

GEORGE MEREDITH

ONE OF OUR
CONQUERORS,
VOLUME 5

George Meredith
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CHAPTER XXXVI

NESTA AND HER FATHER

The day of Nesta's return was one of a number of late when Victor was robbed of his walk Westward by Lady Grace Halley, who seduced his politeness with her various forms of blandishment to take a seat in her carriage; and she was a practical speaker upon her quarter of the world when she had him there. Perhaps she was right in saying—though she had no right to say—that he and she together might have the world under their feet. It was one of those irritating suggestions which expedite us up to a bald ceiling, only to make us feel the gas-bladder's tight extension upon emptiness: It moved him to examine the poor value of his aim, by tying him to the contemptible means: One estimate involved the other, whichever came first. Somewhere he had an idea, that would lift and cleanse all degradations. But it did seem as if he were not enjoying: things pleasant enough in the passage of them were barren, if not prickly, in the retrospect.

He sprang out at the head of the park, for a tramp round it, in the gloom of the girdle of lights, to recover his deadened relish of the thin phantasmal strife to win an intangible prize. His dulled physical system asked, as with the sensations of a man at the start from sleep in the hurrying grip of steam, what on earth he wanted to get, and what was the substance of his gains: what! if other than a precipitous intimacy, a deep crumbling over deeper, with a little woman amusing him in remarks of a whimsical nudity; hardly more. Nay, not more! he said; and at the end of twenty paces, he saw much more; the campaign gathered a circling suggestive brilliancy, like the lamps about the winter park; the Society, lured with glitter, hooked by greed, composed a ravishing picture; the little woman was esteemed as a serviceable lieutenant; and her hand was a small soft one, agreeable to fondle—and avaunt! But so it is in war: we must pay for our allies. What if it had been, that he and she together, with their united powers . . . ? He dashed the silly vision aside, as vainer than one of the bubble-empires blown by boys; and it broke, showing no heart in it. His heart was Nataly's.

Let Colney hint his worst; Nataly bore the strain, always did bear any strain coming in the round of her duties: and if she would but walk, or if she danced at parties, she would scatter the fits of despondency besetting the phlegmatic, like this day's breeze the morning fog; or as he did with two minutes of the stretch of legs.

Full of the grandeur of that black pit of the benighted London,

with its ocean-voice of the heart at beat along the lighted outer ring, Victor entered at his old door of the two houses he had knocked into one: a surprise for Fredi!—and heard that his girl had arrived in the morning.

'And could no more endure her absence from her Mammy O!' The songful satirical line spouted in him, to be flung at his girl, as he ran upstairs to the boudoir off the drawing-room.

He peeped in. It was dark. Sensible of presences, he gradually discerned a thick blot along the couch to the right of the door, and he drew near. Two were lying folded together; mother and daughter. He bent over them. His hand was taken and pressed by Fredi's; she spoke; she said tenderly: 'Father.' Neither of the two made a movement. He heard the shivering rise of a sob, that fell. The dry sob going to the waste breath was Nataly's. His girl did not speak again.

He left them. He had no thought until he stood in his dressing-room, when he said 'Good!' For those two must have been lying folded together during the greater part of the day: and it meant, that the mother's heart had opened; the girl knew. Her tone: 'Father,' sweet, was heavy, too, with the darkness it came out of.

So she knew. Good. He clasped them both in his heart; tempering his pity of those dear ones with the thought, that they were of the sex which finds enjoyment in a day of the mutual tear; and envying them; he strained at a richness appearing in the sobs of their close union.

All of his girl's loving soul flew to her mother; and naturally:

She would not be harsh on her father. She would say he loved! And true: he did love, he does love; loves no woman but the dear mother.

He flicked a short wring of the hand having taken pressure from an alien woman's before Fredi pressed it, and absolved himself in the act; thinking, How little does a woman know how true we can be to her when we smell at a flower here and there!—There they are, stationary; women the flowers, we the bee; and we are faithful in our seeming volatility; faithful to the hive!—And if women are to be stationary, the reasoning is not so bad. Funny, however, if they here and there imitatively spread a wing, and treat men in that way? It is a breach of the convention; we pay them our homage, that they may serve as flowers, not to be volatile tempters. Nataly never had been one of the sort: Lady Grace was. No necessity existed for compelling the world to bow to Lady Grace, while on behalf of his Nataly he had to . . . Victor closed the curtain over a gulf-revealed by an invocation of Nature, and showing the tremendous force he partook of so largely, in her motive elements of the devourer. Horrid to behold, when we need a gracious presentation of the circumstances. She is a splendid power for as long as we confine her between the banks: but she has a passion to discover cracks; and if we give her headway, she will find one, and drive at it, and be through, uproarious in her primitive licentiousness, unless we labour body and soul like Dutchmen at the dam. Here she was, and not desired, almost detested! Nature detested! It had

