

GEORGE MEREDITH

THE AMAZING
MARRIAGE.
VOLUME 1

George Meredith

The Amazing Marriage. Volume 1

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CHAPTER I

ENTER DAME GOSSIP AS CHORUS

Everybody has heard of the beautiful Countess of Cressett, who was one of the lights of this country at the time when crowned heads were running over Europe, crying out for charity's sake to be amused after their tiresome work of slaughter: and you know what a dread they have of moping. She was famous for her fun and high spirits besides her good looks, which you may judge of for yourself on a walk down most of our great noblemen's collections of pictures in England, where you will behold her as the goddess Diana fitting an arrow to a bow; and elsewhere an Amazon holding a spear; or a lady with dogs, in the costume of the day; and in one place she is a nymph, if not Diana herself, gazing at her naked feet before her attendants loosen her tunic for her to take the bath, and her hounds are pricking their ears, and you see antlers of a stag behind a block of stone. She was a wonderful swimmer, among other things, and one early morning, when she was a girl, she did really swim, they say, across the Shannon and back to win a bet for her brother Lord Levellier, the colonel of cavalry, who left an arm in Egypt, and changed his way of life to become a wizard, as the common people about his neighbourhood supposed, because he foretold the weather and had cures for aches and pains without a doctor's diploma. But we know now that he was only a mathematician and astronomer, all for inventing military engines. The brother and sister were great friends in their youth, when he had his right arm to defend her reputation with; and she would have done anything on earth to please him.

There is a picture of her in an immense flat white silk hat trimmed with pale blue, like a pavilion, the broadest brim ever seen, and she simply sits on a chair; and Venus the Queen of Beauty would have been extinguished under that hat, I am sure; and only to look at Countess Fanny's eye beneath the brim she has tipped ever so slightly in her artfulness makes the absurd thing graceful and suitable. Oh! she was a cunning one. But you must be on your guard against the scandalmongers and collectors of anecdotes, and worst of any, the critic, of our Galleries of Art; for she being in almost all of them (the principal painters of the day were on their knees for the favour of a sitting), they have to speak of her pretty frequently, and they season their dish, the coxcombs do, by hinting a knowledge of her history.

'Here we come to another portrait of the beautiful but, we fear, naughty
Countess of Cressett.'

You are to imagine that they know everything, and they are so indulgent when they drop their blot on a lady's character.

They can boast of nothing more than having read Nymriey's Letters and Correspondence, published, fortunately for him, when he was no longer to be called to account below for his malicious insinuations, pretending to decency in initials and dashes: That man was a hater of women and the clergy. He was one of the horrid creatures who write with a wink at you, which sets the wicked part of us on fire: I have known it myself, and I own it to my shame; and if I happened to be ignorant of the history of Countess Fanny, I could not refute his wantonness. He has just the same benevolent leer for a bishop. Give me, if we are to make a choice, the beggar's breech for decency, I say: I like it vastly in preference to a Nymney, who leads you up to the curtain and agitates it, and bids you to retire on tiptoe. You cannot help being angry with the man for both reasons. But he is the writer society delights in, to show what it is composed of. A man brazen enough to declare that he could

hold us in suspense about the adventures of a broomstick, with the aid of a yashmak and an ankle, may know the world; you had better not know him—that is my remark; and do not trust him.

He tells the story of the Old Buccaneer in fear of the public, for it was general property, but of course he finishes with a Nymney touch: 'So the Old Buccaneer is the doubloon she takes in exchange for a handful of silver pieces.' There is no such handful to exchange—not of the kind he sickeningly nudges at you. I will prove to you it was not Countess Fanny's naughtiness, though she was indeed very blamable. Women should walk in armour as if they were born to it; for these cold sneerers will never waste their darts on cuirasses. An independent brave young creature, exposing herself thoughtlessly in her reckless innocence, is the victim for them. They will bring all society down on her with one of their explosive sly words appearing so careless, the cowards. I say without hesitation, her conduct with regard to Kirby, the Old Buccaneer, as he was called, however indefensible in itself, warrants her at heart an innocent young woman, much to be pitied. Only to think of her, I could sometimes drop into a chair for a good cry. And of him too! and their daughter Carinthia Jane was the pair of them, as to that, and so was Chillon John, the son.

Those critics quoting Nymney should look at the portrait of her in the Long Saloon of Cresset Castle, where she stands in blue and white, completely dressed, near a table supporting a couple of holster pistols, and then let them ask themselves whether they would speak of her so if her little hand could move.

