

**GEORGE
MEREDITH**

ONE OF OUR
CONQUERORS,
COMPLETE

George Meredith
One of Our Conquerors. Complete

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George Meredith

One of Our Conquerors – Complete

CHAPTER I. ACROSS LONDON BRIDGE

A gentleman, noteworthy for a lively countenance and a waistcoat to match it, crossing London Bridge at noon on a gusty April day, was almost magically detached from his conflict with the gale by some sly strip of slipperiness, abounding in that conduit of the markets, which had more or less adroitly performed the trick upon preceding passengers, and now laid this one flat amid the shuffle of feet, peaceful for the moment as the uncomplaining who have gone to Sabrina beneath the tides. He was unhurt, quite sound, merely astonished, he remarked, in reply to the inquiries of the first kind helper at his elbow; and it appeared an acceptable statement of his condition. He laughed, shook his coat-tails, smoothed the back of his head rather thoughtfully, thankfully received his runaway hat, nodded bright beams to right and left, and making light of the muddy stigmas imprinted by the pavement, he scattered another shower of his nods and smiles around, to signify, that as his good friends would wish, he thoroughly felt his legs and could walk unaided. And he was in the act of doing it, questioning his familiar behind the waistcoat amazedly, to tell him how such a misadventure could have occurred to him of all men, when a glance below his chin discomposed his outward face. 'Oh, confound the fellow!' he said, with simple frankness, and was humorously ruffled, having seen absurd blots of smutty knuckles distributed over the maiden waistcoat.

His outcry was no more than the confidential communication of a genial spirit with that distinctive article of his attire. At the same time, for these friendly people about him to share the fun of the annoyance, he looked hastily brightly back, seeming with the contraction of his brows to frown, on the little band of observant Samaritans; in the centre of whom a man who knew himself honourably unclean, perhaps consequently a bit of a political jewel, hearing one of their number confounded for his pains, and by the wearer of a superfine dashing-white waistcoat, was moved to take notice of the total deficiency of gratitude in this kind of gentleman's look and pocket. If we ask for nothing for helping gentlemen to stand upright on their legs, and get it, we expect civility into the bargain. Moreover, there are reasons in nature why we choose to give sign of a particular surliness when our wealthy superiors would have us think their condescending grins are cordials.

The gentleman's eyes were followed on a second hurried downward grimace, the necessitated wrinkles of which could be stretched by malevolence to a semblance of haughty disgust; reminding us, through our readings in journals, of the wicked overblown Prince Regent and his Court, together with the view taken of honest labour in the mind of supercilious luxury, even if indebted to it freshly for a trifle; and the hoar-headed nineteenth-century billow of democratic ire craved the word to be set swelling.

'Am I the fellow you mean, sir?' the man said.

He was answered, not ungraciously: 'All right, my man.'

But the balance of our public equanimity is prone to violent antic bobbings on occasions when, for example, an ostentatious garment shall appear disdainful our class and ourself, and coin of the realm has not usurped command of one of the scales: thus a fairly pleasant answer, cast in persuasive features, provoked the retort:

'There you're wrong; nor wouldn't be.'

'What's that?' was the gentleman's musical inquiry.

'That's flat, as you was half a minute ago,' the man rejoined.

'Ah, well, don't be impudent,' the gentleman said, by way of amiable remonstrance before a parting.

‘And none of your dam punctilio,’ said the man.

Their exchange rattled smartly, without a direct hostility, and the gentleman stepped forward.

It was observed in the crowd, that after a few paces he put two fingers on the back of his head.

They might suppose him to be condoling with his recent mishap. But, in fact, a thing had occurred to vex him more than a descent upon the pavement or damage to his waistcoat’s whiteness: he abominated the thought of an altercation with a member of the mob; he found that enormous beat comprehensible only when it applauded him; and besides he wished it warmly well; all that was good for it; plentiful dinners, country excursions, stout menagerie bars, music, a dance, and to bed: he was for patting, stroking, petting the mob, for tossing it sops, never for irritating it to show an eye-tooth, much less for causing it to exhibit the grinders: and in endeavouring to get at the grounds of his dissension with that dirty-fisted fellow, the recollection of the word punctilio shot a throb of pain to the spot where his mishap had rendered him susceptible. Headache threatened—and to him of all men! But was there ever such a word for drumming on a cranium? Puzzles are presented to us now and then in the course of our days; and the smaller they are the better for the purpose, it would seem; and they come in rattle-boxes, they are actually children’s toys, for what they contain, but not the less do they buzz at our understandings and insist that they break or we, and, in either case, to show a mere foolish idle rattle in hollowness. Or does this happen to us only after a fall?

He tried a suspension of his mental efforts, and the word was like the clapper of a disorderly bell, striking through him, with reverberations, in the form of interrogations, as to how he, of all men living, could by any chance have got into a wrangle, in a thoroughfare, on London Bridge, of all places in the world!—he, so popular, renowned for his affability, his amiability; having no dislike to common dirty dogs, entirely the reverse, liking them and doing his best for them; and accustomed to receive their applause. And in what way had he offered a hint to bring on him the charge of punctilio?

‘But I am treating it seriously!’ he said, and jerked a dead laugh while fixing a button of his coat.

That he should have treated it seriously, furnished next the subject of cogitation; and here it was plainly suggested, that a degradation of his physical system, owing to the shock of the fall, must be seen and acknowledged; for it had become a perverted engine, to pull him down among the puerilities, and very soon he was worrying at punctilio anew, attempting to read the riddle of the application of it to himself, angry that he had allowed it to be the final word, and admitting it a famous word for the closing of a controversy:—it banged the door and rolled drum-notes; it deafened reason. And was it a London cockney crow-word of the day, or a word that had stuck in the fellow’s head from the perusal of his pothouse newspaper columns?

Furthermore, the plea of a fall, and the plea of a shock from a fall, required to account for the triviality of the mind, were humiliating to him who had never hitherto missed a step, or owned to the shortest of collapses. This confession of deficiency in explosive repartee—using a friend’s term for the ready gift—was an old and a rueful one with Victor Radnor. His godmother Fortune denied him that. She bestowed it on his friend Fenellan, and little else. Simeon Fenellan could clap the halter on a coltish mob; he had positively caught the roar of cries and stilled it, by capping the cries in turn, until the people cheered him; and the effect of the scene upon Victor Radnor disposed him to rank the gift of repartee higher than a certain rosily oratorical that he was permitted to tell himself he possessed, in bottle if not on draught. Let it only be explosive repartee: the well-fused bomb, the bubble to the stone, echo round the horn. Fenellan, would have discharged an extinguisher on punctilio in emission. Victor Radnor was unable to cope with it reflectively.

No, but one doesn’t like being beaten by anything! he replied to an admonishment of his better mind, as he touched his two fingers, more significantly dubious than the whole hand, at the back of his head, and checked or stemmed the current of a fear. For he was utterly unlike himself; he was dwelling on a trifle, on a matter discernibly the smallest, an incident of the streets; and although he refused to feel a bump or any responsive notification of a bruise, he made a sacrifice of his native pride to his intellectual, in granting that he must have been shaken, so childishly did he continue thinking.