come about through the battle for Nataly; chiefly through Mrs. Burman's tenacious hold of the filmy thread she took for life and was enabled to use as a means for the perversion besides bar to the happiness of creatures really living. We may well marvel at the Fates, and tell them they are not moral agents!

Victor's reflections came across Colney Durance, who tripped and stopped them.

Dressed with his customary celerity, he waited for Nesta, to show her the lighted grand double drawing-room: a further proof of how Fortune favoured him: she was to be told, how he one day expressed a wish for greater space, and was informed on the next, that the neighbour house was being vacated, and the day following he was in treaty for the purchase of it; returning from Tyrol, he found his place habitable.

Nesta came. Her short look at him was fond, her voice not faltering; she laid her hand under his arm and walked round the spacious room, praising the general design, admiring the porcelain, the ferns, friezes, hangings, and the grand piano, the ebony inlaid music-stands, the firegrates and plaques, the ottomans, the tone of neutral colour that, as in sound, muted splendour. He told her it was a reception night, with music: and added: 'I miss my . . . seen anybody lately?'

'Mr. Sowerby?' said she. 'He was to have escorted me back. He may have overslept himself.'

She spoke it plainly; when speaking of the dear good ladies, she set a gentle humour at play, and comforted him, as she

intended, with a souvenir of her lively spirit, wanting only in the manner of gaiety.

He allowed, that she could not be quite gay.

More deeply touched the next minute, he felt in her voice, in her look, in her phrasing of speech, an older, much older daughter than the Fredi whom he had conducted to Moorsedge. 'Kiss me,' he said.

She turned to him full-front, and kissed his right cheek and left, and his forehead, saying: 'My love! my papa! my own dear dada!' all the words of her girlhood in her new sedateness; and smiling: like the moral crepuscular of a sunlighted day down a not totally inanimate Sunday London street.

He strained her to his breast. 'Mama soon be here?'
'Soon.'

That was well. And possibly at the present moment applying, with her cunning hand, the cosmetics and powders he could excuse for a concealment of the traces of grief.

Satisfied in being a superficial observer, he did not spy to see more than the world would when Nataly entered the dining-room at the quiet family dinner. She performed her part for his comfort, though not prattling; and he missed his Fredi's delicious warble of the prattle running rill-like over our daily humdrum. Simeon Fenellan would have helped. Then suddenly came enlivenment: a recollection of news in the morning's paper. 'No harm before Fredi, my dear. She's a young woman now. And no harm, so to speak-at least, not against the Sanfredini. She has

donned her name again, and a villa on Como, leaving her 'duque';—paragraph from a Milanese musical Journal; no particulars. Now, mark me, we shall have her at Lakelands in the Summer. If only we could have her now!

'It would be a pleasure,' said Nataly. Her heart had a blow in the thought, that a lady of this kind would create the pleasure by not bringing criticism.

'The godmother?' he glistened upon Nesta.

She gave him low half-notes of the little blue butterfly's imitation of the superb contralto; and her hand and head at turn to hint the theatrical operatic attitude.

'Delicious!' he cried, his eyelids were bedewed at the vision of the three of them planted in the past; and here again, out of the dark wood, where something had required to be said, and had been said; and all was happily over, owing to the goodness and sweetness of the two dear innocents;—whom heaven bless! Jealousy of their naturally closer heart- at-heart, had not a whisper for him; part of their goodness and sweetness was felt to be in the not excluding him.

Nesta engaged to sing one of the 'old duets with her mother. She saw her mother's breast lift in a mechanical effort to try imaginary notes, as if doubtful of her capacity, more at home in the dumb deep sigh they fell to. Her mother's heroism made her a sacred woman to the thoughts of the girl, overcoming wonderment at the extreme submissiveness.

She put a screw on her mind to perceive the rational object

there might be for causing her mother to go through tortures in receiving and visiting; and she was arrested by the louder question, whether she could think such a man as her father irrational.