Well, and so the tale of her swim across the Shannon river and back drove the young Earl of Cresset straight over to Ireland to propose for her, he saying; that she was the girl to suit his book; not allowing her time to think of how much he might be the man to suit hers. The marriage was what is called a good one: both full of frolic, and he wealthy and rather handsome, and she quite lovely and spirited.

No wonder the whole town was very soon agog about the couple, until at the end of a year people began to talk of them separately, she going her way, and he his. She could not always be on the top of a coach, which was his throne of happiness.

Plenty of stories are current still of his fame as a four-in-hand coachman. They say he once drove an Emperor and a King, a Prince Chancellor and a pair of Field Marshals, and some ladies of the day, from the metropolis to Richmond Hill in fifty or sixty odd minutes, having the ground cleared all the way by bell and summons, and only a donkey-cart and man, and a deaf old woman, to pay for; and went, as you can imagine, at such a tearing gallop, that those Grand Highnesses had to hold on for their lives and lost their hats along the road; and a publican at Kew exhibits one above his bar to the present hour. And Countess Fanny was up among them, they say. She was equal to it. And some say, that was the occasion of her meeting the Old Buccaneer.

She met him at Richmond in Surrey we know for certain. It was on Richmond Hill, where the old King met his Lass. They say Countess Fanny was parading the hill to behold the splendid view, always admired so much by foreigners, with their Achs and Hechs! and surrounded by her crowned courtiers in frogged uniforms and moustachioed like sea-horses, a little before dinner time, when Kirby passed her, and the Emperor made a remark on him, for Kirby was a magnificent figure of a man, and used to be compared to a three-decker entering harbour after a victory. He stood six feet four, and was broad-shouldered and deep-chested to match, and walked like a king who has humbled his enemy. You have seen big dogs. And so Countess Fanny looked round. Kirby was doing the same. But he had turned right about, and appeared transfixed and like a royal beast angry, with his wound. If ever there was love at first sight, and a dreadful love, like a runaway mail-coach in a storm of wind and lightning at black midnight by the banks of a flooded river, which was formerly our comparison for terrible situations, it was when those two met.

And, what! you exclaim, Buccaneer Kirby full sixty-five, and Countess Fanny no more than three and twenty, a young beauty of the world of fashion, courted by the highest, and she in love with him! Go and gaze at one of our big ships coming out of an engagement home with all her flags

flying and her crew manning the yards. That will give you an idea of a young woman's feelings for an old warrior never beaten down an inch by anything he had to endure; matching him, I dare say, in her woman's heart, with the Mighty Highnesses who had only smelt the outside edge of battle. She did rarely admire a valiant man. Old as Methuselah, he would have made her kneel to him. She was all heart for a real hero.

The story goes, that Countess Fanny sent her husband to Captain Kirby, at the emperor's request, to inquire his name; and on hearing it, she struck her hands on her bosom, telling his Majesty he saw there the bravest man in the king's dominions; which the emperor scarce crediting, and observing that the man must be, then, a superhuman being to be so distinguished in a nation of the brave, Countess Fanny related the well-known tale of Captain Kirby and the shipful of mutineers; and how when not a man of them stood by him, and he in the service of the first insurgent State of Spanish America, to save his ship from being taken over to the enemy,—he blew her up, fifteen miles from land: and so he got to shore swimming and floating alternately, and was called Old Sky-high by English sailors, any number of whom could always be had to sail under Buccaneer Kirby. He fought on shore as well; and once he came down from the tops of the Andes with a black beard turned white, and went into action with the title of Kirby's Ghost.

But his heart was on salt water; he was never so much at home as in a ship foundering or splitting into the clouds. We are told that he never forgave the Admiralty for striking him off the list of English naval captains: which is no doubt why in his old age he nursed a grudge against his country.

Ours, I am sure, was the loss; and many have thought so since. He was a mechanician, a master of stratagems; and would say, that brains will beat Grim Death if we have enough of them. He was a standing example of the lessons of his own *MAXIMS FOR MEN*, a very curious book, that fetches a rare price now wherever a copy is put up for auction. I shudder at them as if they were muzzles of firearms pointed at me; but they were not addressed to my sex; and still they give me an interest in the writer who would declare, that 'he had never failed in an undertaking without stripping bare to expose to himself where he had been wanting in Intention and Determination.'

There you may see a truly terrible man.