Yes, well, and if a tumble distorts our ideas of life, and an odd word engrosses our speculations, we are poor creatures, he addressed another friend, from whom he stood constitutionally in dissent naming him Colney; and under pressure of the name, reviving old wrangles between them upon man's present achievements and his probable destinies: especially upon England's grandeur, vitality, stability, her intelligent appreciation of her place in the universe; not to speak of the historic dignity of London City. Colney had to be overcome afresh, and he fled, but managed, with two or three of his bitter phrases, to make a cuttle-fish fight of it, that oppressively shadowed his vanquisher:

The Daniel Lambert of Cities: the Female Annuitant of Nations:—and such like, wretched stuff, proper to Colney Durance, easily dispersed and out-laughed when we have our vigour. We have as much as we need of it in summoning a contemptuous Pooh to our lips, with a shrug at venomous dyspepsia.

Nevertheless, a malignant sketch of Colney's, in the which Hengist and Horsa, our fishy Saxon originals, in modern garb of liveryman and gaitered squire, flat-headed, paunchy, assiduously servile, are shown blacking Ben-Israel's boots and grooming the princely stud of the Jew, had come so near to Victor Radnor's apprehensions of a possible, if not an impending, consummation, that the ghastly vision of the Jew Dominant in London City, over England, over Europe, America, the world (a picture drawn in literary sepia by Colney: with our poor hang neck population uncertain about making a bell-rope of the forelock to the Satyr-snouty master; and the Norman Lord de Warenne handing him for a lump sum son and daughter, both to be Hebraized in their different ways), fastened on the most mercurial of patriotic men, and gave him a whole-length plunge into despondency.

It lasted nearly a minute. His recovery was not in this instance due to the calling on himself for the rescue of an ancient and glorious country; nor altogether to the spectacle of the shipping, over the parapet, to his right: the hundreds of masts rising out of the merchant river; London's unrivalled mezzotint and the City' rhetorician's inexhaustible argument: he gained it rather from the imperious demand of an animated and thirsty frame for novel impressions. Commonly he was too hot with his business, and airy fancies above it when crossing the bridge, to reflect in freshness on its wonders; though a phrase could spring him alive to them; a suggestion of the Foreigner, jealous, condemned to admire in despair of outstripping, like Satan worsted; or when a Premier's fine inflation magnified the scene at City banquets—exciting while audible, if a waggery in memory; or when England's cherished Bard, the Leading Article, blew bellows, and wind primed the lieges.

That a phrase on any other subject was of much the same effect, in relation to it, may be owned; he was lightly kindled. The scene, however, had a sharp sparkle of attractiveness at the instant. Down went the twirling horizontal pillars of a strong tide from the arches of the bridge, breaking to wild water at a remove; and a reddish Northern cheek of curdling pipeing East, at shrilly puffs between the Tower and the Custom House, encountered it to whip and ridge the flood against descending tug and long tail of stern-ajerk empty barges; with a steamer slowly nosing round off the wharf-cranes, preparing to swirl the screw; and half-bottom-upward boats dancing harpooner beside their whale; along an avenue, not fabulously golden, of the deputy masts of all nations, a wintry woodland, every rag aloft curling to volume; and here the spouts and the mounds of steam, and rolls of brown smoke there, variously undulated, curved to vanish; cold blue sky ashift with the whirl and dash of a very Tartar cavalry of cloud overhead.

Surely a scene pretending to sublimity?

Gazeing along that grand highway of the voyageing forest, your London citizen of good estate has reproached his country's poets for not pouring out, succinctly and melodiously, his multitudinous larvae of notions begotten by the scene. For there are times when he would, pay to have them sung; and he feels them big; he thinks them human in their bulk; they are Londinensian; they want but form and fire to get them scored on the tablets of the quotable at festive boards. This he can promise to his poets. As for elsewhere than at the festive, Commerce invoked is a Goddess that will have the reek of those boards to fill her nostrils, and poet and alderman alike may be dedicate to the sublime,

she leads them, after two sniffs of an idea concerning her, for the dive into the turtle-tureen. Heels up they go, poet first—a plummet he!

And besides it is barely possible for our rounded citizen, in the mood of meditation, to direct his gaze off the bridge along the waterway North-eastward without beholding as an eye the glow of whitebait's bow-window by the riverside, to the front of the summer sunset, a league or so down stream; where he sees, in memory savours, the Elysian end of Commerce: frontispiece of a tale to fetch us up the out-wearied spectre of old Apicius; yea, and urge Crispinus to wheel his purse into the market for the purchase of a costlier mullet!

But is the Jew of the usury gold becoming our despot-king of Commerce?

In that case, we do not ask our country's poets to compose a single stanza of eulogy's rhymes—far from it. Far to the contrary, we bid ourselves remember the sons of whom we are; instead of revelling in the fruits of Commerce, we shoot scornfully past those blazing bellied windows of the aromatic dinners, and beyond Thames, away to the fishermen's deeps, Old England's native element, where the strenuous ancestry of a race yet and ever manful at the stress of trial are heard around and aloft whistling us back to the splendid strain of muscle, and spray fringes cloud, and strong heart rides the briny scoops and hillocks, and Death and Man are at grip for the haul.

There we find our nationality, our poetry, no Hebrew competing.

We do: or there at least we left it. Whether to recover it when wanted, is not so certain. Humpy Hengist and dumpy Horsa, quitting ledger and coronet, might recur to their sea bowlegs and red-stubble chins, might take to their tarpaulins again; they might renew their manhood on the capture of cod; headed by Harald and Hardiknut, they might roll surges to whelm a Dominant Jew clean gone to the fleshpots and effeminacy. Aldermen of our ancient conception, they may teach him that he has been backsliding once more, and must repent in ashes, as those who are for jewels, titles, essences, banquets, for wallowing in slimy spawn of lucre, have ever to do. They dispossess him of his greedy gettings.

And how of the Law?

But the Law is always, and must ever be, the Law of the stronger. —Ay, but brain beats muscle, and what if the Jew should prove to have superior power of brain? A dreaded hypothesis! Why, then you see the insurgent Saxon seamen (of the names in two syllables with accent on the first), and their Danish captains, and it may be but a remnant of high-nosed old Norman Lord de Warenne beside them, in the criminal box: and presently the Jew smoking a giant regalia cigar on a balcony giving view of a gallows-tree. But we will try that: on our side, to back a native pugnacity, is morality, humanity, fraternity—nature's rights, aha! and who withstands them? on his, a troop of mercenaries!

And that lands me in Red Republicanism, a hop and a skip from Socialism! said Mr. Radnor, and chuckled ironically at the natural declivity he had come to. Still, there was an idea in it....

A short run or attempt at running after the idea, ended in pain to his head near the spot where the haunting word punctilio caught at any excuse for clamouring.

Yet we cannot relinquish an idea that was ours; we are vowed to the pursuit of it. Mr. Radnor lighted on the tracks, by dint of a thought flung at his partner Mr. Inchling's dread of the Jews. Inchling dreaded Scotchmen as well, and Americans, and Armenians, and Greeks: latterly Germans hardly less; but his dread of absorption in Jewry, signifying subjection, had often precipitated a deplorable shrug, in which Victor Radnor now perceived the skirts of his idea, even to a fancy that something of the idea must have struck Inchling when he shrugged: the idea being... he had lost it again. Definition seemed to be an extirpation enemy of this idea, or she was by nature shy. She was very feminine; coming when she willed and flying when wanted. Not until nigh upon the close of his history did she return, full-statured and embraceable, to Victor Radnor.

