

OUIDA

A HOUSE-PARTY, DON
GESUALDO, AND A
RAINY JUNE

Ouida

**A House-Party, Don
Gesualdo, and A Rainy June**

«Public Domain»

Ouida

A House-Party, Don Gesualdo, and A Rainy June / Ouida — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

A HOUSE-PARTY	5
CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	12
CHAPTER III	16
CHAPTER IV	20
CHAPTER V	22
CHAPTER VI	29
CHAPTER VII	36
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	38

Ouida

A House-Party, Don Gesualdo, and A Rainy June

A HOUSE-PARTY

CHAPTER I

It is an August morning. It is an old English manor-house. There is a breakfast-room hung with old gilded leather of the times of the Stuarts; it has oak furniture of the same period; it has leaded lattices with stained glass in some of their frames, and the motto of the house in old French, "J'ay bon vouloir," emblazoned there with the crest of a heron resting in a crown. Thence, windows open on to a green, quaint, lovely garden, which was laid out by Monsieur Beaumont when he planned the gardens of Hampton Court. There are clipped yew-tree walks and arbors and fantastic forms; there are stone terraces and steps like those of Haddon, and there are peacocks which pace and perch upon them; there are beds full of all the flowers which blossomed in the England of the Stuarts, and birds dart and butterflies pass above them; there are huge old trees, cedars, lime, hornbeam; beyond the gardens there are the woods and grassy lawns of the home park.

The place is called Surrenden Court, and is one of the houses of George, Earl of Usk,—his favorite house in what pastoral people call autumn, and what he calls the shooting season.

Lord Usk is a well-made man of fifty, with a good-looking face, a little spoilt by a permanent expression of irritability and impatience, which is due to the state of his liver; his eyes are good-tempered, his mouth is querulous; nature meant him for a very amiable man, but the dinner-table has interfered with, and in a measure upset, the good intentions of nature: it very often does. Dorothy, his wife, who is by birth a Fitz-Charles, third daughter of the Duke of Derry, is a still pretty woman of thirty-five or -six, inclined to an *embonpoint* which is the despair of herself and her maids; she has small features, a gay expression, and very intelligent eyes; she does not look at all a great lady, but she can be one when it is necessary. She prefers those merrier moments in life in which it is not necessary. She and Lord Usk, then Lord Surrenden, were greatly in love when they married; sixteen years have gone by since then, and it now seems very odd to each of them that they should ever have been so. They are not, however, bad friends, and have even at the bottom of their hearts a lasting regard for each other. This is saying much, as times go. When they are alone they quarrel considerably; but then they are so seldom alone. They both consider this disputatiousness the inevitable result of their respective relations. They have three sons, very pretty boys and great pickles, and two young and handsome daughters. The eldest son, Lord Surrenden, rejoices in the names of Victor Albert Augustus George, and is generally known as Boom.

They are now at breakfast in the garden-chamber; the china is old Chelsea, the silver is Queen Anne, the roses are old-fashioned Jacqueminots and real cabbage roses. There is a pleasant scent from flowers, coffee, cigarettes, and newly-mown grass. There is a litter of many papers on the floor.

There is yet a fortnight before the shooting begins; Lord Usk feels that those fifteen days will be intolerable; he repents a fit of fright and economy in which he has sold his great Scotch moors and deer-forest to an American capitalist; not having his own lands in Scotland any longer, pride has kept him from accepting any of the many invitations of his friends to go to them there for the Twelfth; but he has a keen dread of the ensuing fifteen days without sport.

His wife has asked her own set; but he hates her set; he does not much like his own; there is only Dulcia Waverley whom he does like, and Lady Waverley will not come till the twentieth. He feels bored, hipped, annoyed; he would like to strangle the American who has bought Achnalorrie. Achnalorrie, having gone irrevocably out of his hands, represents to him for the time being the one absolutely to be desired spot upon earth. Good heavens! he thinks, can he have been such a fool as to sell it?

When he was George Rochfort, a boy of much promise going up to Oxford from Eton, he had a clever brain, a love of classics, and much inclination to scholarly pursuits; but he gradually lost all these tastes little by little, he could not very well have said how; and now he never hardly opens a book, and he has drifted into that odd, English habit of only counting time by the seasons for killing things. There is nothing to kill just now except rabbits, which he scorns, so he falls foul of his wife's list of people she has invited, which is lying, temptingly provocative, of course, on the breakfast-table, scribbled in pencil on a sheet of note-paper.

"Always the same thing!" he says, as he glances over it. "Always the very worst lot you could get together, and there isn't one of the husbands or one of the wives!"

"Of course there isn't," says Lady Usk, looking up from a Society newspaper which told her that her friends were all where they were not, and fitted all the caps of scandal on to all the wrong heads, and yet from some mysterious reason gave her amusement on account of its very blunders.

"I do think," he continues, "that nobody on earth ever had such absolutely indecent house-parties as yours!"

"You always say these absurd things."

"I don't think they're absurd. Look at your list: everybody asks that he may meet somebody whom he shouldn't meet!"

"What nonsense! As if they didn't all meet everywhere every day, and as if it mattered!"

"It does matter."

He has not been a moral man himself, but at fifty he likes to *faire la morale pour les autres*. When we are compelled to relinquish cakes and ale ourselves, we begin honestly to believe them indigestible for everybody; why should they be sold, or be made, at all?

"It does matter," he repeats. "Your people are too larky, much too larky. You grow worse every year. You don't care a straw what's said about 'em so long as they please you, and you let 'em carry on till there's the devil to pay."

"They pay him,—I don't; and they like it."

"I know they like it, but I don't choose you should give 'em opportunity for it."

"Oh, nonsense!"

"Not nonsense at all. This house is a kind of Agapemone, a sort of Orleans Club."

"You ought not to be bored in it, then."

"One is always bored at one's own place. I tell you I don't like your people. You ask everybody who wants to meet somebody else; and it's never respectable. It's a joke at the clubs. Jack's always saying to his Jill, 'We'll get Lady Usk to ask us together,' and they do. I say it's indecent."

"But, my dear, if Jack sulks without his Jill, and if Jill's in bad form without Jack, one must ask them together. I want people to like me and to enjoy themselves."

"Enjoy themselves! That means flirting till all's blue with somebody you'd hate if you'd married her."

"What does that matter, so long as they're amused?"

"What an immoral woman you are, Dolly! To hear you—"

"I only mean that I don't think it matters; you know it doesn't matter; everybody's always doing it."

"If you'd only ask some of the women's husbands, some of the men's wives—"

"I couldn't do that, dear. I want people to like my house!"

"Just as I say—you're so immoral."

"No, I'm not. Nobody ever pays a bill for me, except you."

"Enviably distinction! Pay! I think I do pay! Though why you can't keep within your pin-money—"

"Pin-money means money to buy pins. I did buy two diamond pins with it last year, eight hundred guineas each."

"You ought to buy clothes."

"Clothes! What an expression! I can't buy a child's frock even; it all goes in little things, and all my own money too; wedding-presents, christening-presents, churches, orphanages, concerts; and it's all nonsense you're grumbling about my bills to Worth and Elise and Viro; Boom read me a passage out of his Ovid last Easter, in which it describes the quantities of things that the Roman women had to wear and make them look pretty; a great deal more than any of us ever have, and their whole life was spent over their toilets, and then they had tortoise-shell steps to get down from their litters, and their dogs had jewelled collars; and liking to have things nice is nothing new, though you talk as if it were a crime and we'd invented it!"

Usk laughs a little crossly as she comes to the end of her breathless sentences. "*Naso Magister eris*," he remarks, "might certainly be inscribed over the chamber doors of all your friends!"

"I know you mean something odious. My friends are all charming people."

"I'll tell you what I do mean,—that I don't like the house made a joke of in London; I'll shut it up and go abroad if the thing goes on. If a scandal's begun in town in the season, it always comes down here to carry on; if there are two people fond of each other when they shouldn't be, you always ask 'em down here and make pets of 'em. As you're taking to quoting Ovid, I may as well tell you that in his time the honest women didn't do this sort of thing; they left it to the light-o'-loves under the porticoes."

"I really don't know what I've done that I should be called an honest woman! One would think you were speaking to the housemaids! I wish you'd go and stay in somebody else's house: you always spoil things here."

"Very sorry. I like my own shooting. Three days here, three days there, three days t'other place, and expected to leave the game behind you and to say 'thanks' if your host gives you a few brace to take away with you,—not for me, if I know it, while there's a bird in the covers at my own places."

"I thought you were always bored at home?"

"Not when I'm shooting. I don't mind having the house full, either, only I want you to get decenter people in it. Why, look at your list!—they're all paired, like animals in the ark. Here's Lady Arthur for Hugo Mountjoy, here's Iona and Madame de Caillac, here's Mrs. Curzon for Lawrence, here's Dick Wootton and Mrs. Faversham, here's the Duke and Lady Dolgelly, here's old Beaumanoir and Olive Dawlish. I say it's absolutely indecent, when you know how all these people are talked about!"

"If one waited for somebody not talked about, one would have an empty house or fill it with old fogies. My dear George, haven't you ever seen that advertisement about matches which will only light on their own boxes? People in love are like those matches. If you ask the matches without the boxes, or the boxes without the matches, you won't get anything out of either."

"Ovid was born too early: he never knew this admirable illustration!"

"There's only one thing worse than inviting people without the people they care about; it is to invite them with the people they're tired of: I did that once last year. I asked Madame de Saumur and Gervase together, and then found that they had broken with each other two months before. That is the sort of blunder I do hate to make!"

"Well, nothing happened?"

"Of course nothing happened. Nobody ever shows anything. But it looks so stupid in *me*: one is always expected to know—"

"What an increase to the responsibilities of a hostess! She must know all the ins and outs of her acquaintances' unlawful affections as a Prussian officer knows the French by-roads! How simple an affair it used to be when the Victorian reign was young, and Lord and Lady So-and-So and Mr. and Mrs. Nobody all came to stay for a week in twos and twos as inevitably as we buy fancy pigeons in pairs!"

"You pretend to regret those days, but you know you'd be horribly bored if you had always to go out with me."

"Politeness would require me to deny, but truthfulness would compel me to assent."

"Of course it would. You don't want anybody with you who has heard all your best stories a thousand times, and knows what your doctor has told you not to eat; I don't want anybody who has seen how I look when I'm ill, and knows where my false hair is put on. It is quite natural. By the way, Boom says Ovid's ladies had perukes, too, as one of them put her wig on upside down before him, and it chilled his feelings towards her; it would chill most people's. I wonder if they made them well in those days, and what they cost."

"I think you might have invited *some* of the husbands."

"Oh, dear, no. Why? They're all staying somewhere else."

"And your friends are never jealous, I suppose; at least, never about their husbands?"

"An agreeable woman is never jealous of anybody. She hasn't time to be. It is only the women who can't amuse themselves who make that sort of fuss."

"Are you an agreeable woman, my dear?"

"I have always been told so, by everybody except yourself."

Lord Usk rose and laughed as he lighted a cigar.

"Well, I won't have any scandal in the house. Mind that."

"You'd better put that up on a placard, as you have put 'No fees allowed to the servants,' up in the hall."

"I'm sure I would with pleasure if I thought anybody would attend to it. I don't like you're set, Dolly. That's the truth. I wish you'd drop nine-tenths of 'em."

"My dear George, I wish you would mind your own business, to use a very vulgar expression. Do I ever say anything when you talk nonsense in the Lords, and when you give your political picnics and shout yourself hoarse to the farmers who go away and vote against your man? Do I ever say anything when you shoot pheasants which cost you a sovereign a head for their corn, and stalk stags which cost you eighty pounds each for their keep, and lose races with horses which cost you ten thousand a year for their breeding and training? Do I ever say anything when you think that people who are hungry for the whole of your land will be either grateful or delighted because you take ten per cent. off their rents? You know I don't. I think you ought to be allowed to ruin yourself and accelerate the revolution in any absurd way which may seem best to you. In return, pray let me manage my own house-parties and choose my own acquaintances. It is not much to ask. What! are you gone away? How exactly like a man, to go away when he gets the worst of the argument!"