So the emperor being immensely taken with Kirby's method of preserving discipline on board ship, because (as we say to the madman, 'Your strait-waistcoat is my easy-chair') monarchs have a great love of discipline, he begged Countess Fanny's permission that he might invite Captain Kirby to his table; and Countess Fanny (she had the name from the ballad

'I am the star of Prince and Czar,
My light is shed on many,
But I wait here till my bold Buccaneer
Makes prize of Countess Fanny':—

for the popular imagination was extraordinarily roused by the elopement, and there were songs and ballads out of number), Countess Fanny despatched her husband to Captain Kirby again, meaning no harm, though the poor man is laughed at in the songs for going twice upon his mission.

None of the mighty people repented of having the Old Buccaneer—for that night, at all events. He sat in the midst of them, you may believe, like the lord of that table, with his great white beard and hair—not a lock of it shed—and his bronze lion-face, and a resolute but a merry eye that he had. He was no deep drinker of wine, but when he did drink, and the wine champagne, he drank to show his disdain of its powers; and the emperor wishing for a narrative of some of his exploits, particularly the blowing up of his ship, Kirby paid his Majesty the compliment of giving it him as baldly as an official report to the Admiralty. So disengaged and calm was he, with his bottles of champagne in him, where another would have been sparkling and laying on the colours, that he was then and there offered Admiral's rank in the Imperial navy; and the Old Buccaneer, like a courtier of our best days,

bows to Countess Fanny, and asks her, if he is a free man to go: and, No, says she, we cannot spare you! And there was a pretty wrangle between Countess Fanny and the emperor, each pulling at the Old Buccaneer to have possession of him.

He was rarely out of her sight after their first meeting, and the ridiculous excuse she gave to her husband's family was, she feared he would be kidnapped and made a Cossack of! And young Lord Cressett, her husband, began to grumble concerning her intimacy with a man old enough to be her grandfather. As if the age were the injury! He seemed to think it so, and vowed he would shoot the old depredator dead, if he found him on the grounds of Cressett: 'like vermin,' he said, and it was considered that he had the right, and no jury would have convicted him. You know what those days were.

He had his opportunity one moonlight night, not far from the castle, and peppered Kirby with shot from a fowling-piece at, some say, five paces' distance, if not point-blank.

But Kirby had a maxim, Steady shakes them, and he acted on it to receive his enemy's fire; and the young lord's hand shook, and the Old Buccaneer stood out of the smoke not much injured, except in the coat-collar, with a pistol cocked in his hand, and he said:

'Many would take that for a declaration of war, but I know it 's only your lordship's diplomacy'; and then he let loose to his mad fun, astounding Lord Cressett and his gamekeeper, and vowed, as the young lord tried to relate subsequently, as well as he could recollect the words— here I have it in print:—'that he was a man pickled in saltpetre when an infant, like Achilles, and proof against powder and shot not marked with cross and key, and fetched up from the square magazine in the central depot of the infernal factory, third turning to the right off the grand arcade in Kingdom-come, where the night-porter has to wear wet petticoats, like a Highland chief, to make short work of the sparks flying about, otherwise this world and many another would not have to wait long for combustion.'

Kirby had the wildest way of talking when he was not issuing orders under fire, best understood by sailors. I give it you as it stands here printed. I do not profess to understand.

So Lord Cressett said: 'Diplomacy and infernal factories be hanged! Have your shot at me; it's only fair.' And Kirby discharged his pistol at the top twigs of an old oak tree, and called the young lord a Briton, and proposed to take him in hand and make a man of him, as nigh worthy of his wife as any one not an Alexander of Macedon could be.

So they became friendly, and the young lord confessed it was his family that had urged him to the attack; and Kirby abode at the castle, and all three were happy, in perfect honour, I am convinced: but such was not the opinion of the Cressetts and Levellers. Down they trooped to Cressett Castle with a rush and a roar, crying on the disgrace of an old desperado like Kirby living there; Dukes, Marchionesses, Cabinet Ministers, leaders of fashion, and fire-eating colonels of the King's body-guard, one of whom Captain John Peter Kirby laid on his heels at ten paces on an April morning, when the duel was fought, as early as the blessed heavens had given them light to see to do it. Such days those were!

There was talk of shutting up the infatuated lady. If not incarcerated, she was rigidly watched. The earl her husband fell altogether to drinking and coaching, and other things. The ballad makes her say:

'My family my gaolers be,
My husband is a zany;
Naught see I clear save my bold Buccaneer
To rescue Countess Fanny!'

and it goes on:

'O little lass, at play on the grass,

Come earn a silver penny,
And you'll be dear to my bold Buccaneer
For news of his Countess Fanny.'