People with resounding names, waves of a steady stream, were announced by Arlington, just as in the days, that seemed remote, before she went to Moorsedge; only they were more numerous, and some of the titles had ascended a stage. There were great lords, there were many great ladies; and Lady Grace Halley shuffling amid them, like a silken shimmer in voluminous robes.

They crowded about their host where he stood. 'He, is their Law!' Colney said, speaking unintelligibly, in the absence of the Simeon Fenellan regretted so loudly by Mr. Beaves Urmsing. They had an air of worshipping, and he of swimming.

There were also City magnates, and Lakelands' neighbours: the gentleman representing Pride of Port, Sir Abraham Quatley; and Colonel Corfe; Sir Rodwell and Lady Blachington; Mrs. Fanning; Mr. Caddis. Few young men and maids were seen. Dr. John Cormyn came without his wife, not mentioning her. Mrs. Peter Yatt touched the notes for voices at the piano. Priscilla Graves was a vacancy, and likewise the Rev. Septimus Barmby. Peridon and Catkin, and Mr. Pempton took their usual places. There was no fluting. A famous Canadian lady was the principal singer. A Galician violinist, zig-zagging extreme extensions and contractions of his corporeal frame in execution, and described

by Colney as 'Paganini on wall,' failed to supplant Durandarte in Nesta's memory. She was asked by Lady Grace for the latest of Dudley. Sir Abraham Quatley named him with handsome emphasis. Great dames caressed her; openly approved; shadowed the future place among them.

Victor alluded at night to Mrs. John Cormyn's absence. He said: 'A homoeopathic doctor's wife!' nothing more; and by that little, he prepared Nesta for her mother's explanation. The great London people, ignorant or not, were caught by the strong tide he created, and carried on it. But there was a bruited of the secret among their set; and the one to fall away from her, Nataly marvellingly named Mrs. John Cormyn; whose marriage was of her making. She did not disapprove Priscilla's behaviour. Priscilla had come to her and, protesting affection, had openly stated, that she required time and retirement to recover her proper feelings. Nataly smiled a melancholy criticism of an inconsequent or capricious woman, in relating to Nesta certain observations Priscilla had dropped upon poor faithful Mr. Pempton, because of his concealment from her of his knowledge of things for this faithful gentleman had been one of the few not ignorant. The rumour was traceable to the City.

'Mother, we walk on planks,' Nesta said.

Nataly answered: 'You will grow used to it.'

Her mother's habitual serenity in martyrdom was deceiving. Nesta had a transient suspicion, that she had grown, from use, to like the whirl of company, for oblivion in the excitement; and as

her remembrance of her own station among the crowding people was a hot flush, the difference of their feelings chilled her.

Nataly said: 'It is to-morrow night again; we do not rest.' She smiled; and at once the girl read woman's armour on the dear face, and asked herself, Could I be so brave? The question following was a speechless wave, that surged at her father. She tried to fathom the scheme he entertained. The attempt obscured her conception of the man he was. She could not grasp him, being too young for knowing, that young heads cannot obtain a critical hold upon one whom they see grandly succeeding it is the sun's brilliance to their eyes.

Mother and daughter slept together that night, and their embrace was their world.

Nesta delighted her father the next day by walking beside him into the, City, as far as the end of the Embankment, where the carriage was in waiting with her maid to bring her back; and at his mere ejaculation of a wish, the hardy girl drove down in the afternoon for the walk home with him. Lady Grace Halley was at the office. 'I'm an incorrigible Stock Exchange gambler,' she said.

'Only,' Victor bade her beware, 'Mines are undulating in movement, and their heights are a preparation for their going down.'

She said she 'liked a swing.'

Nesta looked at them in turn.

The day after and the day after, Lady Grace was present. She

made play with Dudley's name.

This coming into the City daily of a girl, for the sake of walking back in winter weather with her father, struck her as ambiguous: either a jealous foolish mother's device, or that of a weak man beating about for protection. But the woman of the positive world soon read to the contrary; helped a little by the man, no doubt. She read rather too much to the contrary, and took the pedestrian girl for perfect simplicity in her tastes, when Nesta had so far grown watchful as to feel relieved by the lady's departure. Her mother, without sympathy for the lady, was too great of soul for jealousy. Victor had his Nataly before him at a hint from Lady Grace: and he went somewhat further than the exact degree when affirming, that Nataly could not scheme, and was incapable of suspecting.—Nataly could perceive things with a certain accuracy: she would not stoop to a meanness. 'Plot? Nataly?' said he, and shrugged. In fact, the void of plot, drama, shuffle of excitement, reflected upon Nataly. He might have seen as tragic as ever dripped on Stage, had he looked.

