight! His uncle Samuel, a most worthy man, had found him that sensible woman, and, having found her, had paid his nephew's debts, and adding a round sum to the lady's fortune, had seen that the whole was so tightly settled on wife and children that Poole had the tender satisfaction of knowing that, happen what might to himself, those dear ones were safe; nay, that if, in the reverses of fortune, he should be compelled by persecuting creditors to

fly his native shores, law could not impair the competence it had settled upon Mrs. Poole, nor destroy her blessed privilege to share that competence with a beloved spouse. Insolvency itself, thus protected by a marriage settlement, realises the sublime security of VIRTUE immortalised by the Roman muse:

—"Repulse nescia sordidae,
Intaminatis fulget honoribus;
Nec sumit ant ponit secures
Arbitrio popularis aurae."

Mr. Poole was an active man in the parish vestry—he was a sound politician—he subscribed to public charities—he attended public dinners he had votes in half a dozen public institutions—he talked of the public interests, and called himself a public man. He chose his associates amongst gentlemen in business—speculative, it is true, but steady. A joint-stock company was set up; he obtained an official station at its board, coupled with a salary—not large, indeed, but still a salary.

"The money," said Adolphus Samuel Poole, "is not my object; but I like to have something to do." I cannot say how he did something, but no doubt somebody was done.

Mr. Poole was in his parlour, reading letters and sorting papers, before he departed to his office in the West End. Mrs. Poole entered, leading an infant who had not yet learned to walk alone, and denoting, by an interesting enlargement of shape, a kindly design to bless that infant, at no distant period, with a brother or sister, as the case might be.

"Come and kiss Pa, Johnny," said she to the infant. "Mrs. Poole, I am busy," growled Pa.

"Pa's busy—working hard for little Johnny. Johnny will be better for it some day," said Mrs. Poole, tossing the infant half up to the ceiling, in compensation for the loss of the paternal kiss.

"Mrs. Poole, what do you want?"

"May I hire Jones's brougham for two hours to-day, to pay visits? There are a great many cards we ought to leave; is there any place where I should leave a card for you, lovey—any person of consequence you were introduced to at Mrs. Haughton's last night? That great man they were all talking about, to whom you seemed to take such a fancy, Samuel, duck—"

"Do get out! that man insulted me, I tell you."

"Insulted you! No; you never told me."

"I did tell you last night coming home."

"Dear me, I thought you meant that Mr. Hartopp."

"Well, he almost insulted me, too. Mrs. Poole, you are stupid and disagreeable. Is that all you have to say?"

"Pa's cross, Johnny dear! poor Pa!—people have vexed Pa, Johnny—naughty people. We must go or we shall vex him too."

Such heavenly sweetness on the part of a forbearing wife would have softened Tamburlane. Poole's sullen brow relaxed. If women knew how to treat men, not a husband, unhenpecked, would be found from Indos to the Pole.

And Poole, for all his surly demeanour, was as completely governed by that angel as a bear by his keeper.

"Well, Mrs. Poole, excuse me. I own I am out of sorts to-day—give me little Johnny—there (kissing the infant; who in return makes a dig at Pa's left eye, and begins to cry on finding that he has not succeeded in digging it out)—take the brougham. Hush, Johnny—hush—and you may leave a card for me at Mr. Peckham's, Harley Street. My eye smarts horribly; that baby will gouge me one of these days."

Mrs. Poole had succeeded in stilling the infant, and confessing that Johnny's fingers are extremely strong for his age—but, adding that babies will catch at whatever is very bright and beautiful, such as gold and jewels and Mr. Poole's eyes, administers to the wounded orb so soothing

a lotion of pity and admiration that Poole growls out quite mildly: "Nonsense, blarney—by the by, I did not say this morning that you should not have the rosewood chiffoniere!"

"No, you said you could not afford it, duck; and when Pa says he can't afford it, Pa must be the judge—must not he, Johnny dear?"

"But perhaps I can afford it. Yes, you may have it yes, I say, you shall have it. Don't forget to leave that card on Peckham—he's a moneyed man. There's a ring at the bell. Who is it? run and see."

Mrs. Poole obeyed with great activity, considering her interesting condition. She came back in half a minute. "Oh, my Adolphus—I oh, my Samuel! it is that dreadful-looking man who was here the other evening— stayed with you so long. I don't like his looks at all. Pray don't be at home."