In spite of her bravery, that poor woman suffered!

We used to learn by heart the ballads and songs upon famous events in those old days when poetry was worshipped.

But Captain Kirby gave provocation enough to both families when he went among the taverns and clubs, and vowed before Providence over his big fist that they should rue their interference, and he would carry off the lady on a day he named; he named the hour as well, they say, and that was midnight of the month of June. The Levellers and Cressetts foamed at the mouth in speaking of him, so enraged they were on account of his age and his passion for a young woman. As to blood, the Kirbys of Lincolnshire were quite equal to the Cressetts of Warwick. The Old Buccaneer seems to have had money too. But you can see what her people had to complain of: his insolent contempt of them was unexampled. And their tyranny had roused my lady's high spirit not a bit less; and she said right out: 'When he comes, I am ready and will go with him.'

There was boldness for you on both sides! All the town was laughing and betting on the event of the night in June: and the odds were in favour of Kirby; for though, Lord Cressett was quite the popular young English nobleman, being a capital whip and free of his coin, in those days men who had smelt powder were often prized above titles, and the feeling, out of society, was very strong for Kirby, even previous to the fight on the heath. And the age of the indomitable adventurer must have contributed to his popularity. He was the hero of every song.

"What's age to me!" cries Kirby;
"Why, young and fresh let her be,
But it 's mighty better reasoned
For a man to be well seasoned,
And a man she has in me," cries Kirby.'

As to his exact age:

"Write me down sixty-three," cries Kirby.'

I have always maintained that it was an understatement. We must remember, it was not Kirby speaking, but the song-writer. Kirby would not, in my opinion, have numbered years he was proud of below their due quantity. He was more, if he died at ninety-one; and Chillon Switzer John Kirby, born eleven months after the elopement, was, we know, twenty- three years old when the old man gave up the ghost and bequeathed him little besides a law-suit with the Austrian Government, and the care of Carinthia Jane, the second child of this extraordinary union; both children born in wedlock, as you will hear. Sixty-three, or sixty-seven, near upon seventy, when most men are reaping and stacking their sins with groans and weak knees, Kirby was a match for his juniors, which they discovered.

Captain John Peter Avason Kirby, son of a Lincolnshire squire of an ancient stock, was proud of his blood, and claimed descent from a chief of the Danish rovers.

"What's rank to me!" cries Kirby;
"A titled lass let her be,
But unless my plans miscarry,
I'll show her when we marry;
As brave a pedigree," cries Kirby.'

That was the song-writer's answer to the charge that the countess had stooped to a degrading alliance.

John Peter was fourth of a family of seven children, all males, and hard at the bottle early in life: 'for want of proper occupation,' he says in his Memoirs, and applauds his brother Stanson, the clergyman, for being ahead of him in renouncing strong drinks, because he found that he 'cursed better upon water.' Water, however, helped Stanson Kirby to outlive his brothers and inherit the Lincolnshire property, and at the period of the great scandal in London he was palsied, and waited on by his grandson and heir Ralph Thorkill Kirby, the hero of an adventure celebrated in our Law courts and on the English stage; for he took possession of his coachman's wife, and was accused of compassing the death of the husband. He was not hanged for it, so we are bound to think him not guilty.

The stage-piece is called 'Saturday Night', and it had an astonishing run, but is only remembered now for the song of 'Saturday,' sung by the poor coachman and labourers at the village ale-house before he starts to capture his wife from the clutches of her seducer and meets his fate. Never was there a more popular song: you heard it everywhere. I recollect one verse:

'O Saturday money is slippery metal,
And Saturday ale it is tipsy stuff
At home the old woman is boiling her kettle,
She thinks we don't know when we've tippled enough.
We drink, and of never a man are we jealous,
And never a man against us will he speak
For who can be hard on a set of poor fellows
Who only see Saturday once a week!

You chorus the last two lines.

That was the very song the unfortunate coachman of Kirby Hall joined in singing before he went out to face his end for the woman he loved. He believed in her virtue to the very last.