But the walk Westward with his girl, together with pride in a daughter who clove her way through all weathers, won his heart to exultation. He told her: 'Fredy does her dada so much good'; not telling her in what, or opening any passage to the mystery of the man he was. She was trying to be a student of life, with her eyes down upon hard earth, despite of her winged young head; she would have compassed him better had he dilated in sublime fashion; but he baffled her perusal of a man of power

by the simpleness of his enjoyment of small things coming in his way;—the lighted shops, the crowd, emergence from the crowd, or the meeting near midwinter of a soft warm wind along the Embankment, and dark Thames magnificently coroneted over his grimy flow. There is no grasping of one who quickens us.

His flattery of his girl, too, restored her broken feeling of personal value; it permeated her nourishingly from the natural breath of him that it was.

At times he touched deep in humaneness; and he set her heart leaping on the flash of a thought to lay it bare, with the secret it held, for his help. That was a dream. She could more easily have uttered the words to Captain Dartrey, after her remembered abashing holy tremour of the vision of doing it and casting herself on noblest man's compassionateness; and her imagined thousand emotions;—a rolling music within her, a wreath of cloudglory in her sky;—which had, as with virgins it may be, plighted her body to him for sheer urgency of soul; drawn her by a single unwitting-to-brain, conscious-in-blood, shy curl outward of the sheathing leaf to the flowering of woman to him; even to the shore of that strange sea, where the maid stands choosing this one man for her destiny, as in a trance. So are these young ones unfolded, shade by shade; and a shade is all the difference with them; they can teach the poet to marvel at the immensity of vitality in 'the shadow of a shade.'

Her father shut the glimpse of a possible speaking to him of Mrs. Marsett, with a renewal of his eulogistic allusions to Dudley

Sowerby: the 'perfect gentleman, good citizen'; prospective heir to an earldom besides. She bowed to Dudley's merits; she read off the honorific pedimental letters of a handsome statue, for a sign to herself that she passed it.

She was unjust, as Victor could feel, though he did not know how coldly unjust. For among the exorbitant requisitions upon their fellow-creatures made by the young, is the demand, that they be definite: no mercy is in them for the transitional. And Dudley—and it was under her influence, and painfully, not ignobly—was in process of development: interesting to philosophers, if not to maidens.

Victor accused her of paying too much heed to Colney Durance's epigrams upon their friends. He quite joined with his English world in its opinion, that epigrams are poor squibs when they do not come out of great guns. Epigrams fired at a venerable nation, are surely the poorest of popgun paper pellets. The English kick at the insolence, when they are not in the mood for pelleting themselves, or when the armed Foreigner is overshadowing and braceing. Colney's pretentious and laboured Satiric Prose Epic of 'THE RIVAL TONGUES,' particularly offended him, as being a clever aim at no hitting; and sustained him, inasmuch as it was an acid friend's collapse. How could Colney expect his English to tolerate such a spiteful diatribe! The suicide of Dr. Bouthoin at San Francisco was the finishing stroke to the chances of success of the Serial;—although we are promised splendid evolutions on the part of Mr. Semhians; who,

after brilliant achievements with bat and ball, abandons those weapons of Old England's modern renown, for a determined wrestle with our English pronunciation of words, and rescue of the spelling of them from the printer. His headache over the present treatment of the verb 'To bid,' was a quaint beginning for one who had soon to plead before Japanese, and who acknowledged now 'in contrition of spirit,' that in formerly opposing the scheme for an Academy, he helped to the handing of our noble language to the rapid reporter of news for an apathetic public. Further, he discovered in astonishment the subordination of all literary Americans to the decrees of their literary authorities; marking a Transatlantic point of departure, and contrasting ominously with the unruly Islanders 'grunting the higgledy-piggledy of their various ways, in all the porker's gut-gamut at the rush to the trough.' After a week's privation of bat and ball, he is, lighted or not, a gas-jet of satire upon his countrymen. As for the 'pathetic sublimity of the Funeral of Dr. Bouthoin,' Victor inveighed against an impious irony in the over dose of the pathos; and the same might be suspected in Britannia's elegy upon him, a strain of hot eulogy throughout. Mr. Semhians, all but treasonably, calls it, Papboat and Brandy:—'our English literary diet of the day': stimulating and not nourishing. Britannia's mournful anticipation, that 'The shroud enwinding this my son is mine!'—should the modern generation depart from the track of him who proved himself the giant in mainly supporting her glory—was, no doubt, a high pitch of