CHAPTER II. THROUGH THE VAGUE TO THE INFINITELY LITTLE

The fair dealing with readers demands of us, that a narrative shall not proceed at slower pace than legs of a man in motion; and we are still but little more than midway across London Bridge. But if a man's mind is to be taken as a part of him, the likening of it, at an introduction, to an army on the opening march of a great campaign, should plead excuses for tardy forward movements, in consideration of the large amount of matter you have to review before you can at all imagine yourselves to have made his acquaintance. This it is not necessary to do when you are set astride the enchanted horse of the Tale, which leaves the man's mind at home while he performs the deeds befitting him: he can indeed be rapid. Whether more active, is a question asking for your notions of the governing element in the composition of man, and of his present business here. The Tale inspires one's earlier ardours, when we sped without baggage, when the Impossible was wings to imagination, and heroic sculpture the simplest act of the chisel. It does not advance, 'tis true; it drives the whirligig circle round and round the single existing central point; but it is enriched with applause of the boys and girls of both ages in this land; and all the English critics heap their honours on its brave old Simplicity: our national literary flag, which signalizes us while we float, subsequently to flap above the shallows. One may sigh for it. An ill-fortuned minstrel who has by fateful direction been brought to see with distinctness, that man is not as much comprised in external features as the monkey, will be devoted to the task of the fuller portraiture.

After his ineffectual catching at the volatile idea, Mr. Radnor found repose in thoughts of his daughter and her dear mother. They had begged him to put on an overcoat this day of bitter wind, or a silken kerchief for the throat. Faithful to the Spring, it had been his habit since boyhood to show upon his person something of the hue of the vernal month, the white of the daisied meadow, and although he owned a light overcoat to dangle from shoulders at the Opera crush, he declined to wear it for protection. His gesture of shaking and expanding whenever the tender request was urged on him, signified a physical opposition to the control of garments. Mechanically now, while doating in fancy over the couple beseeching him, he loosened the button across his defaced waistcoat, exposed a large measure of chest to flaws of a wind barbed on Norwegian peaks by the brewers of cough and catarrh—horrid women of the whistling clouts, in the pay of our doctors. He braved them; he starved the profession. He was that man in fifty thousand who despises hostile elements and goes unpunished, calmly erect among a sneezing and tumbled host, as a lighthouse overhead of breezy fleets. The coursing of his blood was by comparison electrical; he had not the sensation of cold, other than that of an effort of the elements to arouse him; and so quick was he, through this fine animation, to feel, think, act, that the three successive tributaries of conduct appeared as an irreflective flash and a gamester's daring in the vein to men who had no deep knowledge of him and his lightning arithmetic for measuring, sounding, and deciding.

Naturally he was among the happiest of human creatures; he willed it so, with consent of circumstances; a boisterous consent, as when votes are reckoned for a favourite candidate: excepting on the part of a small band of black dissentients in a corner, a minute opaque body, devilish in their irreconcilability, who maintain their struggle to provoke discord, with a cry disclosing the one error of his youth, the sole bad step chargeable upon his antecedents. But do we listen to them? Shall we not have them turned out? He gives the sign for it; and he leaves his buoying constituents to out roar them: and he tells a friend that it was not, as one may say, an error, although an erratic step: but let us explain to our bosom friend; it was a step quite unregretted, gloried in; a step deliberately marked, to be done again, were the time renewed: it was a step necessitated (emphatically) by a false preceding

step; and having youth to plead for it, in the first instance, youth and ignorance; and secondly, and O how deeply truly! Love. Deep true love, proved by years, is the advocate.

He tells himself at the same time, after lending ear to the advocate's exordium and a favourite sentence, that, judged by the Powers (to them only can he expose the whole skeleton-cupboard of the case), judged by those clear-sighted Powers, he is exonerated.

To be exonerated by those awful Powers, is to be approved.

As to that, there is no doubt: whom they, all-seeing, discerning as they do, acquit they justify.

Whom they justify, they compliment.

They, seeing all the facts, are not unintelligent of distinctions, as the world is.

What, to them, is the spot of the error?—admitting it as an error. They know it for a thing of convention, not of Nature. We stand forth to plead it in proof of an adherence to Nature's laws: we affirm, that far from a defilement, it is an illumination and stamp of nobility. On the beloved who shares it with us, it is a stamp of the highest nobility. Our world has many ways for signifying its displeasure, but it cannot brand an angel.

This was another favourite sentence of Love's grand oration for the defence. So seductive was it to the Powers who sat in judgement on the case, that they all, when the sentence came, turned eyes upon the angel, and they smiled.

They do not smile on the condemnable.

She, then, were he rebuked, would have strength to uplift him. And who, calling her his own, could be placed in second rank among the blissful!

Mr. Radnor could rationally say that he was made for happiness; he flew to it, he breathed, dispensed it. How conceive the clear-sighted celestial Powers as opposing his claim to that estate? Not they. He knew, for he had them safe in the locked chamber of his breast, to yield him subservient responses. The world, or Puritanic members of it, had pushed him to the trial once or twice—or had put on an air of doing so; creating a temporary disturbance, ending in a merry duet with his daughter Nesta Victoria: a glorious trio when her mother Natalia, sweet lily that she was, shook the rainwater from her cup and followed the good example to shine in the sun.

He had a secret for them.

Nesta's promising soprano, and her mother's contralto, and his baritone—a true baritone, not so well trained as their accurate notes—should be rising in spirited union with the curtain of that secret: there was matter for song and concert, triumph and gratulation in it. And during the whole passage of the bridge, he had not once cast thought on a secret so palpitating, the cause of the morning's expedition and a long year's prospect of the present day! It seemed to have been knocked clean out of it—punctilioed out, Fenellan might say. Nor had any combinations upon the theme of business displaced it. Just before the fall, the whole drama of the unfolding of that secret was brilliant to his eyes as a scene on a stage.

He refused to feel any sensible bruise on his head, with the admission that he perhaps might think he felt one which was virtually no more than the feeling of a thought;—what his friend Dr. Peter Yatt would define as feeling a rotifer astir in the curative compartment of a homoeopathic globule: and a playful fancy may do that or anything. Only, Sanity does not allow the infinitely little to disturb us.

Mr. Radnor had a quaint experience of the effects of the infinitely little while threading his way to a haberdasher's shop for new white waistcoats. Under the shadow of the representative statue of City Corporations and London's majesty, the figure of Royalty, worshipful in its marbled redundancy, fronting the bridge, on the slope where the seas of fish and fruit below throw up a thin line of their drift, he stood contemplating the not unamiable, reposefully-jolly, Guelphic countenance, from the loose jowl to the bent knee, as if it were a novelty to him; unwilling to trust himself to the roadway he had often traversed, equally careful that his hesitation should not be seen. A trifle more impressible, he might have imagined the smoky figure and magnum of pursiness barring the City against him. He could have laughed aloud at the hypocrisy behind his quiet look of provincial wonderment at London's

sculptor's art; and he was partly tickled as well by the singular fit of timidity enchainning him. Cart, omnibus, cab, van, barrow, donkey-tray, went by in strings, broken here and there, and he could not induce his legs to take advantage of the gaps; he listened to a warning that he would be down again if he tried it, among those wheels; and his nerves clutched him, like a troop of household women, to keep him from the hazard of an exposure to the horrid crunch, pitiless as tiger's teeth; and we may say truly, that once down, or once out of the rutted line, you are food for lion and jackal—the forces of the world will have you in their mandibles.