Lord Usk has gone into the gardens in a towering rage. He is a gentleman: he will quarrel with his wife all day long, but he will always stop short of swearing at her, and he feels that if he stays in the room a moment longer he will swear: that allusion to the Scotch stags is too much for humanity (with a liver) to endure. When Achnalorrie is sold to that beastly American, to be twitted with what stags used to cost! Certainly they had cost a great deal, and the keepers had been bores, and the crofters had been nuisances, and there had always been some disease or other among the birds, and he had never cared as much as some men for deer-stalking; but still, as Achnalorrie is irrevocably gone, the thirty-mile drive over the bleak hills, and the ugly house on the stony strathside, and the blinding rains, and the driving snows, and the swelling streams which the horses had to cross as best they could, all seem unspeakably lovely to him and the sole things worth living for: and then his wife has the heartlessness to twit him with the cost of each stag!

"Women have no feeling," he growls, as he walks about the gardens. "If they think they can make a point they'll make it, let it hurt you how it may."

He strolls down between two high yew walls with his hands in his pockets, and feels injured and aggrieved. He ought to be a very happy person; he is still rich despite the troubles of the times, he has fine estates, fair rents, handsome children, and a life of continual change, and yet he is bored and doesn't like anything, and this peaceful, green garden, with its innumerable memories and its delicious, dreamful solitudes, says nothing at all to him. Is it his own fault or the fault of his world? He doesn't know. He supposes it is the fault of his liver. His father was always contented, and jolly as a sand-boy; but then in his father's time there was no grouse-disease, no row about rents, no wire fencing to lame your horses, no Ground Game Bill to corrupt your farmers, no Leaseholder's Bills hanging over your London houses, no corn imported from Arkansas and California, no Joe Chamberlain. When poor Boom's turn comes, how will things be? Joe Chamberlain President, perhaps, and Surrenden cut up into allotment-grounds.

He possesses two other very big places in adjacent counties, Orme Castle and Denton Abbey, but they are ponderous, vast, gorgeous, ceremonious, ugly: he detests both of them. Of Surrenden he is, on the contrary, as fond as he can be of anything except the lost Achnalorrie and a little cosey house that he has at Newmarket where the shadow of Lady Usk has never fallen.

He hears the noise of wheels on gravel. It comes from the other side of the house; it is his brake and his omnibus going down the avenue on their way to the nearest railway-station, four miles off, to meet some of his coming guests there. Well, there'll be nothing seen of them till two o'clock at luncheon. They are all people he hates, or thinks he hates, for that best of all possible reasons, that his wife likes them. Why can't Dulcia Waverley come before the 20th? Lady Waverley always amuses him, and agrees with him. It is so pleasant to be agreed with, only when one's own people do so it makes one almost more angry than when one is contradicted. When his wife agrees with him it leaves him nothing to say. When Dulcia Waverley agrees with him it leaves him with a soothing sense of being sympathized with and appreciated. Dulcia Waverley always tells him that he might have been a great statesman if he had chosen: as he always thinks so himself, the echo of his thoughts is agreeable.

He sits down in one of the clipped-yew-tree arbors to light a new cigar and smoke it peaceably. A peacock goes past him, drawing its beautiful train over the smooth-shaven grass. A mavis is singing on a rose-bough. The babble of a stream hidden under adjacent trees is pleasant on the morning silence. He doesn't notice any of it; he thinks it odiously hot, and what fools they were who clipped a yew-tree into the shape of a periwig, and what a beast of a row that trout-stream makes. Why don't they turn it, and send it farther from the house? He's got no money to do anything, or he would have it done to-morrow.

A peacock begins to scream. The noise of a peacock cannot be said to be melodious or soothing at any time.

"Why don't you wring that bird's neck?" he says savagely to a gardener's boy who is gathering up fallen rose-leaves.

The boy gapes and touches his hair, his hat being already on the ground in sign of respect. The peacocks have been at Surrenden ever since Warren Hastings sent the first pair as a present to the Lady Usk of that generation, and they are regarded with a superstitious admiration by all the good Hampshire people who walk in the gardens of Surrenden or visit them on the public day. The Surrenden peacocks are as sacred to the neighborhood and the workpeople as ever was the green ibis in old Egypt.

"How long will they touch their caps or pull their forelocks to us?" thinks Lord Usk; "though I don't see why they can reasonably object to do it as long as we take off our hats to Wales and say 'Sir' to him."

This political problem suggests the coming elections to his mind: the coming elections are a disagreeable subject for meditation: why wasn't he born in his grandfather's time, when there were

pocket boroughs as handy and portable as snuff-boxes, and the county returned Lord Usk's nominee as a matter of course without question?

"Well, and what good men they got in those days," he thinks, "Fox, and Hervey, and Walpole, and Burke, and all the rest of 'em; fine orators, clever ministers, members that did the nation honor; every great noble sent up some fine fellow with breeding and brains; bunkum and bad logic and dropped aspirates had no kind of chance to get into the House in those days. Now, even when Boom's old enough to put up himself, I dare say there'll be some biscuit-baker or some pin-maker sent down by the Radical Caucus or the English Land League who'll make the poor devils believe that the millennium's coming in with them, and leave Boom nowhere!"

The prospect is so shocking that he throws his cigar-end at the peacocks and gets up out of the evergreen periwig.

As he does so he comes, to his absolute amazement, face to face with his friend Lord Brandolin.

Lord Brandolin is supposed by all the world, or at least that large portion of it which is interested in his movements, to be at that moment in the forest-recesses of Lahore.

"My dear George," says Lord Brandolin, in a very sweet voice, wholly unlike the peacocks', "I venture to take you by surprise. I have left my tub at Weymouth and come on foot across-country to you. It is most unpardonable conduct, but I have always abused your friendship."

The master of Surrenden cannot find words of welcome warm enough to satisfy himself. He is honestly delighted. Failing Dulcia Waverley, nobody could have been so agreeable to him as Brandolin. For once a proverb is justified, "a self-invited guest is thrice welcome." He is for dragging his visitor in at once to breakfast, but Brandolin resists. He has breakfasted on board his yacht; he could not eat again before luncheon; he likes the open air, he wishes to sit in the periwig and smoke.

"Do not let us disturb Lady Usk," he said. "I know châtelaines in the country have a thousand and one things to do before luncheon, and I know your house is full from gable to cellar."

"It will be by night," says the master of Surrenden, with disgust, "and not a decent soul among 'em all."

"That is very sad for you," says Brandolin, with a twinkle in his handsome eyes. He is not a handsome man, but he has beautiful eyes, a patrician profile, and a look of extreme distinction; his expression is a little cynical, but more amused; he is about forty years old, but looks younger. He is not married, having by some miracle of good fortune, or of personal dexterity, contrived to elude all the efforts made for his capture. His barony is one of the oldest in England, and he would not exchange it, were it possible, for a dukedom.

"Since when have you been so in love with decency, George?" he asks, gravely.

Lord Usk laughs. "Well, you know I think one's own house should be proper."

"No doubt," says Lord Brandolin, still more gravely. "To do one's morality vicariously is always so agreeable. Is Lady Waverley not here? She would save a hundred Sodoms, with a dozen Gomorrahs thrown in gratis."

"I thought you were in India," says his host, who does not care to pursue the subject of Lady Waverley's saintly qualifications for the salvation of cities or men.

"I went to India, but it bored me. I liked it when I was twenty-four; one likes so many things when one is twenty-four,—even champagne and a cotillion. How's Boom?"

"Very well; gone to his cousins' in Suffolk. Sure you won't have something to eat? They can bring it here in a minute if you like out-of-doors best."

"Quite sure, thanks. What a lovely place this is! I haven't seen it for years. I don't think there's another garden so beautiful in all England. After the great dust-plains and the sweltering humid heats of India, all this coolness and greenness are like Paradise."

Brandolin laughs languidly.

"Hot! you ungrateful, untravelled country squire! I should like to fasten you to a life-buoy in the middle of the Red Sea. Why do Englishmen perspire in every pore the moment the thermometer's above zero in their own land, and yet stand the tropics better than any other Europeans?"

"You know I've sold Achnalorrie?" says his host, *à propos de rien*, but to him Achnalorrie seems *à propos* of everything in creation.

Brandolin is surprised, but he does not show any surprise. "Ah! Quite right, too. If we wished to please the Radicals we couldn't find any way to please them and injure ourselves equal to our insane fashion of keeping hundreds of square acres at an enormous cost, only that for a few weeks in the summer we may do to death some of the most innocent and graceful of God's creatures."

"That's just the bosh Dolly talks."

"Lady Usk is a wise politician, then. Let her train Boom for his political life. I don't know which is the more utterly indefensible,—our enormous Highland deer-slaughter or our imbecile butchery of birds. They ought to have recorded the introduction of battue-shooting into the British Isles by the Great and Good on the Albert Memorial."

"One must shoot something."

"I never saw why. But 'something' honestly found by a setter in stubble, and three thousand head of game between five guns in a morning, are very different things. What did they give you for Achnalorrie?"

Usk discourses of Achnalorrie with breathless eloquence, as of a lover eulogizing the charms of a mistress forever lost to him.

Brandolin listens with admirable patience, and affects to agree that the vision of the American crawling on his stomach over soaking heather in a thick fog for eight hours after a "stag of ten" is a vision of such unspeakably enviable bliss that it must harrow the innermost soul of the dispossessed lord of the soil.

"And yet, do you know," he says, in conclusion, "I am such a degenerate mortal, such an unworthy 'son of a gun,' that I would actually sooner be sitting in these lovely, sunny, shady gardens, where one expects to see all Spenser's knights coming through the green shadows towards one, than I would be the buyer of Achnalorrie, even in the third week of August?"

"You say so, but you don't mean it," says the seller of Achnalorrie.

"I never say what I don't mean," says Brandolin. "And I never cared about Scotland."

The other smokes dejectedly, and refuses to be comforted.

"Lady Waverley isn't here?" asks Brandolin, with a certain significance. Lady Waverley alone would have the power of making the torturing vision of the American among the heather fade into the background of her host's reflections.

CHAPTER II

"Dolly is nasty about Achnalorrie," says Lord Usk, as they at last rise and approach the house.

"Not logical if she objects to moors on political principles. But ladies are seldom logical when they are as charming as Lady Usk."

"She never likes me to enjoy anything."

"I don't think you are quite just to her: you know I always tell you so." (Brandolin remembers the sweetness with which Dorothy Usk invites Lady Waverley season after season.) "You are a great grumbler, George. I know grumbling is a Briton's privilege, provided for and secured to him in Magna Charta; but still too great abuse of the privilege spoils life."

"Nobody was ever so bothered as I am." Lord Usk regards himself invariably with compassion as an ill-used man. "You always take everything lightly; but then you aren't married, and I suppose you get *some* of your rents?"

"I have always been rather poor, but I don't mind it. So long as I needn't shut up or let the old place, and can keep my boat afloat, I don't much care about anything more. I've enough for myself."

"Ah, that's just it; but when one has no end of family expenses and four great houses to keep up, and the counties looking to one for everything, and the farmers, poor devils, ruined themselves, it's another matter. I assure you if I hadn't made that sacrifice of Achnalorrie—"

Lady Usk coming out of the garden-room down the steps of one of the low windows spares Brandolin the continuation of the lament. She looks pretty; mindful of her years, she holds a rose-lined sun-umbrella over her head; the lace and muslin of her breakfast-gown sweep the lawn softly; she has her two daughters with her, the Ladies Alexandra and Hermione, known as Dodo and Lillie. She welcomes Brandolin with mixed feelings, though with unmixed suavity. She is glad to see him because he amuses Usk, and is a person of wit and distinction whom everybody tries to draw to their houses; but then he upsets all her nicely-balanced combinations; there is nobody for him; he will be the "one out" when all her people so nicely arranged and paired; and, as she is aware that he is not a person to be reconciled to such isolation, he will dispossess somebody else and cause probably those very dissensions and complications from which it is always her effort to keep all her house-parties free. However, there he is; and he is accustomed to be welcomed and made much of wherever he goes. She can do no less.