the note of Conservatism. But considering, that Dr. Bouthoin 'committed suicide under a depression of mind produced by a surfeit of unaccustomed dishes, upon a physical system inspired by the traditions of exercise, and no longer relieved by the practice'—to translate from Dr. Gannius: we are again at war with the writer's reverential tone, and we know not what to think: except, that Mr. Durance was a Saturday meat market's butcher in the Satiric Art.

Nesta found it pleasanter to see him than to hear of his work: which, to her present feeling, was inhuman. As little as our native public, had she then any sympathy for the working in the idea: she wanted throbs, visible aims, the Christian incarnate; she would have preferred the tale of slaughter—periodically invading all English classes as a flush from the undrained lower, Vikings all—to frigid sterile Satire. And truly it is not a fruit-bearing rod. Colney had to stand on the defence of it against the damsel's charges. He thought the use of the rod, while expressing profound regret at a difference of opinion between him and those noble heathens, beneficial for boys; but in relation to their seniors, and particularly for old gentlemen, he thought that the sharpest rod to cut the skin was the sole saving of them. Insensibility to Satire, he likened to the hard-mouthed horse; which is doomed to the worser thing in consequence. And consequently upon the lack of it, and of training to appreciate it, he described his country's male venerables as being distinguishable from annuitant spinsters only in presenting themselves forked.

'He is unsuccessful and embittered, Victor said to Nesta. 'Colney will find in the end, that he has lost his game and soured himself by never making concessions. Here's this absurd Serial—it fails, of course; and then he has to say, it's because he won't tickle his English, won't enter into a "frowzy complicity" with their tastes.'

'But—I think of Skepsey honest creatures respect Mr. Durance, and he is always ready to help them,' said Nesta.

'If he can patronize.'

'Does he patronize me, dada?'

'You are one of his exceptions. Marry a title and live in state—and then hear him! I am successful, and the result of it is, that he won't acknowledge wisdom in anything I say or do; he will hardly acknowledge the success. It is "a dirty road to success," he says. So that, if successful, I must have rolled myself in mire. I compelled him to admit he was wrong about your being received at Moorsedge: a bit of a triumph!'

Nesta's walks with her father were no loss of her to Nataly; the girl came back to her bearing so fresh and so full a heart; and her father was ever prouder of her: he presented new features of her in his quotations of her sayings, thoughtful sayings. 'I declare she helps one to think,' he said. 'It 's not precocity; it 's healthy inquiry. She brings me nearer ideas of my own, not yet examined, than any one else does. I say, what a wife for a man!'

'She takes my place beside you, dear, now I am not quite strong,' said

Nataly. 'You have not seen . . .?'

'Dudley Sowerby? He's at Cronidge, I believe. His elder brother's in a bad way. Bad business, this looking to a death.'

Nataly eyes revealed a similar gulf.

Let it be cast on Society, then! A Society opposing Nature forces us to these murderous looks upon impediments. But what of a Society in the dance with Nature? Victor did not approve of that. He began, under the influence of Nesta's companionship, to see the Goddess Nature there is in a chastened nature. And this view shook the curtain covering his lost Idea. He felt sure he should grasp it soon and enter into its daylight: a muffled voice within him said, that he was kept waiting to do so by the inexplicable tardiness of a certain one to rise ascending to her spiritual roost. She was now harmless to strike: Themison, Carling, Jarniman, even the Rev. Groseman Buttermore, had been won to the cause of humanity. Her ascent, considering her inability to do further harm below, was most mysteriously delayed. Owing to it, in a manner almost as mysterious, he was kept crossing a bridge having a slippery bit on it. Thanks to his gallant Fredi, he had found his feet again. But there was a bruise where, to his honour, he felt tenderest. And Fredi away, he might be down again—for no love of a slippery bit, proved slippery, one might guess, by a predecessor or two. Ta-ta-ta-to and mum! Still, in justice to the little woman, she had been serviceable.