An idea was there too; but it would not accept pursuit.

'A pretty scud overheard?' said a voice at his ear.

'For fine!—to-day at least,' Mr. Radnor affably replied to a stranger; and gazing on the face of his friend Fenellan, knew the voice, and laughed: 'You?' He straightened his back immediately to cross the road, dismissing nervousness as a vapour, asking, between a cab and a van: 'Anything doing in the City?' For Mr. Fenellan's proper station faced Westward.

The reply was deferred until they had reached the pavement, when Mr. Fenellan said: 'I'll tell you,' and looked a dubious preface, to his friend's thinking.

But it was merely the mental inquiry following a glance at mud-spots on the coat.

'We'll lunch; lunch with me, I must eat, tell me then,' said Mr. Radnor, adding within himself: 'Emptiness! want of food!' to account for recent ejaculations and qualms. He had not eaten for a good four hours.

Fenellan's tone signified to his feverish sensibility of the moment, that the matter was personal; and the intimation of a touch on domestic affairs caused sinkings in his vacuity, much as though his heart were having a fall.

He mentioned the slip on the bridge, to explain his: need to visit a haberdasher's shop, and pointed at the waistcoat.

Mr. Fenellan was compassionate over the 'Poor virgin of the smoky city!'

'They have their ready-made at these shops—last year's: perhaps, never mind, do for the day,' said Mr. Radnor, impatient for eating, now that he had spoken of it. 'A basin of turtle; I can't wait. A brush of the coat; mud must be dry by this time. Clear turtle, I think, with a bottle of the Old Veuve. Not bad news to tell? You like that Old Veuve?'

'Too well to tell bad news of her,' said Mr. Fenellan in a manner to reassure his friend, as he intended. 'You wouldn't credit it for the Spring of the year, without the spotless waistcoat?'

'Something of that, I suppose.' And so saying, Mr. Radnor entered the shop of his quest, to be complimented by the shopkeeper, while the attendants climbed the ladder to upper stages for white-waistcoat boxes, on his being; the first bird of the season; which it pleased him to hear; for the smallest of our gratifications in life could give a happy tone to this brightly-constituted gentleman.

CHAPTER III. OLD VEUVE

They were known at the house of the turtle and the attractive Old Veuve: a champagne of a sobered sweetness, of a great year, a great age, counting up to the extremer maturity attained by wines of stilly depths; and their worthy comrade, despite the wanton sparkles, for the promoting of the state of reverential wonderment in rapture, which an ancient wine will lead to, well you wot. The silly girly sugary crudity his given way to womanly suavity, matronly composure, with yet the sparkles; they ascend; but hue and flavour tell of a soul that has come to a lodgement there. It conducts the youthful man to temples of dusky thought: philosophers partaking of it are drawn by the arms of garlanded nymphs about their necks into the fathomless of inquiries. It presents us with a sphere, for the pursuit of the thing we covet most. It bubbles over mellowness; it has, in the marriage with Time, extracted a spice of individuality from the saccharine: by miracle, one would say, were it not for our knowledge of the right noble issue of Time when he and good things unite. There should be somewhere legends of him and the wine-flask. There must be meanings to that effect in the Mythology, awaiting unravelment. For the subject opens to deeper than cellars, and is a tree with vast ramifications of the roots and the spreading growth, whereon half if not all the mythic Gods, Inferior and Superior, Infernal and Celestial, might be shown sitting in concord, performing in concert, harmoniously receiving sacrificial offerings of the black or the white; and the black not extinguishing the fairer fellow. Tell us of a certainty that Time has embraced the wine-flask, then may it be asserted (assuming the great year for the wine, i.e. combinations above) that a speck of the white within us who drink will conquer, to rise in main ascension over volumes of the black. It may, at a greater venture, but confidently, be said in plain speech, that the Bacchus of auspicious birth induces ever to the worship of the loftier Deities.

Think as you will; forbear to come hauling up examples of malarious men, in whom these pourings of the golden rays of life breed fogs; and be moved, since you are scarcely under an obligation to hunt the meaning, in tolerance of some dithyrambic inebriety of narration (quiverings of the reverent pen) when we find ourselves entering the circle of a most magnetic polarity. Take it for not worse than accompanying choric flourishes, in accord with Mr. Victor Radnor and Mr. Simeon Fenellan at their sipping of the venerable wine.

Seated in a cosy corner, near the grey City window edged with a sooty maze, they praised the wine, in the neuter and in the feminine; that for the glass, this for the widow-branded bottle: not as poets hymning; it was done in the City manner, briefly, part pensively, like men travelling to the utmost bourne of flying flavour (a dell in infinite nether), and still masters of themselves and at home.

Such a wine, in its capturing permeation of us, insists on being for a time a theme.

'I wonder!' said Mr. Radnor, completely restored, eyeing his half-emptied second glass and his boon-fellow.

'Low!' Mr. Fenellan shook his head.

'Half a dozen dozen left?'

'Nearer the half of that. And who's the culprit?'

'Old days! They won't let me have another dozen out of the house now.'

'They'll never hit on such another discovery in their cellar, unless they unearth a fifth corner.'

'I don't blame them for making the price prohibitive. And sound as ever!'

Mr. Radnor watched the deliberate constant ascent of bubbles through their rose-topaz transparency. He drank. That notion of the dish of turtle was an inspiration of the right: he ought always to know it for the want of replenishment when such a man as he went quaking. His latest experiences of himself were incredible; but they passed, as the dimples of the stream. He finished his third glass. The bottle, like the cellar-wine, was at ebb: unlike the cellar-wine, it could be set flowing again: He prattled, in the happy ignorance of compulsion:

‘Fenellan, remember, I had a sort of right to the wine—to the best I could get; and this Old Veuve, more than any other, is a bridal wine! We heard of Giulia Sanfredini’s marriage to come off with the Spanish Duke, and drank it to the toast of our little Nesta’s godmother. I’ve told you. We took the girl to the Opera, when quite a little one—that high:—and I declare to you, it was marvellous! Next morning after breakfast, she plants herself in the middle of the room, and strikes her attitude for song, and positively, almost with the Sanfredini’s voice—illusion of it, you know,—trills us out more than I could have believed credible to be recollected by a child. But I’ve told you the story. We called her Fredi from that day. I sent the diva, with excuses and compliments, a nuptial present—necklace, Roman goldwork, locket-pendant, containing sunny curl, and below a fine pearl; really pretty; telling her our grounds for the liberty. She replied, accepting the responsible office; touching letter—we found it so; framed in Fredi’s room, under her godmother’s photograph. Fredi has another heroine now, though she worships her old one still; she never abandons her old ones. You’ve heard the story over and over!’

Mr. Fenellan nodded; he had a tenderness for the garrulity of Old Veuve, and for the damsel. Chatter on that subject ran pleasantly with their entertainment.

Mr. Radnor meanwhile scribbled, and despatched a strip of his Note-book, bearing a scrawl of orders, to his office. He was now fully himself, benevolent, combative, gay, alert for amusement or the probing of schemes to the quick, weighing the good and the bad in them with his fine touch on proportion.