"I must," said Poole, turning a shade paler, if that were possible. "Stop—don't let that girl go to the door; and you—leave me." He snatched his hat and gloves, and putting aside the parlour-maid, who had emerged from the shades below in order to answer the "ring," walked hastily down the small garden.

Jasper Losely was stationed at the little gate. Jasper was no longer in rags, but he was coarsely clad—clad as if he had resigned all pretence to please a lady's eye, or to impose upon a West-End tradesman—a check shirt—a rough pea-jacket, his hands buried in its pockets.

Poole started with well—simulated surprise. "What, you! I am just going to my office—in a great hurry at present."

"Hurry or not, I must and will speak to you," said Jasper, doggedly.

"What now? then, step in;—only remember I can't give you snore than five minutes."

The rude visitor followed Poole into the back parlour, and closed the door after him.

Leaning his arm over a chair, his hat still on his head, Losely fixed his fierce eyes on his old friend, and said in a low, set, determined voice: "Now, mark me, Dolly Poole, if you think to shirk my business, or throw me over, you'll find yourself in Queer Street. Have you called on Guy Darrell, and put my case to him, or have you not?"

"I met Mr. Darrell only last night, at a very genteel party." (Poole deemed it prudent not to say by WHOM that genteel party was given, for it will be remembered that Poole had been Jasper's confidant in that adventurer's former designs upon Mrs. Haughton; and if Jasper knew that Poole had made her acquaintance, might he not insist upon Poole's reintroducing him as a visiting acquaintance?) "A very genteel party," repeated Poole. "I made a point of being presented to Mr. Darrell, and very polite he was at first."

"Curse his politeness—get to the point."

"I sounded my way very carefully, as you may suppose; and when I had got him into friendly chat, you understand, I began; Ah! my poor Losely, nothing to be done there—he flew off in a tangent—as much as desired me to mind my own business, and hold my tongue; and upon my life, I don't think there is a chance for you in that quarter."

"Very well—we shall see. Next, have you taken any steps to find out the girl, my daughter?"

"I have, I assure you. But you give me so slight a clue. Are you quite sure she is not in America after all?"

"I have told you before that that story about America was all bosh! a stratagem of the old gentleman's to deceive me. Poor old man," continued Jasper, in a tone that positively betrayed feeling, "I don't wonder that he dreads and flies me; yet I would not hurt him more than I have done, even to be as well off as you are—blinking at me from your mahogany perch like a pet owl with its crop full of mice. And if I would take the girl from him, it is for her own good. For if Darrell could be got to make a provision on her, and, through her, on myself, why, of course the old man should share the benefit of it. And now that these infernal pains often keep me awake half the night, I can't always shut out the idea of that old man wandering about the world, and dying in a ditch. And that runaway girl—to whom, I dare swear, he would give away his last crumb of bread—ought to be an annuity to us both: Basta, basta! As to the American story—I had a friend at Paris, who went to America on

a speculation; I asked him to inquire about this Willaim Waife and his granddaughter Sophy, who were said to have sailed for New York nearly five years ago, and he saw the very persons—settled in New York—no longer under the name of Waife, but their true name of Simpson, and got out from the man that they had been induced to take their passage from England in the name of Waife, at the request of a person whom the mail would not-give up, but to whom he said he was under obligations. Perhaps the old gentleman had done the fellow a kind turn in early life. The description of this /soi-disant/ Waife and his grandchild settles the matter—wholly unlike those I seek; so that there is every reason to suppose they must still be in England, and it is your business to find them. Continue your search—quicken your wits—let me be better pleased with your success when I call again this day week—and meanwhile four pounds, if you please—as much more as you like."

"Why, I gave you four pounds the other day, besides six pounds for clothes; it can't be gone."

"Every penny."

"Dear, dear! can't you maintain yourself anyhow? Can't you get any one to play at cards? Four pounds! Why, with your talent for whist, four pounds are a capital!"

"Whom can I play with! Whom can I herd with? Cracksmen and pickpockets. Fit me out; ask me to your own house; invite your own friends; make up a rubber, and you will then see what I can do with four pounds; and may go shares if you like, as we used to do."

"Don't talk so loud. Losely, you know very well that what you ask is impossible. I've turned over a new leaf."

"But I've still got your handwriting on the old leaf."