She would be still more so, if a member of Parliament now on his back here we are with the murder-eye again!

Nesta's never speaking of Lakelands clouded him a little, as an intimation of her bent of mind.

'And does my girl come to her dada to-day?' he said, on the fifth morning since her return; prepared with a villanous resignation to hear, that this day she abstained, though he had the wish for her coming.

'Why, don't you know,' said she, 'we all meet to have tea in Mr. Durance's chambers; and I walk back with you, and there we are joined by mama; and we are to have a feast of literary celebrities.'

'Colney's selection of them! And Simeon Fenellan, I hope. Perhaps

Dartrey. Perhaps . . . eh?'

She reddened. So Dudley Sowerby's unspoken name could bring the blush to her cheeks. Dudley had his excuses in his brother's condition. His father's health, too, was—but this was Dudley calculating. Where there are coronets, calculations of this sort must needs occur; just as where there are complications. Odd, one fancies it, that we walking along the pavement of civilized life, should be perpetually summoning Orcus to our aid, for the sake of getting a clear course.

'And supposing a fog, my dearie?' he said.

'The daughter in search of her father carries a lamp to light her to him through densest fogs as well as over deserts,' etc. She declaimed a long sentence, to set the ripple running in his features; and when he left the room for a last word

with Armandine, she flung arms round her mother's neck, murmuring: 'Mother! mother!' a cry equal to 'I am sure I do right,' and understood so by Nataly approving it; she too on the line of her instinct, without an object in sight.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE MOTHER-THE DAUGHTER

Taking Nesta's hand, on her entry into his chambers with her father, Colney Durance bowed over it and kissed it. The unusual performance had a meaning; she felt she was praised. It might be because she made herself her father's companion. 'I can't persuade him to put on a great-coat,' she said. 'You would defeat his aim at the particular waistcoat of his ambition,' said Colney, goaded to speak, not anxious to be heard.

He kept her beside him, leading her about for introductions to multiform celebrities of both sexes; among them the gentleman editing the Magazine which gave out serially THE RIVAL TONGUES: and there was talk of a dragon-throated public's queer appetite in Letters. The pained Editor deferentially smiled at her cheerful mention of Delphica. 'In, book form, perhaps!' he remarked, with plaintive resignation; adding: 'You read it?' And a lady exclaimed: 'We all read it!'

But we are the elect, who see signification and catch flavour; and we are reminded of an insatiable monster how sometimes capricious is his gorge. 'He may happen to be in the humour for a shaking!' Colney's poor consolation it was to say of the prospects of his published book: for the funny monster has been known to like a shaking.

'He takes it kinder tickled,' said Fenellan, joining the group and grasping Nesta's hand with a warmth that thrilled her and set her guessing. 'A taste of his favourite Cayenne lollypop, Colney; it fetches the tear he loves to shed, or it gives him digestive heat in the bag of his literary receptacle-fearfully relaxed and enormous. And no wonder; his is to lie him down on notion of the attitude for reading, his back; and he has in a jiffy the funnel of the Libraries inserted into his mouth, and he feels the publishers pouring their gallons through it unlimitedly; never crying out, which he can't; only swelling, which he's obliged to do, with a non-nutritious inflation; and that's his intellectual enjoyment; bearing a likeness to the horrible old torture of the baillir d'eau; and he's doomed to perish in the worst book-form of dropsy. You, my dear Colney, have offended his police or excise, who stand by the funnel, in touch with his palate, to make sure that nothing above proof is poured in; and there's your misfortune. He's not half a bad fellow, you find when you haven't got to serve him.'

'Superior to his official parasites, one supposes!' Colney murmured.

The celebrities were unaffectedly interested in a literary failure having certain merits; they discussed it, to compliment the crownless author; and the fervider they, the more was he endowed to read the meanness prompting the generosity. Publication of a book, is the philosopher's lantern upon one's fellows.

Colney was caught away from his private manufactory of acids

by hearing Simeon Fenellan relate to Victor some of the recent occurrences at Brighton. Simeon's tone was unsatisfying; Colney would have the word; he was like steel on the grindstone for such a theme of our national grotesque-sublime.