'The ravished wife of my bosom,' he calls her all through the latter half of the play. It is a real tragedy. The songs of that day have lost their effect now, I suppose. They will ever remain pathetic to me; and to hear the poor coachman William Martin invoking the name of his dear stolen wife Elizabeth, jug in hand, so tearfully, while he joins the song of Saturday, was a most moving thing. You saw nothing but handkerchiefs out all over the theatre. What it is that has gone from our drama, I cannot tell: I am never affected now as I was then; and people in a low station of life could affect me then, without being flung at me, for I dislike an entire dish of them, I own. We were simpler in our habits and ways of thinking. Elizabeth Martin, according to report, was a woman to make better men than Ralph Thorkill act evilly—as to good looks, I mean. She was not entirely guiltless, I am afraid; though in the last scene, Mrs. Kempson, who played the part (as, alas, she could do to the very life!), so threw herself into the pathos of it that there were few to hold out against her, and we felt that Elizabeth had been misled. So much for morality in those days!

And now for the elopement.

CHAPTER II

MISTRESS GOSSIP TELLS OF THE ELOPEMENT OF THE COUNTESS OF CRESSETT WITH THE OLD BUCCANEER, AND OF CHARLES DUMP THE POSTILLION CONDUCTING THEM, AND OF A GREAT COUNTY FAMILY

The twenty-first of June was the day appointed by Captain Kirby to carry off Countess Fanny, and the time midnight: and ten minutes to the stroke of twelve, Countess Fanny, as if she scorned to conceal that she was in a conspiracy with her grey-haired lover, notwithstanding that she was watched and guarded, left the Marchioness of Arpington's ball-room and was escorted downstairs by her brother Lord Levellier, sworn to baffle Kirby. Present with him in the street and witness to the shutting of the carriage-door on Countess Fanny, were brother officers of his, General Abrane, Colonel Jack Potts, and Sir Upton Tomber.

The door fast shut, Countess Fanny kissed her hand to them and drew up the window, seeming merry, and as they had expected indignation and perhaps resistance, for she could be a spitfire in a temper and had no fear whatever of firearms, they were glad to have her safe on such good terms; and so General Abrane jumped up on the box beside the coachman, Jack Potts jumped up between the footmen, and Sir Upton Tomber and the one-armed lord, as soon as the carriage was disengaged from the ruck two deep, walked on each side of it in the road all the way to Lord Cressett's town house. No one thought of asking where that silly young man was—probably under some table.

Their numbers were swelled by quite a host going along, for heavy bets were on the affair, dozens having backed Kirby; and it must have appeared serious to them, with the lady in custody, and constables on the look-out, and Kirby and his men nowhere in sight. They expected an onslaught at some point of the procession, and it may be believed they wished it, if only that they might see something for their money. A beautiful bright moonlight night it happened to be. Arm in arm among them were Lord Pitscrew and Russett, Earl of Fleetwood, a great friend of Kirby's; for it was a device of the Old Buccaneer's that helped the earl to win the great Welsh heiress who made him, even before he took to hoarding and buying,—one of the wealthiest noblemen in England; but she was crazed by her marriage or the wild scenes leading to it; she never presented herself in society. She would sit on the top of Estlemont towers—as they formerly spelt it—all day and half the night in midwinter, often, looking for the mountains down in her native West country, covered with an old white flannel cloak, and on her head a tall hat of her Welsh women-folk; and she died of it, leaving a son in her likeness, of whom you will hear. Lord Fleetwood had lost none of his faith in Kirby, and went on booking bets giving him huge odds, thousands!

He accepted fifty to one when the carriage came to a stop at the steps of Lord Cressett's mansion; but he was anxious, and well he might be, seeing Countess Fanny alight and pass up between two lines of gentlemen all bowing low before her: not a sign of the Old Buccaneer anywhere to right or left! Heads were on the look out, and vows offered up for his appearance.

She was at the door and about to enter the house. Then it was; that with a shout of the name of some dreadful heathen god, Colonel Jack Potts roared out, 'She's half a foot short o' the mark!'

He was on the pavement, and it seems he measured her as she slipped by him, and one thing and another caused him to smell a cheat; and General Abrane, standing beside her near the door, cried: 'Where art flying now, Jack?' But Jack Potts grew more positive and bellowed, 'Peel her wig! we're done!'

And she did not speak a word, but stood huddled-up and hooded; and Lord Levellier caught her up by the arm as she was trying a dash into the hall, and Sir Upton Tomber plucked at her veil and raised it, and whistled:

'Phew!'—which struck the rabble below with awe of the cunning of the Old Buccaneer; and there was no need for them to hear General Abrane say:

'Right! Jack, we've a dead one in hand,' or Jack Potts reply:

'It's ten thousand pounds clean winged away from my pocket, like a string of wild geese!'