‘City dead flat? A monotonous key; but it’s about the same as fetching a breath after a run; only, true, it lasts too long—not healthy! Skepsey will bring me my letters. I was down in the country early this morning, looking over the house, with Taplow, my architect; and he speaks fairly well of the contractors. Yes, down at Lakelands; and saw my first lemon butterfly in a dell of sunshine, out of the wind, and had half a mind to catch it for Fredi,—and should have caught it myself, if I had! The truth is, we three are country born and bred; we pine in London. Good for a season; you know my old feeling. They are to learn the secret of Lakelands to-morrow. It’s great fun; they think I don’t see they’ve had their suspicion for some time. You said—somebody said—“the eye of a needle for what they let slip of their secrets, and the point of it for penetrating yours”:—women. But no; my dear souls didn’t prick and bother. And they dealt with a man in armour. I carry them down to Lakelands to-morrow, if the City’s flat.’

‘Keeping a secret’s the lid on a boiling pot with you,’ Mr. Fenellan said; and he mused on the profoundness of the flavour at his lips.

‘I do it.’

‘You do: up to bursting at the breast.’

‘I keep it from Colney!’

‘As Vesuvius keeps it from Palmieri when shaking him.’

‘Has old Colney an idea of it?’

‘He has been foretelling an eruption of an edifice.’

The laugh between them subsided to pensiveness.

Mr. Fenellan’s delay in the delivery of his news was eloquent to reveal the one hateful topic; and this being seen, it waxed to such increase of size with the passing seconds, that prudence called for it.

‘Come!’ said Mr. Radnor.

The appeal was understood.

‘Nothing very particular. I came into the City to look at a warehouse they want to mount double guard on. Your idea of the fireman’s night-patrol and wires has done wonders for the office.’

‘I guarantee the City if all my directions are followed.’

Mr. Fenellan’s remark, that he had nothing very particular to tell, reduced it to the mere touch upon a vexatious matter, which one has to endure in the ears at times; but it may be postponed. So Mr. Radnor encouraged him to talk of an Insurance Office Investment. Where it is all bog and mist,

as in the City to-day, the maxim is, not to take a step, they agreed. Whether it was attributable to an unconsumed glut of the markets, or apprehension of a panic, had to be considered. Both gentlemen were angry with the Birds on the flags of foreign nations, which would not imitate a sawdust Lion to couch reposefully. Incessantly they scream and sharpen talons.

‘They crack the City bubbles and bladders, at all events,’ Mr. Fenellan said. ‘But if we let our journals go on making use of them, in the shape of sham hawks overhead, we shall pay for their one good day of the game with our loss of the covey. An unstable London’s no world’s market-place.’

‘No, no; it’s a niggardly national purse, not the journals,’ Mr. Radnor said. ‘The journals are trading engines. Panics are grist to them; so are wars; but they do their duty in warning the taxpayer and rousing Parliament. Dr. Schlesien’s right: we go on believing that our God Neptune will do everything for us, and won’t see that Steam has paralyzed his Trident: good! You and Colney are hard on Schlesien—or at him, I should say. He’s right: if we won’t learn that we have become Continentals, we shall be marched over. Laziness, cowardice, he says.’

‘Oh, be hanged!’ interrupted Fenellan. ‘As much of the former as you like. He’s right about our “individualismus” being another name for selfishness, and showing the usual deficiency in external features; it’s an individualism of all of a pattern, as when a mob cuts its lucky, each fellow his own way. Well, then, conscript them, and they’ll be all of a better pattern. The only thing to do, and the cheapest. By heaven! it’s the only honourable thing to do.’

Mr. Radnor disapproved. ‘No conscription here.’

‘Not till you’ve got the drop of poison in your blood, in the form of an army landed. That will teach you to catch at the drug.’

‘No, Fenellan! Besides they’ve got to land. I guarantee a trusty army and navy under a contract, at two-thirds of the present cost. We’ll start a National Defence Insurance Company after the next panic.’

‘During,’ said Mr. Fenellan, and there was a flutter of laughter at the unobtrusive hint for seizing Dame England in the mood.

Both dropped a sigh.

‘But you must try and run down with us to Lakelands to-morrow,’ Mr. Radnor resumed on a cheerfuller theme. ‘You have not yet seen all I’ve done there. And it’s a castle with a drawbridge: no exchanging of visits, as we did at Craye Farm and at Creckholt; we are there for country air; we don’t court neighbours at all—perhaps the elect; it will depend on Nataly’s wishes. We can accommodate our Concert-set, and about thirty or forty more, for as long as they like. You see, that was my intention—to be independent of neighbouring society. Madame Callet guarantees dinners or hot suppers for eighty—and Armandine is the last person to be recklessly boasting.—When was it I was thinking last of Armandine?’ He asked himself that, as he rubbed at the back of his head.

Mr. Fenellan was reading his friend’s character by the light of his remarks and in opposition to them, after the critical fashion of intimates who know as well as hear: but it was amiably and trippingly, on the dance of the wine in his veins.

His look, however, was one that reminded; and Mr. Radnor cried: ‘Now! whatever it is!’

‘I had an interview: I assure you,’ Mr. Fenellan interposed to pacify: ‘the smallest of trifles, and to be expected: I thought you ought to know it:—an interview with her lawyer; office business, increase of Insurance on one of her City warehouses.’

‘Speak her name, speak the woman’s name; we’re talking like a pair of conspirators,’ exclaimed Mr. Radnor.

‘He informed me that Mrs. Burman has heard of the new mansion.’

‘My place at Lakelands?’

Mr. Radnor’s clear-water eyes hardened to stony as their vision ran along the consequences of her having heard it.

‘Earlier this time!’ he added, thrummed on the table, and thumped with knuckles. ‘I make my stand at Lakelands for good! Nothing mortal moves me!’

‘That butler of hers—’

‘Jarniman, you mean: he’s her butler, yes, the scoundrel—h’m-pah! Heaven forgive me! she’s an honest woman at least; I wouldn’t rob her of her little: fifty-nine or sixty next September, fifteenth of the month! with the constitution of a broken drug-bottle, poor soul! She hears everything from Jarniman: he catches wind of everything. All foreseen, Fenellan, foreseen. I have made my stand at Lakelands, and there’s my flag till it’s hauled down over Victor Radnor. London kills Nataly as well as Fredi—and me: that is—I can use the words to you—I get back to primal innocence in the country. We all three have the feeling. You’re a man to understand. My beasts, and the wild flowers, hedge-banks, and stars. Fredi’s poetess will tell you. Quiet waters reflecting. I should feel it in Paris as well, though they have nightingales in their Bois. It’s the rustic I want to bathe me; and I had the feeling at school, biting at Horace. Well, this is my Sabine Farm, rather on a larger scale, for the sake of friends. Come, and pure air, water from the springs, walks and rides in lanes, high sand-lanes; Nataly loves them; Fredi worships the old roots of trees: she calls them the faces of those weedy sandy lanes. And the two dear souls on their own estate, Fenellan! And their poultry, cows, cream. And a certain influence one has in the country socially. I make my stand on a home—not empty punctilio.’

Mr. Fenellan repeated, in a pause, ‘Punctilio,’ and not emphatically.

‘Don’t bawl the word,’ said Mr. Radnor, at the drum of whose ears it rang and sang. ‘Here in the City the woman’s harmless; and here,’ he struck his breast. ‘But she can shoot and hit another through me. Ah, the witch!—poor wretch! poor soul! Only, she’s malignant. I could swear! But Colney ‘s right for once in something he says about oaths—“dropping empty buckets,” or something.’