'That Demerara Supple-jack, Victor! Don't listen to Simeon, he's a man of lean narrative, fit to chronicle political party wrangles and such like crop of carcase prose: this is epical. In DRINK we have Old England's organic Epic; Greeks and Trojans; Parliamentary Olympus, ennobled brewers, nasal fanatics, all the machinery to hand. Keep a straight eye on the primary motives of man, you'll own the English produce the material for proud verse; they're alive there! Dartrey's Demerara makes a pretty episode of the battle. I haven't seen it—if it's possible to look on it: but I hear it is flexible, of a vulgar appearance in repose, Jove's lightning at one time, the thong of AEacus at another. Observe Dartrey marching off to the Station, for the purpose of laying his miraculous weapon across the shoulders of a son of Mars, who had offended. But we have his name, my dear Victor! His name, Simeon?—Worrell; a Major Worrell: his offence being probably, that he obtained military instruction in the Service, and left it at his convenience, for our poor patch and tatter British Army to take in his place another young student, who'll grow up to do similarly. And Dartrey, we assume, is off to stop that system. You behold Sir Dartrey twirling the weapon in preparatory fashion; because he is determined we shall have an army of trained officers instead

of infant amateurs heading heroic louts. Not a thought of Beer in Dartrey!—always unpatriotic, you 'll say. Plato entreats his absent mistress to fix eyes on a star: eyes on Beer for the uniting of you English! I tell you no poetic fiction. Seeing him on his way, thus terribly armed, and knowing his intent, Venus, to shield a former favourite servant of Mars, conjured the most diverting of interventions, in the shape of a young woman in a poke-bonnet, and Skepsey, her squire, marching with a dozen or so, informing bedevilled mankind of the hideousness of our hymnification when it is not under secluding sanction of the Edifice, and challenging criticism; and that was hard by, and real English, in the form of bludgeons, wielded by a battalion of the national idol Bungay Beervat's boys; and they fell upon the hymners. Here you fill in with pastoral similes. They struck the maid adored by Skepsey. And that was the blow which slew them! Our little man drove into the press with a pair of fists able to do their work. A valiant skiff upon a sea of enemies, he was having it on the nob, and suddenly the Demerara lightened. It flailed to thresh. Enough. to say, brains would have come. The Bungays made a show of fight. No lack of blood in them, to stock a raw shilling's worth or gush before Achilles rageing. You perceive the picture, you can almost sing the ballad. We want only a few names of the fallen. It was the carving of a maitre chef, according to Skepsey: right-left-and point, with supreme precision: they fell, accurately sliced from the joint. Having done with them, Dartrey tossed the Demerara to Skepsey, and washed his hands of battle; and he let

his major go unscathed. Phlebotomy sufficient for the day!

Nesta's ears hummed with the name of Major Worrell.

'Skepsey did come back to London with a rather damaged frontispiece,'

Victor said. 'He can't have joined those people?'

'They may suit one of your militant peacemakers,' interposed Fenellan. 'The most placable creatures alive, and the surest for getting-up a shindy.'

'Suit him! They're the scandal of our streets.' Victor was pricked with a jealousy of them for beguiling him of his trusty servant.

'Look at your country, see where it shows its vitality,' said Colney. 'You don't see elsewhere any vein in movement-movement,' he harped on the word Victor constantly employed to express the thing he wanted to see. 'Think of that, when the procession sets your teeth on edge. They're honest foes of vice, and they move:—in England! Pulpit-preaching has no effect. For gross maladies, gross remedies. You may judge of what you are by the quality of the cure. Puritanism, I won't attempt to paint—it would barely be decent; but compare it with the spectacle of English frivolity, and you'll admit it to be the best show you make. It may still be the saving of you—on the level of the orderly ox: I've not observed that it aims at higher. And talking of the pulpit, Barmby is off to the East, has accepted a Shoreditch curacy, Skepsey tells me.'

'So there's the reason for our not seeing him!' Victor turned

to Nesta.

'Papa, you won't be angry with Skepsey if he has joined those people,' said Nesta. 'I'm sure he thinks of serving his country, Mr. Durance.'

Colney smiled on her. 'And you too?'

'If women knew how!'

'They're hitting on more ways at present than the men—in England.'

'But, Mr. Durance, it speaks well for England when they're allowed the chance here.'

'Good!' Fenellan exclaimed. 'And that upsets his placement of the modern national genders: Germany masculine, France feminine, Old England what remains.'

Victor ruffled and reddened on his shout of 'Neuter?'