Brandolin makes himself charming in return, and turns pretty compliments to her and the children, which he can do honestly, for he has always liked Dorothy Usk, and the two young girls are as agreeable objects of contemplation as youth, good looks, fair skins, pretty frocks, open air, much exercise, and an indescribable air of "breeding" can make them. An English patrician child is one of the prettiest and most wholesome things on the face of the earth.

He goes to play lawn tennis with them and their youngest brother Cecil, called the Babe; and Lady Usk, under her rose-lined umbrella, sits as umpire, while her lord saunters off disconsolately to an interview with his steward. In these times those interviews are of an unbroken melancholy, and always result in producing the conviction in his mind that Great Britain cannot possibly last out another year. Without the nobility and gentry what will she be? and they will all go to the lands they've bought in America, if they're in luck, and if they aren't will have to turn shoeblacks.

"But the new electorate won't have its shoes blacked,—won't even have any shoes to black," suggests Mr. Lanyon, the land-steward, who began life as an oppidan at Eton and captain of an Eight, but has been glad to take refuge from the storm on the estates of his old Eton comrade, a trust which he discharges with as much zeal as discretion, dwelling contentedly in a rose-covered grange on the edge of the home-woods of Surrenden. If Boom finds things at all in order when he comes into possession, it will be wholly due to John Lanyon.

In one of the pauses of their game the tennis-players hear the brake and the omnibus returning. None of those whom they bring will be visible until luncheon at two o'clock.

"Have you anybody very nice, Lady Usk?" asks Brandolin of his hostess.

She hesitates; there are some women that he would call nice, but then they each have their man. "I hardly know," she answers, vaguely. "You don't like many people, if I remember—"

"All ladies, surely," says Brandolin, with due gravity.

"I'm sure you don't like Grandma Sophy," says the saucy Babe, sitting cross-legged in front of him. He means the Dowager Duchess of Derry, a very unpleasant person of strong principles, called by the profane "Sophia, by the grace of God," because she ruled Ireland in a viceroyalty of short duration and long-enduring mischief. She and Brandolin do not agree, a fact which the Babe has seen and noted with the all-seeing eyes of a petted boy who is too much in his mother's drawing-rooms.

"I plead guilty to having offended her Grace Sophia," says Brandolin, "but I conclude that Lady Usk's guests are not all like that most admirable lady."

The Babe and his sisters laugh with much irreverent enjoyment; her Grace is not more appreciated by her grandchildren than she was by Ireland.

"If I had known you were going to be so kind as to remember us, I would have invited some of your friends," says his hostess, without coming to the rescue of her august mother's name. "I am so sorry; but there is nobody I think who will be very sympathetic to you. Besides, you know them all already."

"And is that fatal to sympathy? What a cruel suggestion, dear Lady Usk!"

"Sympathy is best new, like a glove. It fits best; you don't see any wrinkles in it for the first hour."

"What cynicism! Do you know that I am very fond of old gloves? But, then, I never was a dandy—"

"Lord Brandolin will like Madame Sabaroff," says Dodo, a very *éveillé* young lady of thirteen.

"Fair prophetess, why? And who is Madame Sabaroff? A second O. K., a female Stepniak?"

"What are those?" says Dodo. "She is very handsome, and a princess in her own right."

"She gave me two Ukraine ponies and a real droschky," says the Babe.

"And Boom a Circassian mare, all white, and each of us a set of Siberian turquoises," says Lilie.

"Her virtues must be as many as her charms," says Brandolin.

"She is a lovely creature," adds Lady Usk, "but I don't think she is your style at all; you like fast women who make you laugh."

"My tastes are catholic where your adorable sex is in question," says Brandolin. "I am not sure that I do like fast women; they are painful to one's vanity; they flirt with everybody."

Lady Usk smiles. "The season before last, I recollect—"

"Dearest lady, don't revert to pre-historic times. Nothing is so disagreeable as to think this year of what we liked last year."

"It was Lady Leamington last year!" cries the terrible Babe.

Brandolin topples him over on the grass and hoists him up on his own shoulders. "You precocious rascal! What will you be when you are twenty?"

"Babe's future is a thing of horror to contemplate," says his mother, smiling placidly.

"Who is Madame Sabaroff?" asks Brandolin, again, with a vague curiosity.

"A princess in her own right; a god-daughter of the Emperor's," says Dodo. "She is so handsome, and her jewels—you never saw such jewels."

"Her father was Chancellor," adds her mother, "and her husband held some very high place at court, I forget what."

"Held? Is he disgraced, then, or dead?"

"Oh, dead: that is what is so nice for her," says Dodo.

"Heartless Dodo!" says Brandolin. "Then if I marry you four years hence I must kill myself to become endeared to you?"

"I should pity you indeed if you were to marry Dodo," says Dodo's mother. "She has not a grain of any human feeling, except for her dog."

Dodo laughs. She likes to be called heartless; she thinks it is *chic* and grown-up; she will weep over a lame puppy, a beaten horse, a dead bird, but she is "hard as nails to humans," as her brother Boom phrases it.

"Somebody will reign some day where the Skye reigns now over Dodo's soul. Happy somebody!" says Brandolin. "I shall be too old to be that somebody. Besides, Dodo will demand from fate an Adonis and a Cr[oe]sus in one!"

Dodo smiles, showing her pretty white teeth; she likes the banter and the flirtation with some of her father's friends. She feels quite old; in four years' time her mother will present her, and she means to marry directly after that.

"When does this Russian goddess who drops ponies and turquoises out of the clouds arrive here?" asks Brandolin, as he picks up his racquet to resume the game.

"She won't be here for three days," says Lady Usk.

"Then I fear I shall not see her."

"Oh, nonsense! You must stay all the month, at least."

"You are too good, but I have so many engagements."

"Engagements are made to be broken. I am sure George will not let you go."

"We won't let you go," cries the Babe, dragging him off to the nets, "and I'll drive you this afternoon, behind my ponies."

"I have gone through most perils that can confront a man, Babe, and I shall be equal even to that," says Brandolin.

He is a great favorite with the children at Surrenden, where he has always passed some weeks of most years ever since they can remember, or he either, for he was a godson and ward of the late Lord Usk, and always welcome there. His parents died in his infancy: even a long minority failed to make him a rich man. He has, however, as he had said, enough for his not extravagant desires, and is able to keep his old estate of St. Hubert's Lea, in Warwickshire, unembarrassed. His chief pleasure has been travelling and sailing, and he has travelled and sailed wherever a horse or a dromedary, a schooner or a canoe, can penetrate. He has told some of his travels in books so admirably written that, *mirabile dictu!* they please both learned people and lazy people. They have earned him a reputation beyond the drawing-rooms and clubs of his own fashionable acquaintances. He has even considerable learning himself, although he carries it so lightly that few people suspect it. He has had a great many passions in his life, but they have none of them made any very profound impression on him. When any one of them has grown tiresome or seemed likely to enchain him more than he thought desirable, he has always gone to Central Asia or the South Pole. The butterflies which he has broken on his wheel have, however, been of that order which is not crushed by abandonment, but mends itself easily and soars to new spheres. He is incapable of harshness to either man or woman, and his character has a warmth, a gayety, and a sincerity in it which endear him inexpressibly to all his friends. His friendships have hitherto been deeper and more enduring than his amours. He is, on the whole, happy,—as happy as any thinking being can be in this world of anomalies and purposeless pains.

"But then you always digest all you eat," Usk remarks to him, enviously.

"Put it the other way and be nearer the point," says Brandolin. "I always eat what I can digest, and I always leave off with an appetite."

"I should be content if I could begin with one," says Usk.

Brandolin is indeed singularly abstemious in the pleasures of the table, to which the good condition of his nerves and constitution may no doubt be attributed. "I have found that eating is an almost entirely unnecessary indulgence," he says in one of his books. "If an Arab can ride, fight,

kill lions, and slay Frenchmen on a mere handful of pulse or of rice, why cannot we live on it too?"
Whereat Usk wrote once on the margin of the volume, in pencil, "Why should we?"

The author, seeing this one day, wrote also on the margin, "For the best of all reasons: to do away with dyspepsia and with doctors, who keep their carriages on our indigestion and make fifty thousand a year each out of it."

Usk allowed that the reason was excellent; but then the renunciation involved was too enormous.

CHAPTER III

Let it not for an instant be supposed that the guests of Surrenden are people looked in the least coldly or shyly on by society. Not they. They go to drawing-rooms, which means nothing; they are invited to state balls and state concerts, which means much. They are among the most eminent leaders of that world of fashion which has of late revolutionized taste, temper, and society in England. Mrs. Wentworth Curzon sails a little near the wind, perhaps because she is careless, and now and then Lady Dawlish has been "talked about," because she has a vast number of debts and a lord who occasionally makes scenes; but, with these exceptions, all these ladies are as safe on their pedestals as if they were marble statues of chastity. That their tastes are studied and their men asked to meet them everywhere is only a matter of delicate attention, like the bouquets which the housekeeper sets out in their bedrooms and the new novels which are laid on their writing-tables.

"I like my house to be pleasant," says Dorothy Usk, and she does not look any further than that: as for people's affairs, she is not supposed to know anything about them. She knows well enough that Iona would not come to her unless she had asked the Marquise de Caillac, and she is fully aware that Lawrence Hamilton would never bestow the cachet of his illustrious presence on Surrenden unless Mrs. Wentworth Curzon brought thither her *fourgons*, her maids, her collie dog, her famous emeralds, and her no less famous fans. Of course she knows that, but she is not supposed to know it. Nobody except her husband would be so ill-bred as to suggest that she did know it; and if any of her people should ever by any mischance forget their tact and stumble into the newspapers, or become notorious by any other accident, she will drop them, and nobody will be more surprised at the discovery of their naughtiness than herself. Yet she is a kind woman, a virtuous woman, a very warm friend, and not more insincere in her friendships than any one else; she is only a hostess of the last lustre of the nineteenth century, a woman who knows her London and follows it in all its amazing and illimitable condonations as in its eccentric and exceptional severities.

The guests are numerous; they might even be said to be miscellaneous, were it not that they all belonged to the same set. There is Dick Wootton, who believes himself destined to play in the last years of the nineteenth century the part played by Charles Greville in the earlier. There is Lord Vanstone, an agreeable, eccentric, unsatisfactory valetudinarian, who ought to have done great things with his life, but has always been too indolent and had too bad health to carry out his friends' very large expectations of him. There is the young Duke of Whitby, good-natured and foolish, with a simple pleasant face and a very shy manner. "If I had that ass's opportunities I'd make the world spin," says Wriothlesley Ormond, who is a very poor and very witty member of Parliament, and also, which he values more, the most popular member of the Marlborough. There is Lord Iona, very handsome, very silent, very much sought after and spoiled by women. There is Hugo Mountjoy, a pretty young fellow in the Guards, with a big fortune and vague ideas that he ought to "do something;" he is not sure what. There is Lawrence Hamilton, who, as far as is possible in an age when men are clothed, but do not dress, gives the law to St. James Street in matters of male toilet. There is Sir Adolphus Beaumanoir, an ex-diplomatist, admirably preserved, charmingly loquacious, and an unconscionable flirt, though he is seventy. Each of these happy or unhappy beings has the lady invited to meet him in whom his affections are supposed to be centred, for the time being, in those tacit but potent relations which form so large a portion of men's and women's lives in these days. It is this condonance on the part of his wife which George Usk so entirely denounces, although he would be very much astonished and very much annoyed if she made any kind of objections to inviting Dulcia Waverley. Happily, there is no Act of Parliament to compel any of us to be consistent, or where would anybody be?