The excitement of the varletty in the square, they say, was fearful to hear. So the principal noblemen and gentlemen concerned thought it prudent to hurry the young woman into the house and bar the door; and there she was very soon stripped of veil and blonde false wig with long curls, the whole framing of her artificial resemblance to Countess Fanny, and she proved to be a good-looking foreign maid, a dark one, powdered, trembling very much, but not so frightened upon hearing that her penalty for the share she had taken in the horrid imposture practised upon them was to receive and return a salute from each of the gentlemen in rotation; which the hussy did with proper submission; and Jack Potts remarked, that 'it was an honest buss, but dear at ten thousand!'

When you have been the victim of a deceit, the explanation of the simplicity of the trick turns all the wonder upon yourself, you know, and the backers of the Old Buccaneer and the wagers against him crowed and groaned in chorus at the maid's narrative of how the moment Countess Fanny had thrown up the window of her carriage, she sprang out to a carriage on the off side, containing Kirby, and how she, this little French jade, sprang in to take her place. One snap of the fingers and the transformation was accomplished. So for another kiss all round they let her go free, and she sat at the supper-table prepared for Countess Fanny and the party by order of Lord Levellier, and amused the gentlemen with stories of the ladies she had served, English and foreign. And that is how men are taught to think they know our sex and may despise it! I could preach them a lesson. Those men might as well not believe in the steadfastness of the very stars because one or two are reported lost out of the firmament, and now and then we behold a whole shower of fragments descending. The truth is, they have taken a stain from the life they lead, and are troubled puddles, incapable of clear reflection. To listen to the tattle of a chatting little slut, and condemn the whole sex upon her testimony, is a nice idea of justice. Many of the gentlemen present became notorious as woman-scorners, whether owing to Countess Fanny or other things. Lord Levellier was, and Lord Fleetwood, the wicked man! And certainly the hearing of naughty stories of us by the light of a grievous and vexatious instance of our misconduct must produce an impression. Countess Fanny's desperate passion for a man of the age of Kirby struck them as out of nature. They talked of it as if they could have pardoned her a younger lover.

All that Lord Cressett said, on the announcement of the flight of his wife, was: 'Ah! Fan! she never would run in my ribbons.'

He positively declined to persue. Lord Levellier would not attempt to follow her up without him, as it would have cost money, and he wanted all that he could spare for his telescopes and experiments. Who, then, was the gentleman who stopped the chariot, with his three mounted attendants, on the road to the sea, on the heath by the great Punch-Bowl?

That has been the question for now longer than half a century, in fact approaching seventy mortal years. No one has ever been able to say for certain.

It occurred at six o'clock on the summer morning. Countess Fanny must have known him, —and not once did she open her mouth to breathe his name. Yet she had no objection to talk of the adventure and how Simon Fettle, Captain Kirby's old ship's steward in South America, seeing horsemen stationed on the ascent of the high road bordering the Bowl, which is miles round and deep, made the postillion cease jogging, and sang out to his master for orders, and Kirby sang back to him to look to his priming, and then the postillion was bidden proceed, and he did not like it, but he had to deal with pistols behind, where men feel weak, and he went bobbing on the saddle in dejection,

as if upon his very heart he jogged; and soon the fray commenced. There was very little parleying between determined men.

Simon Fettle was a plain kindly creature without a thought of malice, who kept his master's accounts. He fired the first shot at the foremost man, as he related in after days, 'to reduce the odds.' Kirby said to Countess Fanny, just to comfort her, never so much as imagining she would be afraid, 'The worst will be a bloody shirt for Simon to mangle,' for they had been arranging to live cheaply in a cottage on the Continent, and Simon Fettle to do the washing. She could not help laughing outright. But when the Old Buccaneer was down striding in the battle, she took a pistol and descended likewise; and she used it, too, and loaded again.

She had not to use it a second time. Kirby pulled the gentleman off his horse, wounded in the thigh, and while dragging him to Countess Fanny to crave her pardon, a shot intended for Kirby hit the poor gentleman in the breast, and Kirby stretched him at his length, and Simon and he disarmed the servant who had fired. One was insensible, one flying, and those two on the ground. All in broad daylight; but so lonely is that spot, nothing might have been heard of it, if at the end of the week the postillion who had been bribed and threatened with terrible threats to keep his tongue from wagging, had not begun to talk. So the scene of the encounter was examined, and on one spot, carefully earthed over, blood- marks were discovered in the green sand. People in the huts on the hill- top, a quarter of a mile distant, spoke of having heard sounds of firing while they were at breakfast, and a little boy named Tommy Wedger said he saw a dead body go by in an open coach that morning; all bloody and mournful. He had to appear before the magistrates, crying terribly, but did not know the nature of an oath, and was dismissed. Time came when the boy learned to swear, and he did, and that he had seen a beautiful lady firing and killing men like pigeons and partridges; but that was after Charles Dump, the postillion, had been telling the story.