“Empty buckets to haul up impotent demons, whom we have to pay as heavily as the ready devil himself,” Mr. Fenellan supplied the phrase. ‘Only, the moment old Colney moralizes, he’s what the critics call sententious. We’ve all a parlous lot too much pulpit in us.’

‘Come, Fenellan, I don’t think...’

‘Oh, yes, but it’s true of me too.’

‘You reserve it for your enemies.’

‘I ‘d like to distract it a bit from the biggest of ‘em.’ He pointed finger at the region of the heart.

‘Here we have Skepsey,’ said Mr. Radnor, observing the rapid approach of a lean small figure, that in about the time of a straight-aimed javelin’s cast, shot from the doorway to the table.

CHAPTER IV. THE SECOND BOTTLE

This little dart of a man came to a stop at a respectful distance from his master, having the look of an arrested needle in mechanism. His lean slip of face was an illumination of vivacious grey from the quickest of prominent large eyes. He placed his master's letters legibly on the table, and fell to his posture of attention, alert on stiff legs, the hands like sucking-cubs at play with one another.

Skepsey waited for Mr. Fenellan to notice him.

'How about the Schools for Boxing?' that gentleman said.

Deploing in motion the announcement he had to make, Skepsey replied: 'I have a difficulty in getting the plan treated seriously: a person of no station:—it does not appear of national importance. Ladies are against. They decline their signatures; and ladies have great influence; because of the blood; which we know is very slight, rather healthy than not; and it could be proved for the advantage of the frailer sex. They seem to be unaware of their own interests—ladies. The contention all around us is with ignorance. My plan is written; I have shown it, and signatures of gentlemen, to many of our City notables favourable in most cases: gentlemen of the Stock Exchange highly. The clergy and the medical profession are quite with me.'

'The surgical, perhaps you mean?'

'Also, sir. The clergy strongly.'

'On the grounds of—what, Skepsey?'

'Morality. I have fully explained to them:—after his work at the desk all day, the young City clerk wants refreshment. He needs it, must have it. I propose to catch him on his way to his music-halls and other places, and take him to one of our establishments. A short term of instruction, and he would find a pleasure in the gloves; it would delight him more than excesses-beer and tobacco. The female in her right place, certainly.' Skepsey supplicated honest interpretation of his hearer, and pursued,

'It would improve his physical strength, at the same time add to his sense of personal dignity.'

'Would you teach females as well—to divert them from their frivolities?'

'That would have to be thought over, sir. It would be better for them than using their nails.'

'I don't know, Skepsey: I'm rather a Conservative there.'

'Yes; with regard to the female, sir: I confess, my scheme does not include them. They dance; that is a healthy exercise. One has only to say, that it does not add to the national force, in case of emergency. I look to that. And I am particular in proposing an exercise independent of—I have to say—sex. Not that there is harm in sex. But we are for training. I hope my meaning is clear?'

'Quite. You would have boxing with the gloves to be a kind of monastic recreation.'

'Recreation is the word, sir; I have often admired it,' said Skepsey, blinking, unsure of the signification of monastic.

'I was a bit of a boxer once,' Mr. Fenellan said, conscious of height and breadth in measuring the wisp of a figure before him.

'Something might be done with you still, sir.'

Skepsey paid him the encomium after a respectful summary of his gifts in a glimpse. Mr. Fenellan bowed to him.

Mr. Radnor raised head from the notes he was pencilling upon letters perused.

'Skepsey's craze: regeneration of the English race by boxing—nucleus of a national army?'

'To face an enemy at close quarters—it teaches that, sir. I have always been of opinion, that courage may be taught. I do not say heroism. And setting aside for a moment thoughts of an army, we create more valuable citizens. Protection to the weak in streets and by-places—shocking examples of ruffians maltreating women, in view of a crowd.'

'One strong man is an overmatch for your mob,' said Mr. Fenellan.

Skepsey toned his assent to the diminishing thinness where a suspicion of the negative begins to wind upon a distant horn.

‘Knowing his own intentions; and before an ignorant mob:—strong, you say, sir? I venture my word that a decent lad, with science, would beat him. It is a question of the study and practice of first principles.’

‘If you were to see a rascal giant mishandling a woman?’ Skepsey conjured the scene by bending his head and peering abstractedly, as if over spectacles.

‘I would beg him to abstain, for his own sake.’

Mr. Fenellan knew that the little fellow was not boasting.

‘My brother Dartrey had a lesson or two from you in the first principles, I think?’

‘Captain Dartrey is an athlete, sir: exceedingly quick and clever; a hard boxer to beat.’

‘You will not call him captain when you see him; he has dismissed the army.’

‘I much regret it, sir, much, that we have lost him. Captain Dartrey Fenellan was a beautiful fencer. He gave me some instruction; unhappily, I have to acknowledge, too late. It is a beautiful art. Captain Dartrey says, the French excel at it. But it asks for a weapon, which nature has not given: whereas the fists...’

‘So,’ Mr. Radnor handed notes and papers to Skepsey: ‘No sign of life?’

‘It is not yet seen in the City, sir.’

‘The first principles of commercial activity have retreated to earth’s maziest penetralia, where no tides are! is it not so, Skepsey?’ said Mr. Fenellan, whose initiative and exuberance in loquency had been restrained by a slight oppression, known to guests; especially to the guest in the earlier process of his magnification and illumination by virtue of a grand old wine; and also when the news he has to communicate may be a stir to unpleasant heaps. The shining lips and eyes of his florid face now proclaimed speech, with his Puckish fancy jack-o’-lantern over it. ‘Business hangs to swing at every City door, like a ragshop Doll, on the gallows of overproduction. Stocks and Shares are hollow nuts not a squirrel of the lot would stop to crack for sight of the milky kernel mouldered to beard.

Percentage, like a cabman without a fare, has gone to sleep inside his vehicle. Dividend may just be seen by tiptoe: stockholders, twinkling heels over the far horizon. Too true!—and our merchants, brokers, bankers, projectors of Companies, parade our City to remind us of the poor steamed fellows trooping out of the burst-boiler-room of the big ship Leviathan, in old years; a shade or two paler than the crowd o’ the passengers, apparently alive and conversible, but corpses, all of them to lie their length in fifteen minutes.’

‘And you, Fenellan?’ cried his host, inspired for a second bottle by the lovely nonsense of a voluble friend wound up to the mark.

‘Doctor of the ship! with this prescription!’ Mr. Fenellan held up his glass.

‘Empty?’

Mr. Fenellan made it completely so. ‘Confident!’ he affirmed.

An order was tossed to the waiter, and both gentlemen screwed their lips in relish of his heavy consent to score off another bottle from the narrow list.

‘At the office in forty minutes,’ Skepsey’s master nodded to him and shot him forth, calling him back: ‘By the way, in case a man named Jarniman should ask to see me, you turn him to the rightabout.’

Skepsey repeated: ‘Jarniman!’ and flew.

‘A good servant,’ Mr. Radnor said. ‘Few of us think of our country so much, whatever may be said of the specific he offers. Colney has impressed him somehow immensely: he studies to write too; pushes to improve himself; altogether a worthy creature.’

The second bottle appeared. The waiter, in sincerity a reluctant executioner, heightened his part for the edification of the admiring couple.

‘Take heart, Benjamin,’ said Mr. Fenellan; ‘it’s only the bottle dies; and we are the angels above to receive the spirit.’