Lady Dolgelly, much older than himself, and with a *taille de couturière*, as all her intimate friends delight to reveal, is supposed to be indispensable to the existence of His Grace of Whitby; Lady Leamington is not less necessary to the happiness of Wriothlesley Ormond. Mr. Wootton would

be supposed incapable of cutting a single joke or telling a single good story unless his spirits were sustained by the presence of Mrs. Faversham, the prettiest brunette in the universe, for whom Worth is supposed to make marvellous combinations of rose and gold, of amber and violet, of deep orange and black, and of a wondrous yellow like that of the daffodil, which no one dares to wear but herself. Mrs. Wentworth Curzon is the momentary goddess of Lawrence Hamilton; and Lord Iona, as far as he has ever opened his handsome mouth to say anything "serious," has sworn himself the slave of Madame de Caillac. Sir Adolphus has spread the ægis of his semi-paternal affection over the light little head of that extravagant little beauty, Lady Dawlish; whilst Hugo Mountjoy is similarly protected by the prescient wisdom and the rare experience of his kindest of friends, Lady Arthur Audley.

Sir Hugo and several other gilded youths there present are all exact patterns of one another, the typical young Englishman of the last years of this curious century; the masher pure and simple; close-shaven, close-cropped, faultlessly clothed, small of person, small of features, stiff, pale, insignificant, polite, supercilious, indifferent; occasionally amusing, but never by any chance original; much concerned as to health, climate, and their own nerves; often talking of their physicians, and flitting southward before cold weather like swallows, though they have nothing whatever definite the matter with them.

These young men are all convinced that England is on the brink of ruin, and they talk of it in the same tone with which they say that their cigarette is out, or the wind is in the east. The Throne, the Church, the Lords, and the Thirty-Nine Articles are all going down pell-mell next week, and it is very shocking; nevertheless, there is no reason why they should not be studious of their digestions and very anxious about the parting of their hair.

It never occurs to them that they and their father's battue-shooting, pigeon-shooting, absenteeism, clubism, and general preference for every country except their own, may have had something to do with bringing about this impending cataclysm. That all the grand old houses standing empty, or let to strangers, among the rich Herefordshire pastures, the green Warwickshire woods, the red Devon uplands, the wild Westmoreland fells, may have also something to do with it, never occurs to them. That while they are flirting at Aix, wintering at Pau, throwing comfits at Rome, losing on the red at Monaco, touring in California, or yawning in Berlin, the demagogue's agents are whispering to the smock-frocks in the meadows, and pouring the gall of greed and hatred into the amber ale of the village pothouse, never occurs to them. If any one suggests it, they stare: "such a beastly climate, you know; nobody can stand it. Live in the country? Oh, Lord! who could live in the country?"

And then they wonder that Mr. George has replaced Sir Roger de Coverley, and that Joseph Chamberlain's voice is heard instead of Edmund Burke's.

Their host could kick them with a sensation of considerable satisfaction. Their neatness, smallness, and self-complacency irritate him excessively. The bloods of George the Fourth's time at least were men,—so he says.

"You do these poor boys injustice," says Brandolin. "When they get out in a desert, or are left to roast and die under the equator, they put off all their affectations with their starched cambric, and are not altogether unworthy of their great-grandfathers. Britons are still bad ones to beat when the trial comes."

"They must leave their constitutions at their clubs, then, and their nervous system in their hat-boxes," growls Usk. "If you are like those namby-pamby fellows when you are twenty, Boom, I'll put a bullet through your head myself," he says to his heir one morning, when that good-looking and high-spirited boy has come back from Suffolk.

Boom laughs. He is a careless, high-spirited, extravagant lad, and he does not at present lean towards the masher type. Gordon is in his head; that is his idea of a man. The country had one hero in this century, and betrayed him, and honors his betrayer; but the hearts of the boys beat truer than that of the House of Commons and the New Electorate. They remember Gordon, with a noble, headlong, quixotic wish to go and do likewise. That one lonely figure standing out against the yellow light of

the desert may perhaps be as a pharos to the youth of his nation, and save them from the shipwreck which is nigh.

"Curious type, the young fellows," says Brandolin, musingly. "I don't think they will keep England what our fathers and grandfathers made it. I don't think they will, even if Chamberlain and Company will let them, which they certainly won't."

"Tell you what it is," says Usk, "it all comes of having second horses hunting, and loaders behind you out shooting."

"You confound cause and effect. The race wouldn't have come to second horses and men to load if it hadn't degenerated. Second horses and men to load indicate in England just what pasties of nightingales' tongues, and garlands of roses, indicated with the Romans,—effeminacy and self-indulgence. The Huns and the Goths were knocking at their doors, and Demos and the Débauché are knocking at ours. History repeats itself, which is lamentable, for its amazing tendency to tell the same tale again and again makes it a bore.

"I should like to know, by the way," he continues, "why English girls get taller and taller, stronger and stronger, and are as the very palm of the desert for vigor and force, whilst the English young man gets smaller and smaller, slighter and slighter, and has the nerves of an old maid and the habits of a valetudinarian. It is uncommonly droll; and, if the disparity goes on increasing, the ladies will not only get the franchise, but they will carry the male voter to the polling-place on their shoulders."

"As the French women did their husbands out of some town that surrendered in some war," said Boom, who was addicted to historical illustration and never lost occasion to display it.

"They won't carry their *husbands*," murmurs Brandolin. "They'll drive *them*, and carry somebody else."

"Will they have any husbands at all when they can do as they like?" says Boom.

"Probably not," says Brandolin. "My dear boy, what an earthly paradise awaits you when you shall be of mature age, and shall have seen us all descend one by one into the tomb, with all our social prejudices and antiquated ways!"

"I dare say he'll be a navvy in New Guinea by that time, and all his acres here will be being let out by the state at a rack-rent which the people will call free land," says the father, with a groan.

"Very possible, too," replies Brandolin.

The boy's eyes go thoughtfully towards the landscape beyond the windows, the beautiful lawns, the smiling gardens, the rolling woods. A look of resolution comes over his fair frank face.

"They shan't take our lands without a fight for it," he says, with a flush on his cheeks.

"And the fight will be a fierce one," says Brandolin, with a sigh, "and I am afraid it is in Mr. Gladstone's 'dim and distant future,'—that is to say, very near at hand indeed."

"Well, I shall be ready," says the lad. Both his father and Brandolin are silent, vaguely touched by the look of the gallant and gracious boy, as he stands there with the sun in his brave blue eyes, and thinking of the troubled time which will await his manhood in this green old England, cursed by the spume of wordy demagogues, and hounded on to envenomed hatreds and causeless discontents, that the professional politician may fatten on her woes.

What will Boom live to see?

It will be a sorry day for the country when her wooded parks and stately houses are numbered with the things that are no more.

Brandolin puts his arm over the boy's shoulder, and walks away with him a little way under the deep boughs of yew.

"Look here, Boom," he says to him, "you won't care to be like those fellows, but you don't know how hard it is to get out of the fashion of one's set, to avoid going with the stream of one's contemporaries. Nobody can say what will be the style of the 'best men' when you're of age, but I'm much afraid it will still be the Masher. The Masher is not very vicious, he is often cultured, he is a more harmless animal than he tries to appear, but he is weak; and we are coming on times, or times

are coming on us, when an English gentleman will want to be very strong if he is to hold his own and save his country from shame in her old age. Don't be conventional. Scores of people who would be ashamed to seem virtuous haven't courage to resist appearing vicious. Don't talk all that odious slang which is ruining English. Don't get into that stupid way of counting the days and seasons by steeple-chases, coursing-meetings, flat-races, and the various different things to be shot at. Sport is all very well in its place, but Squire Allworthy beating the turnips with a brace of setters is a different figure to Lord Newgold sending his hampers of pheasants to Leadenhall. Certainly, Mr. Bradlaugh has no more right to make a misdemeanor of our covert-shooting, and put the axe to our home woods, than we have to make a misdemeanor of his shoes and stockings, or put an axe to his head. But I think if of our own accord we centred our minds and spent our guineas less on our preserves, we might be wiser, and if we grudged our woods less to the hawk and the woodpecker and the owl and the jay, and all the rest of their native population, we should be wiser still. I never see a beast or a bird caught or dead in a keeper's trap but that I think to myself that after all, if we ourselves are caught in the end between the grinning jaws of anarchy, it will really be only partial justice on our injustice. Only I fear that it won't better the birds and beasts very much, even when we all go to prison for the crime of property, and Bradlaugh will grub up their leafy haunts with a steam plough from Chicago."

CHAPTER IV

Meanwhile, let the country be going to the dogs as it may, Surrenden is full of very gay people, and all its more or less well-matched doves are cooing at Surrenden, whilst the legitimate partners of their existences are diverting themselves in other scenes, Highland moors, German baths, French châteaux, Channel yachting, or at other English country houses. It is George Usk's opinion that the whole thing is immoral: he is by no means a moral person himself. His wife, on the contrary, thinks that it is the only way to have your house liked, and that nobody is supposed to know anything, and that nothing of that sort matters; she is a woman who on her own account has never done anything that she would in the least mind having printed in the *Morning Post* to-morrow.

"Strange contradiction!" muses Brandolin. "Here is George, who's certainly no better than he should be, hallooing out for Dame Propriety, and here's my lady, who's always run as straight as a crow flies, making an Agapemone of her house to please her friends. To the pure all things are pure, I suppose; but if purity can stand Mrs. Wentworth Curzon and Lady Dawlish, I think I shall select my wife from among *les jolies impures*."

However, he takes care audibly to hold up his hostess's opinions and condemn her lord's.

"The poor little woman means well, and only likes to be popular," he reflects; "and we are none of us so sure that we shan't want indulgence some day."

Brandolin is very easy and elastic in his principles, as becomes a man of the world; he is even considered by many of his friends a good deal too lax in all his views; but in the depths of his soul there is a vague dislike to similar looseness of principle in women. He may have been glad enough to avail himself of the defect; that is another matter; he does not like it, does not admire it: licentiousness in a woman seems to him a fault in her taste; it is as if she wore fur slippers with her court train. "Of course," he will say, apologetically, "this idea of mine is born of the absurd English conventionality which sleeps in all of us; nothing better; an Englishman is always conventional somewhere, let him live as he will."

He himself is the most unconventional of beings, appalls his county, terrifies his relations, and irrevocably offends the bishop of his diocese; he has lived with Arabs, Bohemians, and wild men of the woods, and believes that he has not such a thing as prejudice about him; yet at the bottom of his soul there is this absurd feeling born of sheer conventionality,—he cannot thoroughly like a light-minded woman. Absurd, indeed, in the times in which his lot is cast! He is quite ashamed of it.

Dorothy Usk does not favor the modern mode of having relays of guests for two or three days; she thinks it makes a country house too like an hotel. She wishes her people to be perfectly well assorted, and then to stay with her at least a week, even two weeks or three weeks. People do not often object: Orme, Denton, and Surrenden are all popular places, and Surrenden is perhaps most popular of all.

"An ideal house," says Brandolin, who would not stay a day where he was not as free as air.

"It's too much like an hotel," grumbles the master of it, "and an hotel where the *table-d'hôte* bell rings to deaf ears. Lord! I remember in my poor mother's days everybody had to be down to breakfast at nine o'clock every morning as regularly as if they were charity children, and the whole lot of 'em were marched off to church on Sunday whether they liked it or not. The villagers used to line the path across the fields to see the great folks pass. Now it's as much as ever Dolly can do to get a woman or two up in time to go with her. How things are changed, by Jove! And it isn't so very long ago, either."