Those who credited Charles Dump's veracity speculated on dozens of great noblemen—and gentlemen known to be dying in love with Countess Fanny. And this brings us to another family.

I do not say I know anything; I do but lay before you the evidence we have to fix suspicion upon a notorious character, perfectly capable of trying to thwart a man like Kirby, and with good reason to try, if she had bewitched him to a consuming passion, as we are told.

About eleven miles distant, as the crow flies and a bold huntsman will ride in that heath country, from the Punch-Bowl, right across the mounds and the broad water, lies the estate of the Fakenhams, who intermarried with the Coplestones of the iron mines, and were the wealthiest of the old county families until Curtis Fakenham entered upon his inheritance. Money with him was like the farm-wife's dish of grain she tosses in showers to her fowls. He was more than what you call a lady-killer, he was a woman-eater. His pride was in it as well as his taste, and when men are like that, indeed they are devourers!

Curtis was the elder brother of Commodore Baldwin Fakenham, whose offspring, like his own, were so strangely mixed up with Captain Kirby's children by Countess Fanny, as you will hear. And these two brothers were sons of Geoffrey Fakenham, celebrated for his devotion to the French Countess Jules d'Andreuze, or some such name, a courtly gentleman, who turned Papist on his death-bed in France, in Brittany somewhere, not to be separated from her in the next world, as he solemnly left word; wickedly, many think.

To show the oddness of things and how opposite to one another brothers may be, his elder, the uncle of Curtis, and Baldwin, was the renowned old Admiral Fakenham, better known along our sea-coasts and ports among sailors as 'Old Showery,' because of a remark he once made to his flag- captain, when cannon-balls were coming thick on them in a hard-fought action. 'Hot work, sir,' his captain said. 'Showery,' replied the admiral, as his cocked-hat was knocked off by the wind of a cannon-ball. He lost both legs before the war was over, and said merrily, 'Stumps for life' while they were carrying him below to the cockpit. In my girlhood the boys were always bringing home anecdotes of old Admiral Showery: not all of them true ones, perhaps, but they fitted him. He was a

rough seaman, fond, as they say, of his glass and his girl, and utterly despising his brother Geoffrey for the airs he gave himself, and crawling on his knees to a female Parleyvoo; and when Geoffrey died, the admiral drank to his rest in the grave: 'There's to my brother Jeff,' he said, and flinging away the dregs of his glass: 'There 's to the Frog!' and flinging away the glass to shivers: 'There's to the Turncoat!'

He salted his language in a manner I cannot repeat; no epithet ever stood by itself. When I was young the boys relished these dreadful words because they seemed to smell of tar and battle-smoke, when every English boy was for being a sailor and daring the Black Gentleman below. In all truth, the bad words came from him; though an excellent scholar has assured me they should be taken for aspirates, and mean no harm; and so it may be, but heartily do I rejoice that aspirates, have been dropped by people of birth; for you might once hear titled ladies guilty of them in polite society, I do assure you.

We have greatly improved in that respect. They say the admiral's reputation as a British sailor of the old school made him, rather his name, a great favourite at Court; but to Court he could not be got to go, and if the tale be true, their Majesties paid him a visit on board his ship, in harbour one day, and sailors tell you that Old Showery gave his liege lord and lady a common dish of boiled beef with carrots and turnips, and a plain dumpling, for their dinner, with ale and port wine, the merit of which he swore to; and he became so elate, that after the cloth was removed, he danced them a hornpipe on his pair of wooden legs, whistling his tune, and holding his full tumbler of hot grog in his hand all the while, without so much as the spilling of a drop!—so earnest was he in everything he did. They say his limit was two bottles of port wine at a sitting, with his glass of hot grog to follow, and not a soul could induce him to go beyond that. In addition to being a great seaman, he was a very religious man and a stout churchman.