Their circle widened. Nesta knew she was on promotion, by her being led about and introduced to ladies. They were encouraging with her. One of them, a Mrs. Marina Floyer, had recently raised a standard of feminine insurrection. She said: 'I hear your praises from Mr. Durance. He rarely praises. You have shown capacity to meditate on the condition of women, he says.'

Nesta drew a shorter breath, with a hope at heart. She speculated in the dark, as to whether her aim to serve and help was not so friendless. And did Mr. Durance approve? But surely she stood in a glorious England if there were men and women to welcome a girl to their councils. Oh! that is the broad free England where gentlemen and gentlewomen accept of the

meanest aid to cleanse the land of its iniquities, and do not suffer shame to smite a young face for touching upon horrors with a pure design.

She cried in her bosom: I feel! She had no other expression for that which is as near as great natures may come to the conceiving of the celestial spirit from an emissary angel; and she trembled, the fire ran through her. It seemed to her, that she would be called to help or that certainly they were nearing to an effacement of the woefullest of evils; and if not helping, it would still be a blessedness for her to kneel thanking heaven.

Society was being attacked and defended. She could but studiously listen. Her father was listening. The assailant was a lady; and she had a hearing, although she treated Society as a discrowned monarch on trial for an offence against a more precious: viz., the individual cramped by brutish laws: the individual with the ideas of our time, righteously claiming expansion out of the clutches of a narrow old-world disciplinarian-that giant hypocrite! She flung the gauntlet at externally venerable Institutions; and she had a hearing, where horrification, execration, the foul Furies of Conservatism would in a shortly antecedent day have been hissing and snakily lashing, hounding her to expulsion. Mrs. Marina Floyer gravely seconded her. Colney did the same. Victor turned sharp on him. 'Yes,' Colney said; 'we unfold the standard of extremes in this country, to get a single step taken: that's how we move: we threaten death to get footway. Now, mark: Society's errors will be admitted.'

A gentleman spoke. He began by admitting Society's errors. Nevertheless, it so distinctly exists for the common good, that we may say of Society in relation to the individual, it is the body to the soul. We may wash, trim, purify, but we must not maim it. The assertion of our individuality in opposition to the Government of Society—this existing Society—is a toss of the cap for the erasure of our civilization, et caetera.

Platitudes can be of intense interest if they approach our case.—But, if you please, we ask permission to wash, trim, purify, and we do not get it.—But you have it! Because we take it at our peril; and you, who are too cowardly to grant or withhold, call-up the revolutionary from the pits by your slackness:—etc. There was a pretty hot debate. Both assailant and defendant, to Victor's thinking, spoke well, and each the right thing and he could have made use of both, but he could answer neither. He beat about for the cause of this deficiency, and discovered it in his position. Mentally, he was on the side of Society. Yet he was annoyed to find the attack was so easily answerable when the defence unfolded. But it was absurd to expect it would not be. And in fact, a position secretly rebellious is equal to water on the brain for stultifying us.

Before the controversy was over, a note in Nataly's handwriting called him home. She wrote: 'Make my excuses. C. D. will give Nesta and some lady dinner. A visitor here. Come alone, and without delay. Quite well, robust. Impatient to consult with you, nothing else.'

Nesta was happy to stay; and Victor set forth.

The visitor? plainly Dudley. Nataly's trusting the girl to the chance of some lady being present, was unlike her. Dudley might be tugging at the cord; and the recent conversation upon Society, rendered one of its gilt pillars particularly estimable.—A person in the debate had declared this modern protest on behalf of individualism to represent Society's Criminal Trial. And it is likely to be a long one. And good for the world, that we see such a Trial!—Well said or not, undoubtedly Society is an old criminal: not much more advanced than the state of spiritual worship where bloody sacrifice was offered to a hungry Lord. But it has a case for pleading. We may liken it, as we have it now, to the bumping lumberer's raft; suitable along torrent waters until we come to smoother. Are we not on waters of a certain smoothness at the reflecting level?— enough to justify demands for a vessel of finer design. If Society is to subsist, it must have the human with the logical argument against the cry of the free-flags, instead of presenting a block's obtuseness. That, you need not hesitate to believe, will be rolled downward and disintegrated, sooner than later. A Society based on the logical concrete of humane considerateness:—a Society prohibiting to Mrs. Burman her wielding of a life-long rod

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