"The march of intellect, my dear George," says Brandolin; "neither *le bon Dieu* nor we are great folks any longer."

"Well, I think it's a pity," sighs Usk. "Everybody was happier then, and jollier too, though we do tear about so to try and get amused."

"There is still nothing to prevent you going to sleep in the big pew if it pleases you," replies Brandolin; "and Lawrence Hamilton always goes that he may look at Mrs. Curzon's profile as she sings: she is really saintly then. I think Sunday service is to Englishwomen what confession is to Catholic ladies: it sweeps all the blots off the week's tablets. It is convenient, if illogical."

"You are very irreligious," says his host, who is invariably orthodox when orthodoxy doesn't interfere with anything.

"Not more so than most people," says Brandolin. "I have even felt religious when I have been alone in the savannas or in the jungle. I don't feel so in a wooden box covered with red velvet, with a curate bawling in my ears about the hewing in pieces of Agag."

"That's nothing to do with it," says Usk: "we're bound to set an example."

"That's why you doze in public, and Mrs. Curzon wears her big pearls, to lead the school-children in the way they should go."

"That's nothing to do with it," repeats Lord Usk, somewhat crossly. He has a comfortable if indistinct idea that he does something patriotic, patriarchal, and highly praiseworthy in getting up an hour earlier than usual one Sunday out of three, and putting on a tall hat, a frock-coat, and a pair of new gloves, to attend the village church for morning service when he is at Orme, Denton, or Surrenden in fine weather.

If he sleeps, what of that? There are curtains to the pew, and nobody sees him except the Babe, who takes fiendish rapture in catching big flies and releasing them from a careful little hand to alight on his father's forehead or nose. The Babe would define the Sunday morning as a horrid bore tempered by blue-bottles.

"What a curiously conventional mind is the English mind!" thinks Brandolin, when he is alone. "Carlisle is right: the gig is its standard. The gig is out of fashion as a vehicle, but the national mind remains the same as in the age of gigs,—content with the outside of things, clinging to the husk, to the shell, to the outward appearance, and satisfied with these. My dear friend puts on his chimney-pot, then takes it off and snores in his pew, and thinks that he has done something holy which will sustain both Church and State, as he thinks that he prays when he buries his face in his hat and creases his trousers on a hassock! Mysterious consolations of the unfathomable human breast!"

CHAPTER V

A few new people have come by the brake, and make their appearance at luncheon. More come by the five-o'clock train, and are visible at six-o'clock tea, which is always to be had in the library any time before seven: dinner at all the Usk houses is always at nine. Brandolin's doctrines do not prevail with any of his acquaintances, although he, unlike most professors, emphasizes them by example.

Among the people who come by the latter train are the famous Mr. Wootton, a man very famous at London dinner-parties, and Lady Gundrede Vansittart, whose dinners are the best in London.

"Where would those two people be if you brought the pulse and the rice you recommend into fashion?" says their host to Brandolin. "Take 'em away from the table, they'd be good for nothing. He wouldn't say 'Bo' to a goose, and she wouldn't be worth leaving a card upon. Believe me, my dear Guy, such *esprit* as there is left in us is only brought out by eating."

"I think you invert all your reasonings," says Brandolin. "Say rather, that too much eating has destroyed all *esprit*. Don't we eat all day long everywhere, or at least are expected to do so? You lament your ruined digestion. It is impossible to digest when time is only counted by what our beloved Yankees call square meals (why square I fail to fathom), and for women it is worse than for us, because they eat such quantities of sweet things we don't touch, and then the way they go in for caviare bread-and-butter, and anchovy sandwiches, and all kinds of rich cakes, and *deux doigts de Madère* or glasses of kümmel at the tea-hour,—it is frightful! I wonder they have any complexions at all left, even with the assistance of all the '*secrets de Vénus*.'"

"You won't alter 'em, my dear fellow," replies Usk, "if you put yourself out about it ever so much. If you were to marry a savage out of Formosa, or an Esquimaux, she'd take kindly to the caviare and the kümmel before a week was out, if you brought her to Europe. Why, look at dogs,—you may keep 'em on biscuit and tripe if they live in the kennels, but if they once come to the dining-room they'll turn their noses up at a beef-steak if it isn't truffled!"

"Dogs, at least, stop short of the kümmel," says Brandolin; "but if you were to put together the sherry, the dry champagne, the liqueurs at tea, the brandy in the *chasse* at dinner, which a fashionable woman takes in the course of the day (not counting any pick-me-up that she may require in her own room), the amount would be something enormous,—incredible! You would not believe the number of women who have cured me of an unhappy passion for them by letting me see what a lot they could drink."

"You will adore the Sabaroff, then. She never touches anything that I see, except tea."

"Admirable person! I am ready to adore her. Tell me more about her. By the way, who is she?"

"Oh, you must go to Dolly for biographies of her foreigners. I can't keep even their names in my head."

"Foreigners! What an expression!" cries Dorothy Usk, in disdain. "Since steam effaced frontiers, nobody but insular people like ourselves ever use such a term. Nationalities are obliterated."

She is very fond of Xenia Sabaroff: she has a great many warm attachments to women who help to make her house attractive.

"Nationalities are still discernible in different tobaccos," murmurs Brandolin. "The Havana won't acknowledge an equal in the Cavour."

"Dolly don't know anything about her," continues Usk, clinging to the subject.

"Oh, my dear!" cried his wife, shocked, "when she is the niece of the great Chancellor and her mother was a Princess Dourtza."

"You don't know anything about her," repeats Usk, with that unpleasant obstinacy characteristic of men when they talk to their wives. "You met her in Vienna and took one of your crazes for her, and she may have sent a score of lovers to Siberia, or deserve to go there herself, for anything you can tell. One can never be sure of anything about foreigners."

"How absurd you are, and how *insular*!" cries Dorothy Usk, again. "'Foreigners!' As if there were any foreigners in these days, when Europe is like one family!"

"A family which, like most families, squabbles and scratches pretty often, then," says Usk,—which seems to his wife a reply too vulgar to be worthy of contradiction. He is conscious that Xenia Sabaroff is a very great lady, and that her quarterings, backed by descent and alliance, are wholly irreproachable,—indeed, written in that *libro d'oro*, the "Almanach de Gotha," for all who choose to read.

Her descent and her diamonds are alike immaculate, but her character?—he is too old-fashioned a Briton not to think it very probable that there is something *louche* there.

Usk is a Russophobic, as becomes a true Tory. He has a rooted impression that all Russians are spies when they are not swindlers; much as in the early years of the century his grandsire had been positive that all Frenchmen were assassins when they were not dancing-masters. The White Czar has replaced the Petit Caporal, and the fur cap the cocked hat, in the eyes of Englishmen of Usk's type, as an object of dread and detestation. He would never be in the least surprised if it turned out that the real object of Madame Sabaroff's visit to Surrenden were to have possible opportunities to examine the facilities of Weymouth as a landing-place for Cossacks out of Muscovite corvettes.

"Russians are tremendous swells at palaver," he says, with much contempt, "gammon you no end if you like to believe 'em: they've always some political dodge or other behind it all."

"I don't say she isn't an agreeable woman," he continues, now: his admiration of Madame Sabaroff is much mitigated by his sense that she has a rather derisive opinion of himself. "I don't say she isn't an agreeable woman, but she gives me the idea of artificiality,—insincerity,—mystery."

"Just because she's a Russian!" cries his wife, with disdain.

"My dear George," observes Brandolin, "there are preconceived ideas about all nationalities. As a rule, they are completely false. The received Continental idea is that an Englishman is a bluff, blunt, unpleasant, opinionated person, very cross, very clean too it is true, but on the strength of his tub and his constitution despising all the rest of mankind. Now, how completely absurd such an opinion is! You yourself are an example of the *suaviter in modo, fortiter in re*, of which the true-blue Briton always gives so admirable an example."

Usk laughs, but sulkily; he has the impression that his beloved friend is making fun of him, but he is not quite sure. He himself believes that he is an ideal Englishman; Brandolin is only half or a quarter of one, he does not shoot, wears furs in winter, only drinks very light Rhenish wine, never goes to any church, and never cuts his hair very short. Added to this, he has no fixed political opinion, except a general impression that England and the world in general are going down-hill as fast as they can, "tobogganing" as they say in Canada, at the rate of fifty miles a minute, to land in the slough of Socialism and be picked out of it by some military despot,—democracy invariably ending in absolutism.

"What ridiculous rubbish!" says his wife. "You might as well say that the *demoiselles-mannequins* at Worth's or Rodrigue's are conspiring for the Orleanists when they try on my clothes."

"They are conspiring for the ruin of your family," says Usk, with a groan. "Whose purse can stand those Paris prices?"

"What an irrelevant remark!" cries Lady Usk. "You are always dragging money-questions into everything."

"Those *faiseurs*, as you call 'em," continues Usk, unheeding, "are at the root of half the misery of society. Women get into debt up to their eyes for their toilets, and they don't care what abomination they do if they get enough out of it to go on plunging. Hundred-guinea gowns soon make up a pretty total when you change 'em three times a day."

"And if women are guys aren't the men furious?" asks his wife. "Even if they try to economize, aren't they always taunted with being dowdies? You none of you know anything about the cost of things, and you expect everybody to be *bien mise* on a halfpenny a day. When Boom saw me at Ascot

this year he stared at me, and whispered to me, 'Oh, I say, mother! you've got the same bonnet on you had at the Oaks. I do hope the other fellows won't notice it.' That is how he will speak to his wife some day; and yet I dare say, like you, he will expect her to get her bonnets from Virot at ten francs apiece!"

Lady Usk is angry and roused.

"Look at my poor little sister," she goes on. "What a life that brute Mersey leads her about money! All those dreadfully plain girls to dress, and nothing to do it on, and yet if they are not all well got up wherever they go to, he swears he is ashamed to be seen with them. You can't dress well, you can't do anything well, without spending money; and if you haven't money you must get into debt. That is as clear as that two and two are four. When ever do men remember their own extravagances? You smoke ten cigars a day; your cigars cost a shilling or eighteenpence each,—that is ten or fifteen shillings a day; five pounds a week, not counting your cigarettes! Good heavens! five pounds a week for sheer silly personal indulgence that your doctors tell you will canker your tongue and dry up your gastric juice! At all events, our toilets don't hurt our digestion; and what would the world look like if women weren't well dressed in it? Your cigars benefit nobody, and only make your teeth yellow."

"Well, in a year they cost about what one ball-gown does that's worn twice."

"I always wear mine three times, even in London," says Dorothy Usk, with conscious virtue. "But I don't see any sin in spending money. I think it ought to be spent. But you are always dragging money-questions into everything, and Boom says that the Latin person whom you and Lord Brandolin are always quoting declares most sensibly that money should always be regarded as a means, never as an end; and if it is to be a means to anything, must not it be spent before it can become so?"

"That's neither here nor there," replies her lord; "and if Boom only reads his classics upside down like that he'd better leave 'em alone."

"You are never content. Most men would be delighted if a boy read *at all*."

"I don't know why, I'm sure," replies Usk, drearily. "Reading's going out, you know; nobody'll read at all fifty years hence: poking about in guinea-pigs' stomachs, and giving long names to insects out of the coal-hole, is what they call education nowadays."

"Frederic Harrison has said very aptly," remarks Brandolin, who is present at this conjugal colloquy, and seeks to make a diversion on it, "that the boast of science is to send the Indian mails across seas and deserts in nine days, but that science cannot put in those mail-bags a single letter equal to Voltaire's or Sévigné's, and he doubts very much that there is one."

"It's an ill bird that fouls its own nest," says Usk, grimly: "still, I'm very glad if those scientific prigs fall out among themselves."

"I think some people write charming letters still," says Dorothy Usk. "Of course when one is in a hurry—and one is almost always in a hurry—"

"Hurry is fatal, Lady Usk," says Brandolin. "It destroys style, grace, and harmony. It is the curse of our times. The most lovely thing in life is leisure; and we call it progress to have killed it."