Well, now, the Curtis Fakenham of Captain Kirby's day had a good deal of his uncle as well as his father in him, the spirit of one and the outside, of the other; and, favoured or not, he had been distinguished among Countess Fanny's adorers: she certainly chose to be silent about the name of the assailant. And it has been attested on oath that two days and a night subsequent to the date furnished by Charles Dump, Curtis Fakenham was brought to his house, Hollis Grange, lame of a leg, with a shot in his breast, that he carried to the family vault; and his head gamekeeper, John Wiltshire, a resolute fellow, was missing from that hour. Some said they had a quarrel, and Curtis was wounded and John Wiltshire killed. Curtis was known to have been extremely attached to the man. Yet when Wiltshire was inquired for, he let fall a word of 'having more of Wiltshire than was agreeable to Hampshire'—his county. People asked what that meant. Yet, according to the tale, it was the surviving servant, by whom he, or whoever it may have been, was accidentally shot.

We are in a perfect tangle. On the other hand, it was never denied that Curtis and John Wiltshire were in London together at the time of Countess Fanny's flight: and Curtis Fakenham was one of the procession of armed gentleman conducting her in her carriage, as they supposed; and he was known to have started off, on the discovery of the cheat, with horrible imprecations against Frenchwomen. It became known, too; that horses of his were standing saddled in his innyard at midnight. And more, Charles Dump the postillion was taken secretly to set eyes on him as they wheeled him in his garden-walk, and he vowed it was the identical gentleman. But this coming by and by to the ear of Curtis, he had Charles Dump fetched over to confront him; and then the man made oath that he had never seen Mr. Curtis Fakenham anywhere but there, in his own house at Hollis! One does not really know what, to think of it.

This postillion made a small fortune. He was everywhere in request. People were never tired of asking him how he behaved while the fight was going on, and he always answered that he sat as close to his horse as he could, and did not dream of dismounting; for, he said, 'he was a figure on a horse, and naught when off it.' His repetition of the story, with some adornments, and that same remark, made him the popular man of the county; people said he might enter Parliament, and I think

at one time it was possible. But a great success is full of temptations. After being hired at inns to fill them with his account of the battle, and tipped by travellers from London to show the spot, he set up for himself as innkeeper, and would have flourished, only he had contracted habits on his rounds, and he fell to contradicting himself, so that he came to be called Lying Charley; and the people of the country said it was 'he who drained the Punch-Bowl, for though he helped to put the capital into it, he took all the interest out of it.'

Yet we have the doctor of the village of Ipley, Dr. Cawthorne, a noted botanist, assuring us of the absolute credibility of Charles Dump, whom he attended in the poor creature's last illness, when Charles Dump confessed he had lived in mortal terror of Squire Curtis, and had got the trick of lying, through fear of telling the truth. Hence his ruin.

So he died delirious and contrite. Cawthorne, the great Turf man, inherited a portrait of him from his father the doctor. It was often the occasion of the story being told over again, and used to hang in the patients' reception room, next to an oil-painting of the Punch-Bowl, an admired landscape picture by a local artist, highly-toned and true to every particular of the scene, with the bright yellow road winding uphill, and the banks of brilliant purple heath, and a white thorn in bloom quite beautiful, and the green fir trees, and the big Bowl black as a cauldron,—indeed a perfect feast of harmonious contrasts in colours.

And now you know how it is that the names of Captain Kirby and Curtis Fakenham are alive to the present moment in the district.

We lived a happy domestic life in those old coaching days, when county affairs and county people were the topics of firesides, and the country enclosed us to make us feel snug in our own importance. My opinion is, that men and women grow to their dimensions only where such is the case. We had our alarms from the outside now and again, but we soon relapsed to dwell upon our private business and our pleasant little hopes and excitements; the courtships and the crosses and the scandals, the tea-parties and the dances, and how the morning looked after the stormy night had passed, and the coach coming down the hill with a box of news and perhaps a curious passenger to drop at the inn. I do believe we had a liking for the very highwaymen, if they had any reputation for civility. What I call human events, things concerning you and me, instead of the deafening catastrophes now afflicting and taking all conversation out of us, had their natural interest then. We studied the face of each morning as it came, and speculated upon the secret of the thing it might have in store for us or our heroes and heroines; we thought of them more than of ourselves. Long after the adventures of the Punch-Bowl, our county was anxious about Countess Fanny and the Old Buccaneer, wondering where they were and whether they were prospering, whether they were just as much in love as ever, and which of them would bury the other, and what the foreign people abroad thought of that strange pair.

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