"What's the good of these stupid threats? If you really wanted to do me a mischief, where could you go to, and who'd believe you?"

"I fancy your wife would. I'll try. Hillo—"

"Stop—stop—stop. No row here, sir. No scandal. Hold your tongue, or I'll send for the police."

"Do! Nothing I should like better. I'm tired out. I want to tell my own story at the Old Bailey, and have my revenge upon you, upon Darrell, upon all. Send for the police."

Losely threw himself at length on the sofa—(new morocco with spring cushions)—and folded his arms.

"You could only give me five minutes—they are gone, I fear. I am more liberal. I give you your own time to consider. I don't care if I stay to dine; I dare say Mrs. Poole will excuse my dress."

"Losely, you are such a—fellow! If I do give you the four pounds you ask, will you promise to shift for yourself somehow, and molest me no more?"

"Certainly not. I shall come once every week for the same sum. I can't live upon less—until—"

"Until what?"

"Until either you get Mr. Darrell to settle on me a suitable provision; or until you place me in possession of my daughter, and I can then be in a better condition to treat with him myself; for if I would make a claim on account of the girl, I must produce the girl, or he may say she is dead. Besides, if she be as pretty as she was when a child, the very sight of her might move him more than all my talk."

"And if I succeed in doing anything with Mr. Darrell, or discovering your daughter, you will give up all such letters and documents of mine as you say you possess?"

"Say I possess! I have shown them to you in this pocket-book, Dolly Poole—your own proposition to rob old Latham's safe."

Poole eyed the book, which the ruffian took out and tapped. Had the ruffian been a slighter man, Poole would have been a braver one. As it was—he eyed and groaned. "Turn against one's own crony! So unhandsome, so unlike what I thought you were."

"It is you who would turn against me. But stick to Darrell or find me my daughter, and help her and me to get justice out of him; and you shall not only have back these letters, but I'll pay you handsomely— handsomely, Dolly Poole. Zooks, sir—I am fallen, but I am always a gentleman."

Therewith Losely gave a vehement slap to his hat, which, crushed by the stroke, improved his general appearance into an aspect so outrageously raffish, that but for the expression of his countenance the contrast between the boast and the man would have been ludicrous even to Mr. Poole. The countenance was too dark to permit laughter. In the dress, but the ruin of fortune—in the face, the ruin of man. Poole heaved a deep sigh, and extended four sovereigns.

Losely rose and took them carelessly. "This day week," he said—shook himself—and went his way.

CHAPTER VI

FRESH TOUCHES TO THE THREE VIGNETTES FOR THE BOOK OF BEAUTY.

Weeks passed—the London season was beginning—Darrell had decided nothing—the prestige of his position was undiminished,—in politics, perhaps higher. He had succeeded in reconciling some great men; he had strengthened—it might be saved—a jarring cabinet. In all this he had shown admirable knowledge of mankind, and proved that time and disuse had not lessened his powers of perception. In his matrimonial designs, Darrell seemed more bent than ever upon the hazard—irresolute as ever on the choice of a partner. Still the choice appeared to be circumscribed to the fair three who had been subjected to Colonel Morley's speculative criticism—Lady Adela, Miss Vipont, Flora Vyvyan. Much pro and con might be said in respect to each. Lady Adela was so handsome that it was a pleasure to look at her; and that is much when one sees the handsome face every day,—provided the pleasure does not wear off. She had the reputation of a very good temper; and the expression of her countenance confirmed it. There, panegyric stopped; but detraction did not commence. What remained was inoffensive commonplace. She had no salient attribute, and no ruling passion. Certainly she would never have wasted a thought on Mr. Darrell, nor have discovered a single merit in him, if he had not been quoted as a very rich man of high character in search of a wife, and if her father had not said to her: "Adela, Mr. Darrell has been greatly struck with your appearance—he told me so. He is not young, but he is still a very fine looking man, and you are twenty-seven. 'Tis a greater distinction to be noticed by a person of his years and position, than by a pack of silly young fellows, who think more of their own pretty faces than they would ever do of yours."

"If you did not mind a little disparity of years, he would make you a happy wife; and, in the course of nature, a widow, not too old to enjoy liberty, and with a jointure that might entitle you to a still better match."