"Read this letter," says his hostess, giving him one which she holds in her hand. "There is nothing private in it, and nothing wonderful, but there is a grace in the expressions; whilst the English, for a foreigner, is absolutely marvellous."

"I thought there were no foreigners?" says Usk. "I thought steam had effaced nationalities?"

His wife does not deign to reply.

Brandolin has taken the letter with hesitation. "Do you really think I may read it?"

"When I tell you to do so," says Dolly Usk, impatiently. "Besides, there is nothing in it, only it is pretty."

Brandolin reads; it is on very thick paper, almost imperceptibly scented, with a princess's crown embossed on it and a gold X.

"It is very kind of you, dear Lady Usk, to have remembered a *solitaire* like myself in the midst of your charming children and your many joys." ("My many annoyances, she means," interpolates Lady Usk.) "I will be with you, as you so

amiably wish, next Tuesday or Wednesday. I am for the moment in Paris, having been this month at Aix, not that I have any aches or pains myself, but a friend of mine, Marie Woronszoff, has many, and tries to cure them by warm sunshine and the cold douches which her physicians prescribe. There are many pleasant people here; every one is supposed to be very ill and suffering agony, but every one laughs, flirts, plays, sits under the little tents under the trees, dances at the Casino, and eats a fair dinner as usual, so that if Pallida Mors be indeed among us she looks just like every one else. I came to Aix from my own place on the White Sea, and the gay groups, the bright alleys, the green embowered chalets, and the goatherds with their flocks which come tinkling their bells down the hill-sides in all directions, all seemed to me like an operetta of Offenbach's, spiritualized and washed with the pure daylight and the mountain-air, but still Offenbach. How are your children? Do they still care for me? That is very sweet of them. A day at their years is as long as a season at mine. Assure them of my unforgetting gratitude. I shall be pleased to be in England again, and, though I do not know Surrenden, my recollections of Orme tell me *d'avance* that I shall in any house of yours find the kindest of friends, the most sympathetic of companions. Say many things to your lord for me. I think he is only so discontented because the gods have been too good to him and given him too completely everything he can desire." ("That's all *she* knows about it!" says Usk, *sotto voce*.) "*Au revoir*, dear Lady Usk. Receive the assurance of my highest consideration, and believe in my sincere regard. *Bien à vous*.—Xenia P. Sabaroff."

"A very pretty letter," says Brandolin. "Many thanks." And he restores it to its owner.

"Bunkum!" says Usk.

"Not a bit in the world," says his wife, with contempt and indignation. "*She* does not 'pose,' if you do!"

"My dear George," says Brandolin, "you are one of those thorough-going Britons who always think that everybody who doesn't deal in disagreeable remarks must be lying. Believe me, there are people who really see 'the side that's next the sun,'—even in a crab-apple."

"And deuced irritating, too, they are," says Usk, with emphasis. "'What a beastly bad day,' one says to 'em when it's pouring cats and dogs, and they answer, 'Oh, yes, but rain was so wanted we must be thankful.' That's the kind of answer that would make a saint swear."

"You are not a saint, and you swear on small provocation," replies Brandolin. "To look at rain in that light argues true philosophy. Unfortunately, philosophy is too often strained to bursting in our climate, by having to contemplate rain destroying the crops. If we only had rain when we wanted it, I think the most unreasonable among us would view it with equanimity."

Rain is at that moment running down the painted panes of the Surrenden casements, and driving across the lawns and terraces of the Surrenden gardens. It makes Usk very cross: all the ensilage in the world will not console him for ripening corn beaten down in all directions, and young families of pheasants dying of cramp and pip in their ferny homes.

"Dig a big pit and cram your soaked grass into it: very well, I don't say no," he growls. "But what about your mildewed wheat? And where should we be if we had to undergo a blockade? I'm not against making more pasture, grazing's all very well; but if there's a war big enough to sweep the seas of the grain-ships that come to us from the Colonies and the United States, where shall we be if we've nothing to eat but our own beef and mutton? Beef and mutton are solid food, but I believe we should all go mad on them if we'd no bread to eat too."

"I'm all for pasture," replies Brandolin; "and as the British Isles can never, under any cultivation whatever, feed all their population, we may as well dedicate ourselves to what is picturesque. I am fascinated by Laveleye's portrait of England when she shall have turned grazier exclusively: it is lovely:

"L'Angleterre redeviendra ce qu'elle était sous les Tudors, un grand parc vert, parsemé d'ormes et de chênes, où b[oe]ufs et moutons se promèneront dans des prairies sans limites."

"'Prairies sans limites?' when the land's to be all sliced up in little bits between peasant proprietors!" says Usk.

"I don't think Laveleye believes in peasant proprietors, though he is a professor of social economy."

"Social economy!" says Usk, with a groan. "Oh, I know that fool of a word! In plain English, it means ruin all round, and fortune for a few d-d manufacturers."

"The d-d manufacturer is the principal outcome of two thousand centuries of Christianity, civilization, and culture. The result is not perfectly satisfactory or encouraging, one must admit," says Brandolin, as he reaches down a volume of eighteenth-century memoirs, and adds, with entire irrelevancy to manufacturers or memoirs, "Is she really as handsome as your children tell me?"

"Who?" asks Usk. "Oh, the Russian woman: yes, very good-looking. Yes, she was here at Easter, and she turned their heads."

"Has she any lovers older than Babe?"

"She has left 'em in Russia if she has."

"A convenient distance to leave anything at: Italy and Russia are the only countries remaining to us in which Messalina can still do her little murders comfortably without any fuss being made."

"She isn't Messalina, at least I think not. But one never knows."

"No, one never knows till one tries," says Brandolin. And he wishes vaguely that the Russian woman were already here. He is fond of Surrenden, and fond of all its people, but he is a little, a very little, bored. He sees that all Lady Usk's doves are paired, and he does not wish to disturb their harmony, possibly because none of the feminine doves attract him. But he cannot flirt forever with the children, because the children are not very often visible, and without flirting civilized life is dull, even for a man who is more easily consoled by ancient authors off the library-shelves than most people can be.

This conversation occurs in the forenoon in Lady Usk's boudoir. In the late afternoon in the library over their teacups the ladies talk of Xenia Sabaroff. It is perceptible to Brandolin that they would prefer that she should not arrive.

"Is she really so very good-looking?" he asks of Mrs. Wentworth Curzon.

"Oh, yes," replies that lady, with an accent of depreciation in her tones. "Yes, she is very handsome; but too pale, and her eyes too large. You know those Russian women are mere *paquets de nerfs*, shut up in their rooms all day and smoking so incessantly: they have all that is worst in the Oriental and Parisienne mixed together."

"How very sad!" says Brandolin. "I don't think I have known one, except Princess Kraskawa: she went sleighing in all weathers, wore the frankest of gingerbread wigs, and was always surrounded by about fifty grandchildren."

Princess Kraskawa had been for many years ambassadress in London.

"Of course there are exceptions," says Nina Curzon; "but generally, you know, they are very depraved, such inordinate gamblers, and so fond of morphine, and always *maladives*."

"Ah," says Brandolin, pensively, "but the physical and moral perfection of Englishwomen always makes them take too high a standard: poor humanity toils hopelessly, and utterly exhausted, many miles behind them."

"Don't talk nonsense," says Mrs. Curzon; "we are no better than our neighbors, perhaps, but we are not afraid of the air, we don't heat our houses to a thousand degrees above boiling-point, we don't gamble,—at least not much,—and we don't talk every language under the sun except our own, and yet not one of them grammatically."

"Decidedly," reflects Brandolin, "Lawrence must have looked too often at Madame Sabaroff."

"Sabaroff is dead, isn't he?" he asked, aloud. "You know I have been out of society for a year: the whole map of Europe gets altered in one's absence."

"Sabaroff was shot in a duel four years ago," replies Mrs. Curzon,— "a duel about her."

"What a fortunate woman! To get rid of a husband, and to get rid of him in such interesting circumstances! *C'est le comble de bonheur!*"

"That depends. With her it resulted in her exile from court."

"Oh, to be sure; when Russians are naughty they are sent to live on their estates, as riotous children are dismissed to the nursery. Was she compromised, then?"

"Very much compromised; and both men were killed, for the adversary of Sabaroff had been wounded mortally, when, with an immense effort, he fired, and shot the prince through the lungs."

"A pretty little melodrama. Who was the opponent?"

"Count Lustoff, a colonel of the Guard. I wonder you did not hear of it: it made a stir at the time."

"I may have heard: when one doesn't know the people concerned, no massacre, even of the Innocents, makes any impression on one. And the result was that the lady had to leave the imperial court?"

"Yes: they do draw a line *there*."

Brandolin laughs; it tickles his fancy to hear Mrs. Wentworth Curzon condemning by implication the laxity of the court of St. James.

"They can't send *us* to our estates," he replies, "the lands are so small and the railways are so close. Else it would have a very good effect if all our naughty people could be shut up inside their own gates, with nobody to speak to but the steward and the rector. Can you imagine anything that would more effectively contribute to correct manners and morals? But how very desolate London would look!"

"You think everybody would be exiled inside his own ring-fence!"

"*Her* own ring-fence,—well, nearly everybody. There would certainly be no garden-parties at Marlborough House."

Mrs. Wentworth Curzon is not pleased; she is a star of the first magnitude at Marlborough House.

"Why does she take this absent woman's character away?" thinks Brandolin, with a sense of irritation. "I will trust the Babe's instincts sooner than hers."

He does not know Xenia Sabaroff; but he admires the photograph of her which stands on the boudoir table, and he likes the tone of the letter written from Aix. With that spirit of contradiction which is inborn in human nature, he is inclined to disbelieve all that Nina Curzon has told him. Lustoff and Sabaroff probably both deserved their fates, and the departure from the court of St. Petersburg might very possibly have been voluntary. He has a vague feeling of tenderness for the original of the photograph. It often happens to him to fall sentimentally and ephemerally in love with some unknown woman whose portrait he has seen or of whose charms he has heard. Sometimes he has avoided knowing these in their actual life, lest he should disturb his ideals. He is an imaginative man with a great amount of leisure in which to indulge his fancies, and his knowledge of the world has not hardened his feelings or dulled his fancy. There is something of the Montrose, of the Lord Surrey, in him.

"To think of all one knows about that hussy," he muses, as he smokes a cigar in his bedroom before dressing for dinner. By the uncomplimentary epithet he means Mrs. Wentworth Curzon. "Such a good fellow as Fred Curzon is, too, a man who might have been made anything of if she'd only treated him decently. When he married her he adored the ground she walked on, but before a week was out she began to fret him, and jar at him, and break him in, as she called it; he was too poor for her, and too slow for her, and too good for her, and she was vilely cruel to him,—it's only women who can be cruel like that, she's had more lovers than anybody living, and she's taken every one of

'em for money; nothing but money. Old Melton gave her the Park-Lane House, and Glamorgan gave her her emeralds, and Dartmoor paid her Paris bills for ten years, and Riverston takes all her stable-expenses. Everything she does is done for money; and if she puts any heart at all now into this thing with Lawrence, it is only because she's getting older and so getting jealous,—they always do as they get on,—and then she calls Russians dissolute and depraved, good Lord!"

With which he casts aside his cigar, and resigns himself to his servant's hands as the second gong sounds.

CHAPTER VI

The very bachelor rooms at Surrenden are conducive to revery and indolence, cosily comfortable and full of little attentions for the guest's *bien-être*, among which there is a printed paper which is always laid on the dressing-table in every room at this house: it contains the latest telegrams of public news, which come every afternoon from a London news-agency.