‘I’m thinking of the house,’ Benjamin replied. He told them that again.

‘It’s the loss of the fame of having the wine, that he mourns. But, Benjamin,’ said Mr. Fenellan, ‘the fame enters into the partakers of it, and we spread it, and perpetuate it for you.’

‘That don’t keep a house upright,’ returned Benjamin.

Mr. Fenellan murmured to himself: ‘True enough, it’s elegy—though we perform it through a trumpet; and there’s not a doubt of our being down or having knocked the world down, if we’re loudly praised.’

Benjamin waited to hear approval sounded on the lips uncertain as a woman is a wine of ticklish age. The gentlemen nodded, and he retired.

A second bottle, just as good as the first, should, one thoughtlessly supposes, procure us a similar reposeful and excursive enjoyment, as of men lying on their backs and flying imagination like a kite. The effect was quite other. Mr. Radnor drank hastily and spoke with heat: ‘You told me All? tell me that!’

Mr. Fenellan gathered himself together; he sipped, and relaxed his bracing. But there really was a bit more to tell: not much, was it? Not likely to puff a gale on the voluptuous indolence of a man drawn along by Nereids over sunny sea-waves to behold the birth of the Foam-Goddess? ‘According to Carling, her lawyer; that is, he hints she meditates a blow.’

‘Mrs. Burman means to strike a blow?’

‘The lady.’

‘Does he think I fear any—does he mean a blow with a weapon? Is it a legal...? At last? Fenellan!’

‘So I fancied I understood.’

‘But can the good woman dream of that as a blow to strike and hurt, for a punishment?—that’s her one aim.’

‘She may have her hallucinations.’

‘But a blow—what a word for it! But it’s life to us life! It’s the blow we’ve prayed for. Why, you know it! Let her strike, we bless her. We’ve never had an ill feeling to the woman; utterly the contrary—pity, pity, pity! Let her do that, we’re at her feet, my Nataly and I. If you knew what my poor girl suffers! She’s a saint at the stake. Chiefly on behalf of her family. Fenellan, you may have a sort of guess at my fortune: I’ll own to luck; I put in a claim to courage and calculation.’

‘You’ve been a bulwark to your friends.’

‘All, Fenellan, all-stocks, shares, mines, companies, industries at home and—abroad—all, at a sweep, to have the woman strike that blow! Cheerfully would I begin to build a fortune over again—singing! Ha! the woman has threatened it before. It’s probably feline play with us.’

His chin took support, he frowned.

‘You may have touched her.’

‘She won’t be touched, and she won’t be driven. What’s the secret of her? I can’t guess, I never could. She’s a riddle.’

‘Riddles with wigs and false teeth have to be taken and shaken for the ardently sought secret to reveal itself,’ said Mr. Fenellan.

His picture, with the skeleton issue of any shaking, smote Mr. Radnor’s eyes, they turned over. ‘Oh!—her charms! She had a desperate belief in her beauty. The woman’s undoubtedly charitable; she’s not without a mind—sort of mind: well, it shows no crack till it’s put to use. Heart! yes, against me she has plenty of it. They say she used to be courted; she talked of it: “my courtiers, Mr. Victor!” There, heaven forgive me, I wouldn’t mock at her to another.’

‘It looks as if she were only inexorably human,’ said Mr. Fenellan, crushing a delicious gulp of the wine, that foamed along the channel to flavour. ‘We read of the tester of a bandit-bed; and it

flattened unwary recumbents to pancakes. An escape from the like of that seems pleadable, should be: none but the drowsy would fail to jump out and run, or the insane.'

Mr. Radnor was taken with the illustration of his case. 'For the sake of my sanity, it was! to preserve my.... but any word makes nonsense of it. Could—I must ask you—could any sane man—you were abroad in those days, horrible days! and never met her: I say, could you consent to be tied—I admit the vow, ceremony, so forth-tied to—I was barely twenty-one: I put it to you, Fenellan, was it in reason an engagement—which is, I take it, a mutual plight of faith, in good faith; that is, with capacity on both sides to keep the engagement: between the man you know I was in youth and a more than middle-aged woman crazy up to the edge of the cliff—as Colney says half the world is, and she positively is when her spite is roused. No, Fenellan, I have nothing on my conscience with regard to the woman. She had wealth: I left her not one penny the worse for—but she was not one to reckon it, I own. She could be generous, was, with her money. If she had struck this blow—I know she thought of it: or if she would strike it now, I could not only forgive her, I could beg forgiveness.'

A sight of that extremity fetched prickles to his forehead.

'You've borne your part bravely, my friend.'

'I!' Mr. Radnor shrugged at mention of his personal burdens. 'Praise my Nataly if you like! Made for one another, if ever two in this world! You know us both, and do you doubt it? The sin would have been for us two to meet and—but enough when I say, that I am she, she me, till death and beyond it: that's my firm faith. Nataly teaches me the religion of life, and you may learn what that is when you fall in love with a woman. Eighteen-nineteen-twenty years!'

Tears fell from him, two drops. He blinked, bugled in his throat, eyed his watch, and smiled: 'The finishing glass! We should have had to put Colney to bed. Few men stand their wine. You and I are not lamed by it; we can drink and do business: my first experience in the City was, that the power to drink—keeping a sound head—conduces to the doing of business.'

'It's a pleasant way of instructing men to submit to their conqueror.'

'If it doubles the energies, mind.'

'Not if it fiddles inside. I confess to that effect upon me. I've a waltz going on, like the snake with the tail in his mouth, eternal; and it won't allow of a thought upon Investments.'

'Consult me to-morrow,' said Mr. Radnor, somewhat pained for having inconsiderately misled the man he had hitherto helpfully guided. 'You've looked at the warehouse?'

'That's performed.'

'Make a practice of getting over as much of your business in the early morning as you well can.'

Mr. Radnor added hints of advice to a frail humanity he was indulgent, the giant spoke in good fellowship. It would have been to have strained his meaning, for purposes of sarcasm upon him, if one had taken him to boast of a personal exemption from our common weakness.

He stopped, and laughed: 'Now I 'm pumping my pulpit-eh? You come with us to Lakelands. I drive the ladies down to my office, ten A.M.: if it's fine; train half-past. We take a basket. By the way, I had no letter from Dartrey last mail.'

'He has buried his wife. It happens to some men.'

Mr. Radnor stood gazing. He asked for the name of the place of the burial. He heard without seizing it. A simulacrum spectre-spark of hopefulness shot up in his imagination, glowed and quivered, darkening at the utterance of the Dutch syllables, leaving a tinge of witless envy. Dartrey—Fenellan had buried the wife whose behaviour vexed and dishonoured him: and it was in Africa! One would have to go to Africa to be free of the galling. But Dartrey had gone, and he was free!—The strange faint freaks of our sensations when struck to leap and throw off their load after a long affliction, play these disorderly pranks on the brain; and they are faint, but they come in numbers, they are recurring, always in ambush. We do not speak of them: we have not words to stamp the indefinite things; generally we should leave them unspoken if we had the words; we know them as out of reason: they haunt us, pluck at us, fret us, nevertheless.

Dartrey free, he was relieved of the murderous drama incessantly in the mind of shackled men.

It seemed like one of the miracles of a divine intervention, that Dartrey should be free, suddenly free; and free while still a youngish man. He was in himself a wonderful fellow, the pick of his country for vigour, gallantry, trustiness, high-mindedness; his heavenly good fortune decked him as a prodigy.