Darrell thus put into Lady Adela's head, he remained there, and became an */idee fixe/*. Viewed in the light of a probable husband, he was elevated into an "interesting man." She would have received his addresses with gentle complacency; and, being more the creature of habit than impulse, would no doubt, in the intimacy of connubial life, have blest him, or any other admiring husband, with a reasonable modicum of languid affection. Nevertheless, Lady Adela was an unconscious impostor; for, owing to a mild softness of eye and a susceptibility to blushes, a victim ensnared by her beauty would be apt to give her credit for a nature far more accessible to the romance of the tender passion than, happily perhaps for her own peace of mind, she possessed; and might flatter himself that he had produced a sensation which gave that softness to the eye and that damask to the blush.

Honoraria Vipont would have been a choice far more creditable to the good sense of so mature a wooer. Few better specimens of a young lady brought up to become an accomplished woman of the world. She had sufficient instruction to be the companion of an ambitious man—solid judgment to fit her for his occasional adviser. She could preside with dignity over a stately household—receive with grace distinguished guests. Fitted to administer an ample fortune, ample fortune was necessary to the development of her excellent qualities. If a man of Darrell's age were bold enough to marry a young wife, a safer wife amongst the young ladies of London he could scarcely find; for though Honoraria was only three-and- twenty, she was as staid, as sensible, and as remote from all girlish frivolities, as if she had been eight-and-thirty. Certainly had Guy Darrell been of her own years, his fortunes unmade, his fame to win, a lawyer residing at the back of Holborn, or a pretty squire in the petty demesnes of Fawley, he would have had no charm in the eyes of Honoraria Vipont. Disparity of years was in this case no drawback but his advantage, since to that disparity Darrell owed the established name and the eminent station which made Honoraria think she elevated her own self in preferring him. It is but

justice to her to distinguish here between a woman's veneration for the attributes of respect which a man gathers round him, and the more vulgar sentiment which sinks the man altogether, except as the necessary fixture to be taken in with general valuation. It is not fair to ask if a girl who entertains a preference for one of our toiling, stirring, ambitious sex, who may be double her age or have a snub nose, but who looks dignified and imposing on a pedestal of state, whether she would like him as much if stripped of all his accessories, and left unredeemed to his baptismal register or unbecoming nose. Just as well ask a girl in love with a young Lothario if she would like him as much if he had been ugly and crooked. The high name of the one man is as much a part of him as good looks are to the other. Thus, though it was said of Madame de la Valliere that she loved Louis XIV: for himself and not for his regal grandeur, is there a woman in the world, however disinterested, who believes that Madame de la Valliere would have liked Louis XIV. as much if Louis XIV. had been Mr. John Jones; Honoria would not have bestowed her hand on a brainless, worthless nobleman, whatever his rank or wealth. She was above that sort of ambition; but neither would she have married the best-looking and worthiest John Jones who ever bore that British appellation, if he had not occupied the social position which brought the merits of a Jones within range of the eyeglass of a Vipont.

Many girls in the nursery say to their juvenile confidants, "I will marry the man I love." Honoria had ever said, "I will only marry the man I respect." Thus it was her respect for Guy Darrell that made her honour him by her preference. She appreciated his intellect—she fell in love with the reputation which the intellect had acquired. And Darrell might certainly choose worse. His cool reason inclined him much to Honoria. When Alban Morley argued in her favour, he had no escape from acquiescence, except in the turns and doubles of his ironical humour. But his heart was a rebel to his reason; and, between you and me, Honoria was exactly one of those young women by whom a man of grave years ought to be attracted, and by whom, somehow or other, he never is; I suspect, because the older we grow the more we love youthfulness of character. When Alcides, having gone through all the fatigues of life, took a bride in Olympus, he ought to have selected Minerva, but he chose Hebe.

Will Darrell find his Hebe in Flora Vyvyan? Alban Morley became more and more alarmed by the apprehension. He was shrewd enough to recognise in her the girl of all others formed to glad the eye and plague the heart of a grave and reverend seigneur. And it might well not only flatter the vanity, but beguile the judgment, of a man who feared his hand would be accepted only for the sake of his money, that Flora just at this moment refused the greatest match in the kingdom, young Lord Vipont, son of the new Earl of Montfort, a young man of good sense, high character, well-looking as men go—heir to estates almost royal; a young man whom no girl on earth is justified in refusing. But would the whimsical creature accept Darrell? Was she not merely making sport of him, and if, caught by her arts, he, sage and elder, solemnly offered homage and hand to that */belle dedaigneuse/* who had just doomed to despair a comely young magnet with five times his fortune, would she not hasten to make him the ridicule of London.