"I dare say to the political fellows they are delightful," reflects Brandolin, as he glances down the lines, "but to me they unpleasantly recall an uncomfortable world. I don't dine the worse, certainly, for knowing that there is a revolution in Patagonia or an earthquake in Bolivia, but neither do I dine the better for being told that the French government is *destituant* all moderate prefets in favor of immoderate ones. It is very interesting, no doubt, but it doesn't interest me, and I think the possession of these fresh scraps of prosaic news spoils dinner-conversation."

Brandolin does not consider it conversation to say, "Have you seen so-and-so?" or, "What a sad thing such-and-such is, isn't it!" He likes persiflage, he likes banter, he likes argument, he likes antithesis, he likes brilliancy, and the dinner-tables of the epoch seldom offer these good things with their Metternich hock and Mouton Rothschild. He is fond of talking himself, and he can be also a very good listener. If you cannot give the *quid quo pro* in hearing as in speaking, you may be immensely clever, but you will be immediately pronounced a bore, like Macaulay and Madame de Staël. Brandolin likes talking not for the sake of showing himself off, but for the sake of being amused, of eliciting the opinions and observing the minds of others, and he is convinced that if the conversational art were cultured as it used to be in Bourbon Paris, life would become more refined, more agreeable, more sympathetic, and less given over to gross pleasures of the appetites.

"Children should be taught to talk," he observes one day to Lady Usk, "and they should not be allowed to be slovenly in their speech any more than in their dress. You would not let them enter your presence with unbrushed hair, but you do let them use any bald, slangy, or inappropriate words which come uppermost to them. There is so much in the choice of words! A beautiful voice is a delicious thing, but it avails little without the usage of apt and graceful phrases. Did you ever hear Mrs. Norton sustain a discussion or relate an anecdote? It was like listening to perfect phrasing in music. When she died, the art of conversation died with her."

"We are always in such a hurry," says Lady Usk, which is her habitual explanation of anything in which her generation is at fault. "And hurry is always vulgar, you know, as you said the other day: it cannot help itself."

"You are a purist, my dear Brandolin," says Lady Dolgelly, who hates him.

"Purity, daughter of sweet virtues mild!" murmurs Brandolin. "Alas, my dear ladies, I cannot hope that she dwells with *me* in any form! When she has a home in your own gentle breasts, who can hope that she would ever take shelter in a man's?"

"How impertinent and how nasty he is!" thinks the lady; and she detests him a little more cordially than before. There is not a very good feeling towards him among any of the ladies at Surrenden: he does not make love to them, he does not endeavor to alter existing arrangements in his favor; it is generally felt that he would not care to do so. What can you expect from a man who sits half his days in a library?

The Surrenden library is well stored, an elegant and lettered lord of the eighteenth century having been a bibliophile. It is a charming room, panelled with inlaid woods, and with a ceiling painted after Tiepolo; the bookcases are built into the wall, so that the books look *chez eux*, and are not mere lodgers or visitors; oriel windows look out on to a portion of the garden laid out by Beaumont. One window has been cut down to the ground, an anachronism and innovation indeed, somewhat impairing the uniformity of the room. The present Lady Usk had it done, but one forgives her the sacrilege when one feels how pleasant it is to walk out from the mellow shadows of the library

on to the smooth-shaven grass and gather a rose with one hand whilst holding an eighteenth-century author with the other.

It is in the smaller library adjacent, filled with modern volumes, that five-o'clock tea is always to be had, with all the abundant demoralizing abominations of caviare, kümmel, etc. It is a gay room, with *dessus-des-portes* after Watteau and every variety of couch and of lounging-chair. "Reading made easy" somebody calls it. But there is little reading done either in it or in the big library: Brandolin when he goes there finds himself usually alone, and can commune as he chooses with Latin philosophy and Gaulois wit.

"You *used* to read, George?" he says to his host, in expostulation.

"Yes, I used,—ages ago," says Usk, with a yawn.

Brandolin looks at him with curiosity.

"I can understand a man who has never read," he replies, "but I cannot understand a man losing the taste for reading if he has ever had it. One can dwell contented in B[œ]otia if one has never been out of it, but to go back to B[œ]otia after living in Attica—"

"It's one's life does it."

"What life? One has the life one wishes."

"That's the sort of thing a man says who hasn't married."

"My dear George, you cannot pretend your wife would prevent your reading Latin and Greek, or even Sanscrit. I am sure she would much sooner you read them than—well, than do other things you do do."

"I don't say she would prevent me," returns the lord of Surrenden, with some crossness, "but it's the kind of life one gets into that kills all that sort of thing in one. There is no time for it."

"I keep out of the life: why don't you?"

"There's no time for anything," says Usk, gloomily. "There's such heaps of things to see to, and such numbers of places to go to, and then one lives *au jour le jour*, and one gets into the swim and goes on, and then there's the shooting, and when there isn't the shooting there's the season, and the racing."

"I lead my own life," Brandolin remarks.

"Yes; but you don't mind being called eccentric."

"No; I don't mind it in the least. If they say nothing worse of me I am grateful."

"But you couldn't do it if you had all my places, and all my houses, and all my brothers, and all my family. You're a free agent. I declare that all the time goes away with me in such a crowd of worries that I've hardly a second to smoke a cigarette in, in any peace!"

Brandolin smiles.

A sixth part of most days his host passes leaning back in some easy-chair with a cigar in his mouth, whether his venue be Surrenden, Orme, Denton, the smoking-room of a club, or the house of a friend,—whether London or the country. Usk's own view of himself is of a man entirely devoted to, and sacrificed to, business, politics, the management of his estates, and the million-and-one affairs which perpetually assail him; but this is not the view which his friends take of him.

When ever is the view that our friends take of us our view?

"Once a scholar always a scholar, it seems to me," says Brandolin. "I could as soon live without air as without books." And he quotes Cowley,—

"Books should as business entertain the light."

"You don't continue the quotation," says Usk, with a smile.

"*Autres temps autres m[œ]eurs*," says Brandolin. He laughs, and gets up: it is four in the afternoon; the delicious green garden is lying bathed in warm amber light; one of the peacocks is turning round slowly with all his train displayed; he seems never to tire of turning round.

"How exactly that bird is like some politicians one could name!" says Brandolin. "Do you know that this charming garden always reminds me of St. Hubert's Lea,—our west garden, I mean? I think

the same man must have laid them out. Is it not Bulwer Lytton who says that so long as one has a garden one always has one room which is roofed by heaven?"

"A heaven mitigated by gardeners' wages,—very considerably mitigated," says Usk.

"You are cynical, George, and your mind is running on pounds, shillings, and pence,—an offence against Nature on such a day as this. There is nothing so demoralizing as to think of money."

"To have debts and not to think of 'em is more so; and Boom—"

"Sell something of his that he likes very much, to pay his debts: that's the only way I know of to check a boy at the onset. Your father did it with me the very first time I owed twenty pounds; and he read me a lesson I never forgot. I have been eternally obliged to him ever since."

"What did he sell?"

"My cob,—a cob I adored. I wept like a child, but he didn't see my tears. What I saved up next half to trace out that cob and buy him back at twice his value,—what I denied myself to make up the money,—nobody would believe; and the beast wasn't easy to find: some dealer had taken him over to Ireland."

"That could be done with you," says Usk, gloomily. "It would be no use to do it with Boom: his mother would buy him some other horse the next day. You've no chance to bring up a boy decently if he's got a mother!"

"The reverse is the received opinion of mankind," said Brandolin; "but I believe there's something to be said for your view. No end of women have no idea of bringing up their children, and when they ought to be ordered a flogging they fondle them."

"Dolly does," says her husband. "What's a woman's notion of a horse? That he must have slender legs, a coat like satin, and be fed on apples and sugar: still, they saw his mouth till he half dislocates his neck, and tear his ribs open with their spur. They're just as unreasonable with their children."

"Who is *that* woman?" says Brandolin, making a step across the window and into the garden. "Now I am perfectly certain that is Madame Sabaroff, without your saying so."

"Then I needn't say so," replies Usk. "I wonder when she came. They didn't expect her till to-morrow."

They both look at a lady in one of the distant alleys walking between the high green walls. She is dressed in some soft cream-colored stuff with quantities of lace. She carries a sunshade of the same hue. She has a tall cane in her other hand. On either side of her are the Ladies Alexandra and Hermione, and before her gambols in his white sailor clothes, with his blue silk stockings and his silver-buckled shoes, the Babe.

"Decidedly the Sabaroff," says Usk. "Won't you come and speak to her?"

"With pleasure," says Brandolin. "Even if the Babe brains me with the cane!"

He looks very well as he walks bareheaded over the grass and along the green alley; he wears a loose brown velvet coat admirably made, and brown breeches and stockings; his legs are as well made as his coat; the sun shines on his curling hair; there is a *dégagé*, picturesque, debonair, yet distinguished look about him, which pleases the eyes of Xenia Sabaroff, as they watch him draw near.

"Who is that person with your father?" she asks. The children tell her, all speaking at once.

She recognizes the name; she has heard of him often in the world, and has read those books which praise solitude and a dinner of herbs. "I doubt his having been alone very long, however," she reflects, as she looks at him. A certain unlikeness in him to Englishmen in general, some women who are fond of him fancifully trace to the fact that the first Brandolin was a Venetian, who fled for his life from the Republic, and made himself conspicuous and acceptable for his talents alike as a lutist and a swordsman at the court of Henry the Second. "It can't count, it's so very far away," he himself objects; but perhaps it does count. Of all things ineffaceable, the marks of race are the most indelible.

The Venetian Brandolin married the daughter of a Norman knight, and his descendants became affectionate sons of England, and held their lands of St. Hubert's Lea safely under the wars of the Roses, of the Commonwealth, and of the Jacobites. They were always noticeable for scholarly habits

and artistic tastes, and in the time of George the Second the Lord Brandolin of the period did much to enrich his family mansion and diminish the family fortunes by his importations of Italian sculptures and pictures and his patronage of Italian musicians. The house at St. Hubert's Lea is very beautiful, but it requires much more to keep it up than the present owner possesses. He is often urged to let it, but he scouts the idea. "You might as well ask me to sell the Brandolin portraits, like Charles Surface," he says, angrily, whenever his more intimate friends venture on the suggestion. So the old house stands in its warm-hued and casket-like loveliness, empty, save for his occasional visits and the presence of many old and devoted servants.

"An interesting woman," he thinks now, as he exchanges with the Princess Sabaroff the usual compliments and commonplaces of a presentation. "Russians are always interesting: they are the only women about whom you feel that you know very little; they are the only women who, in this chatterbox of a generation *tout en dehors* as it is, preserve some of the vague charm of mystery; and what a charm that is!"

His reasons for admiring her are not those of the Babe and his sisters, but he admires her almost as much as they. Brandolin, who in his remote travels has seen a great deal of that simple nature which is so much lauded by many people, has a great appreciation of well-dressed women, and the Madame Sabaroff is admirably dressed, from her long loose cream-colored gloves to her bronze shoes with their miniature diamond clasps.

"Didn't I tell you?" whispers the Babe, climbing up behind Brandolin.

"Yes, you did," returned Brandolin, "and you were quite right; but it is abominably bad manners to whisper, my dear Cecil."

The Babe subsides into silence with hot cheeks when anybody calls him Cecil he is conscious that he has committed some flagrant offence.

"Those brats are always bothering you, princess," says their father.

"They are very kind to me," replies Xenia Sabaroff, in English which has absolutely no foreign accent. "They make me feel at home! What a charming place this is! I like it better than your castle—what is its name?—where I had the pleasure to visit you at Easter."

"Orme. Oh, that's beastly,—a regular barn: obliged to go there just for show, you know."

"Orme was built by Inigo Jones, and the ingratitude to fortune of its owner is a constant temptation to Providence to deal in thunder-bolts, or have matches left about by housemaids," says Brandolin.

"I think Lord Usk has not a contented mind," says Madame Sabaroff, amused.

"Contented! By Jove, who should be, when England's going to the dogs as fast as she can?"

"In every period of your history," says the princess, "your country is always described as going headlong to ruin; and yet she has not gone there yet, and she has not done ill."

"Our constitution is established on a mere equipoise, with dark precipices and deep waters all around it.' So said Burke," replies Brandolin. "At the present moment everybody has forgotten the delicacy of this nice equipoise, and one day or other it will lose its balance and topple over into the deep waters, and be engulfed. Myself, I confess I do not think that time is very distant."

"I hope it is; I am very much attached to England," replies the Princess Xenia, gravely, "and to naughty English boys," she adds, passing her hand over the shining locks of the Babe.

"She must be in love with an Englishman," thinks Brandolin, with the one-sided construction which a man is always ready to place on the words of a woman. "Must we go in-doors?" he asks, regretfully, as she is moving towards the house. "It is so pleasant in these quaint green arbors. To be under a roof on such a summer afternoon as this, is to fly in the face of a merciful Creator with greater ingratitude than Usk's ingratitude to Inigo Jones."

"But I have scarcely seen my hostess," says Madame Sabaroff; nevertheless, she resigns herself to a seat in a yew-tree cut like a helmet.

There are all manner of delightful old-fashioned flowers, such flowers as Disraeli gave to the garden of Corisande, growing near in groups encircled by clipped box-edging.

Those disciples of Pallas Athene who render the happy lives of the Surrenden children occasionally a burden to them seize at that moment on their prey and bear them off to the school-room. The Babe goes to his doom sullenly; he would be tearful, only that were too unmanly.

"Why do you let those innocents be tortured, George?" asks Brandolin.

"Books should, like business, entertain the day,"

replies Usk: "so you said, at least, just now. Their governesses are of the same opinion."

"That is not the way to make them love books, to shut them up against their wills on a summer afternoon."

"How will you educate your children when you have 'em, then?"

"He always gets out of any impersonal argument by putting some personal question," complains Brandolin to Madame Sabaroff. "It is a common device, but always an unworthy one. Because a system is very bad, it does not follow that I alone of all men must be prepared with a better one. I think if I had children I would not have them taught in that way at all. I should get the wisest old man I could find, a Samuel Johnson touched with a John Ruskin, and should tell him to make learning delightful to them, and associated, as far as our detestable climate would allow, with open-air studies in cowslip meadows and under hawthorn hedges. If I had only read dear Horace at school, should I ever have loved him as I do? No; my old tutor taught me to feel all the delight and the sweet savor of him, roaming in the oak woods of my own old place."

"I am devoutly thankful," says his host, "that Dorothy among her caprices had never had the fancy you have, for a Dr. Johnson *doublé* with a Ruskin, to correct my quotations, abuse my architecture, and make prigs of the children."

"Prigs!" exclaims Brandolin. "Prigs! When did ever real scholarship and love of nature make anything approaching to a prig? Science and class-rooms make prigs, not Latin verse and cowslip meadows."

"That is true, I think," says the Princess Xenia, with her serious smile.

"If they are beginning to agree with one another I shall be *de trop*," thinks Usk, who is very good-natured to his guests, and popular enough with women not to be resigned to play what is vulgarly termed "second fiddle" (though why an expression borrowed from the orchestra should be vulgar it were hard to say). So he goes a few paces off to speak to a gardener, and by degrees edges away towards the house, leaving Brandolin and Madame Sabaroff to themselves in the green yew-helmet arbor.

Brandolin is in love with his subject, and does not abandon it.

"It is absurd," he continues, "the way in which children are made to loathe all scholarship by its association with their own pains and subjection. A child is made as a punishment to learn by rote fifty lines of Virgil. Good heavens! It ought rather to be as a reward that he should be allowed to open Virgil! To walk in all those delicious paths of thought should be the highest pleasure that he could be brought to know. To listen to the music of the poets should be at once his privilege and his recompense. To be deprived of books should be, on the contrary, his cruellest chastisement!"

"He would be a very exceptional child, surely," says Madame Sabaroff.

"I was not an exceptional child," he answers, "but that is how I was brought up and how I felt."

"You had an exceptional training, then?"

"It ought not to be exceptional: that is just the mischief. Up to the time I was seventeen, I was brought up at my own place (by my father's directions, in his will) by a most true and reverent scholar, whom I loved as Burke loved Shackleton. He died, God rest his soul, but the good he left behind him lives after him: whatever grains of sense I have shown, and whatever follies I have avoided, both what I am and what I am not, are due to him, and it is to him that I owe the love of study which

has been the greatest consolation and the purest pleasure of my life. That is why I pity so profoundly those poor Rochefort children, and the tens of thousands like them, who are being educated by the commonplace, flavorless, cramming system which people call education. It may be education; it is not culture. What will the Babe always associate with his Latin themes? Four walls, hated books, inky, aching fingers, and a headache. Whereas I never look at a Latin line in a newspaper, be it one ever so hackneyed, without pleasure, as at the face of an old friend, and whenever I repeat to myself the words, I always smell the cowslips and the lilac and the hawthorn of the spring mornings when I was a boy."

Xenia Sabaroff looked at him with some little wonder and more approval.

"My dear lord," she says seriously, "I think in your enthusiasm you forget one thing, that there is ground on which good seed falls and brings forth flowers and fruit, and there is other ground on which the same seed, be it strewn every so thickly, lies always barren. Without underrating the influences of your tutor, I must believe that had you been educated at an English public school, or even in a French Lycée, you would still have become a scholar, still have loved your books."

"Alas, madame," says Brandolin, with a little sigh, "perhaps I have only been what Matthew Arnold calls a 'foiled circuitous wanderer' in the orbit of life!"

"I imagine that you have not very often been foiled," replies the lady, with a smile, "and wandering has a great deal to be said in its favor, especially for a man. Women are happiest, perhaps, at anchor."

"Women used to be: not our women. *Nous avons changé tout cela*. I have bored you too much with myself and my opinions."

"No, you interest me," says his companion with a serious serenity which deprives the words of all sound of flattery or encouragement. "I have long admired your writings," she adds, and Brandolin colors a little with gratification. The same kind of phrase is said to him on an average five hundred times a year, and his usual emotion is either ennui or irritation. The admiration of fools is folly, and humiliates him. But the admiration of so lovely a woman as Xenia Sabaroff would lay a flattering unction to the soul of any man, even if she were absolutely mindless; and she gives him the impression that she has a good deal of mind, and one out of the common order.

"My writings have no other merit," he says, after the expression of his sense of the honor she does him, "than being absolutely the chronicle of what I have seen and what I have thought; and I think they are expressed in tolerably pure English, though that is claiming a great deal in these times; for since John Newman laid down the pen there is scarcely a living Briton who can write his own tongue with eloquence and purity."

"I think it must be very nice to leave off wandering if one has a home," replies Madame Sabaroff, with a slight sigh, which gave him the impression that, though no doubt she had many houses, she had no home. "Where is your place that you spoke of just now?—the place where you learned to love Horace?"

Brandolin is always pleased to speak of St. Hubert's Lea. He has a great love for it and for the traditions of his race, which makes many people accuse him of great family pride, though, as has been well said *à propos* of a greater man than Brandolin, it is rather that sentiment which the Romans defined as piety. When he talks of his old home he grows eloquent, unreserved, cordial; and he describes with an artist's touch its antiquities, its landscapes, and its old-world and sylvan charms.

"It must be charming to care for any place so much as that," says his companion, after hearing him with interest.

"I think one cares more for places than for people," he replies.

"Sometimes one cares for neither," says Xenia Sabaroff, with a tone which in a less lovely woman would have been morose.

"One must suffice very thoroughly to one's self in such a case?"

"Oh, not necessarily."

At that moment there is a little bustle under a very big cedar near at hand; servants are bringing out folding tables, folding chairs, a silver camp-kettle, cakes, fruit, cream, liqueurs, sandwiches, wines, all those items of an afternoon tea on which Brandolin has animadverted with so much disgust in the library an hour before. Lady Usk has chosen to take these murderous compounds out of doors in the west garden. She herself comes out of the house with a train of her guests around her.

"Adieu to rational conversation," says Brandolin, as he rises with regret from his seat under the evergreen helmet.

Xenia Sabaroff is pleased at the expression. She is too handsome for men often to speak to her rationally: they usually plunge headlong into attempts at homage and flattery, of which she is nauseated.

CHAPTER VII

"How do you like Lord Brandolin?" says Lady Usk, when she can say so unobserved.

"I like him very much," replies Madame Sabaroff. "He is what one would expect him to be from his books; and that is so agreeable,—and so rare."

Dorothy Usk is not pleased. She does not want her Russian ph[oe]nix to admire Brandolin. She has arranged an alliance in her own mind between the Princess Sabaroff and her own cousin Alan, Lord Gervase, whom she is daily expecting at Surrenden. Gervase is a man of some note in diplomacy and society; she is proud of him, she is attached to him, she desires to see him ultimately fill all offices of state that the ambition of an Englishman can aspire to; and Xenia Sabaroff is so enormously rich, as well as so unusually handsome. It would be a perfectly ideal union; and, desiring it infinitely, the mistress of Surrenden, with that tact which distinguishes her, has never named Lord Gervase to the Princess Sabaroff nor the Princess Sabaroff to Lord Gervase. He is to be at Surrenden in a week's time. Now she vaguely wishes that Brandolin had not these eight days' start of him. But then Brandolin, she knows, will only flirt; that is to say, if the Russian lady allow him to do so: he is an unconscionable flirt, and never means anything by his tenderest speeches. Brandolin, she knows, is not a person who will ever marry; he has lost scores of the most admirable opportunities, and rejected the fairest and best-filled hands that have been offered to him. To the orderly mind of Lady Usk, he represents an Ishmael forever wandering in wild woods, outside the pale of general civilization. She can never see why people make such a fuss with him. She does not say so, because it is the fashion to make the fuss, and she never goes against a fashion. A very moral woman herself, she is only as charitable and elastic as she is to naughty people because such charity and elasticity is the mark of good society in the present day. Without it, she would be neither popular nor well bred; and she would sooner die than fail in being either.

"Why don't you ever marry, Lord Brandolin?" asks Dorothy Usk. "Why have you never married?"

"Because he's much too sensible," growls her husband, but adds, with infinite compassion, "He'll have to, some day, or the name will die out."

"Yes, I shall have to, some day, to use your very grammatical expression," assents Brandolin. "I don't wish the name to die out, and there's nobody to come after me except the Southesk-Vanes, who detest me as I detest them."

"Well, then, why not make some marriage at once?" says Lady Usk. "I know so many charming—"

Brandolin arrests the sentence with a deprecatory gesture, "Dear Lady Usk, *please!* I like you so much, I wouldn't for worlds have you mixed up in anything which would probably, or at least very possibly, make me so much dislike you in the years to come."

Usk gives a laugh of much enjoyment.

His wife is slightly annoyed. She does not like this sort of jesting.

"You said a moment ago that you must marry!" she observes, with some impatience.

"Oh, there is no positive 'must' about it," says Brandolin, dubiously. "The name doesn't matter greatly, after all; it is only that I don't like the place to go to the Southesk-Vanes: they are my cousins, heaven knows how many times removed; they have most horrible politics, and they are such dreadfully prosaic people that I am sure they will destroy my gardens, poison my Indian beasts, strangle my African birds, turn my old servants adrift, and make the country round hideous with high farming."

"Marry, then, and put an end to anything so dreadful," says Dorothy Usk.

Brandolin gets up and walks about the room. It is a dilemma which has often been present to his mind in various epochs of his existence.

"You see, my dear people," he says, with affectionate confidence, "the real truth of the matter is this. A good woman is an admirable creation of Providence, for certain uses in her generation; but she is tiresome. A naughty woman is delightful; but then she is, if you marry her, compromising. Which am I to take of the two? I should be bored to death by what Renan calls *la femme pure*

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.