Darrell had perhaps his secret reasons for thinking otherwise, but he did not confide them even to Alban Morley. This much only will the narrator, more candid, say to the reader: If out of the three whom his thoughts fluttered round, Guy Darrell wished to select the one who would love him best—love him with the whole fresh unreasoning heart of a girl whose childish forwardness sprang from childlike innocence, let him dare the hazard of refusal and of ridicule; let him say to Flora Vyvyan, in the pathos of his sweet deep voice: "Come and be the spoiled darling of my gladdened age; let my life, ere it sink into night, be rejoiced by the bloom and fresh breeze of the morning."

But to say it he must wish it; he himself must love—love with all the lavish indulgence, all the knightly tenderness, all the grateful sympathising joy in the youth of the beloved, when youth for the lover is no more, which alone can realise what we sometimes see, though loth to own it—congenial unions with unequal years. If Darrell feel not that love, woe to him, woe and thrice shame if he allure to his hearth one who might indeed be a Hebe to the spouse who gave up to her his whole heart in

return for hers; but to the spouse who had no heart to give, or gave but the chips of it, the Hebe indignant would be worse than Erinnyes!

All things considered, then, they who wish well to Guy Darrell must range with Alban Morley in favour of Miss Honoria Vipont. She, proffering affectionate respect—Darrell responding by rational esteem. So, perhaps, Darrell himself thought, for whenever Miss Vipont was named he became more taciturn, more absorbed in reflection, and sighed heavily, like a man who slowly makes up his mind to a decision, wise, but not tempting.

CHAPTER VII

CONTAINING MUCH OF THAT INFORMATION WHICH THE WISEST MEN IN THE WORLD COULD NOT GIVE, BUT WHICH THE AUTHOR CAN.

"Darrell," said Colonel Morley, "you remember my nephew George as a boy? He is now the rector of Humberston; married—a very nice sort of woman— suits him Humberston is a fine living; but his talents are wasted there. He preached for the first time in London last year, and made a considerable sensation. This year he has been much out of town. He has no church here as yet.

"I hope to get him one. Carr is determined that he shall be a Bisop. Meanwhile he preaches at —Chapel tomorrow; come and hear him with me, and then tell me frankly—is he eloquent or not?"

Darrell had a prejudice against fashionable preachers; but to please Colonel Morley he went to hear George. He was agreeably surprised by the pulpit oratory of the young divine. It had that rare combination of impassioned earnestness with subdued tones, and decorous gesture, which suits the ideal of ecclesiastical eloquence conceived by an educated English Churchman

"Strong without rage, without o'erflowing full."

Occasionally the old defect in utterance was discernible; there was a gasp as for breath, or a prolonged dwelling upon certain syllables, which, occurring in the most animated passages, and apparently evincing the preacher's struggle with emotion, rather served to heighen the sympathy of the audience. But, for the most part, the original stammer was replaced by a felicitous pause, the pause as of a thoughtful reasoner or a solemn monitor knitting ideas, that came too quick, into method, or chastening impulse into disciplined zeal. The mind of the preacher, thus not only freed from trammel, but armed for victory, came forth with that power which is peculiar to an original intellect—the power which suggests more than it demonstrates. He did not so much preach to his audience as wind himself through unexpected ways into the hearts of the audience; and they who heard suddenly found their hearts preaching to themselves. He took for his text: "Cast down, but not destroyed;" and out of this text he framed a discourse full of true Gospel tenderness, which seemed to raise up comfort as the saving, against despair as the evil, principle of mortal life. The congregation was what is called "brilliant"—statesmen, and peers, and great authors, and fine ladies— people whom the inconsiderate believe to stand little in need of comfort, and never to be subjected to despair. In many an intent or drooping farce in that brilliant congregation might be read a very different tale. But of all present there was no one whom the discourse so moved as a woman who, chancing to pass that way, had followed the throng into the Chapel, and with difficulty obtained a seat at the far end; a woman who had not been within the walls of a chapel or church for long years— a grim woman, in iron grey. There she sate unnoticed, in her remote corner; and before the preacher had done, her face was hidden behind her clasped hands, and she was weeping such tears as she had not wept since childhood.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

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

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