‘No harm to the head from that fall of yours?’ Mr. Fenellan said.

‘None.’ Mr. Radnor withdrew his hand from head to hat, clapped it on and cried cheerily: ‘Now to business’; as men may, who have confidence in their ability to concentrate an instant attention upon the substantial. ‘You dine with us. The usual Quartet: Peridon, Pempton, Colney, Yatt, or Catkin: Priscilla Graves and Nataly—the Rev. Septimus; Cormyn and his wife: Young Dudley Sowerby and I—flutes: he has precision, as naughty Fredi said, when some one spoke of expression. In the course of the evening, Lady Grace, perhaps: you like her.’

‘Human nature in the upper circle is particularly likeable.’

‘Fenellan,’ said Mr. Radnor, emboldened to judge hopefully of his fortunes by mere pressure of the thought of Dartrey’s, ‘I put it to you: would you say, that there is anything this time behind your friend Carling’s report?’

Although it had not been phrased as a report, Mr. Fenellan’s answering look and gesture, and a run of indiscriminate words, enrolled it in that form, greatly to the inspiriting of Mr. Radnor.

Old Veuve in one, to the soul of Old Veuve in the other, they recalled a past day or two, touched the skies; and merriment or happiness in the times behind them held a mirror to the present: or the hour of the reverse of happiness worked the same effect by contrast: so that notions of the singular election of us by Dame Fortune, sprang like vinous bubbles. For it is written, that however powerful you be, you shall not take the Winegod on board to entertain him as a simple passenger; and you may captain your vessel, you may pilot it, and keep to your reckonings, and steer for all the ports you have a mind to, even to doing profitable exchange with Armenian and Jew, and still you shall do the something more, which proves that the Winegod is on board: he is the pilot of your blood if not the captain of your thoughts.

Mr. Fenellan was unused to the copious outpouring of Victor Radnor’s confidences upon his domestic affairs; and the unwonted excitement of Victor’s manner of speech would have perplexed him, had there not been such a fiddling of the waltz inside him.

Payment for the turtle and the bottles of Old Veuve was performed apart with Benjamin, while Simeon Fenellan strolled out of the house, questioning a tumbled mind as to what description of suitable entertainment, which would be dancing and flirting and fal-lallery in the season of youth, London City could provide near meridian hours for a man of middle age carrying his bottle of champagne, like a guest of an old-fashioned wedding-breakfast. For although he could stand his wine as well as his friend, his friend’s potent capacity martially after the feast to buckle to business at a sign of the clock, was beyond him. It pointed to one of the embodied elements, hot from Nature’s workshop. It told of the endurance of powers, that partly explained the successful, astonishing career of his friend among a people making urgent, if unequal, demands perpetually upon stomach and head.

CHAPTER V. THE LONDON WALK WESTWARD

In that nationally interesting Poem, or Dramatic Satire, once famous, THE RAJAH IN LONDON (London, Limbo and Sons, 1889), now obliterated under the long wash of Press-matter, the reflection—not unknown to philosophical observers, and natural perhaps in the mind of an Oriental Prince—produced by his observation of the march of London citizens Eastward at morn, Westward at eve, attributes their practice to a survival of the Zoroastrian form of worship. His Minister, favourable to the people or for the sake of fostering an idea in his Master's head, remarks, that they show more than the fidelity of the sunflower to her God. The Rajah, it would appear, frowns interrogatively, in the princely fashion, accusing him of obscureness of speech:—princes and the louder members of the grey public are fraternally instant to spurn at the whip of that which they do not immediately comprehend. It is explained by the Minister: not even the flower, he says, would hold constant, as they, to the constantly unseen—a trebly cataphractic Invisible. The Rajah professes curiosity to know how it is that the singular people nourish their loyalty, since they cannot attest to the continued being of the object in which they put their faith. He is informed by his prostrate servant of a settled habit they have of diligently seeking their Divinity, hidden above, below; and of copiously taking inside them doses of what is denied to their external vision: thus they fortify credence chemically on an abundance of meats and liquors; fire they eat, and they drink fire; they become consequently instinct with fire. Necessarily therefore they believe in fire. Believing, they worship. Worshipping, they march Eastward at morn, Westward at eve. For that way lies the key, this way the cupboard, of the supplies, their fuel.

According to Stage directions, THE RAJAH AND HIS MINISTER Enter a Gin-Palace.—It is to witness a service that they have learnt to appreciate as Anglicanly religious.

On the step of the return to their Indian clime, they speak of the hatted sect, which is most, or most commercially, succoured and fattened by our rule there: they wave adieu to the conquering Islanders, as to 'Parsees beneath a cloud.'

The two are seen last on the deck of the vessel, in perusal of a medical pamphlet composed of statistics and sketches, tracteries, horrid blots, diagrams with numbers referring to notes, of the various maladies caused by the prolonged prosecution of that form of worship.

'But can they suffer so and live?' exclaims the Rajah, vexed by the physical sympathetic twinges which set him wincing.

'Science,' his Minister answers, 'took them up where Nature, in pity of their martyrdom, dropped them. They do not live; they are engines, insensible things of repairs and patches; insteamed to pursue their infuriate course, to the one end of exhausting supplies for the renewing of them, on peril of an instant suspension if they deviate a step or stop: nor do they.'

The Rajah is of opinion, that he sails home with the key of the riddle of their power to vanquish. In some apparent allusion to an Indian story of a married couple who successfully made their way, he accounts for their solid and resistless advance, resembling that of—

The doubly-wedded man and wife,
Pledged to each other and against the world
With mutual union.

One would like to think of the lengthened tide-flux of pedestrian citizens facing South-westward, as being drawn by devout attraction to our nourishing luminary: at the hour, mark, when the Norland cloud-king, after a day of wild invasion, sits him on his restful bank of bluefish smack-o'-cheek red above Whitechapel, to spy where his last puff of icy javelins pierces and dismembers the vapoury masses in cluster about the circle of flame descending upon the greatest and most elevated

of Admirals at the head of the Strand, with illumination of smoke-plumed chimneys, house-roofs, window-panes, weather-vanes, monument and pedimental monsters, and omnibus umbrella. One would fair believe that they advance admiring; they are assuredly made handsome by the beams. No longer mere concurrent atoms of the furnace of business (from coal-dust to sparks, rushing, as it were, on respiratory blasts of an enormous engine's centripetal and centrifugal energy), their step is leisurely to meet the rosy Dinner, which is ever a see-saw with the God of Light in his fall; the mask of the noble human visage upon them is not roughened, as at midday, by those knotted hard ridges of the scrambler's hand seen from forehead down to jaw; when indeed they have all the appearance of sour scientific productions. And unhappily for the national portrait, in the Poem quoted, the Rajah's Minister chose an hour between morning and meridian, or at least before an astonished luncheon had come to composure inside their persons, for drawing his Master's attention to the quaint similarity of feature in the units of the busy antish congregates they had travelled so far to visit and to study:

These Britons wear
The driven and perplexed look of men
Begotten hastily 'twixt business hours

It could not have been late afternoon.

These Orientals should have seen them, with Victor Radnor among them, fronting the smoky splendours of the sunset. In April, the month of piled and hurried cloud, it is a Rape of the Sabines overhead from all quarters, either one of the winds brawnily larcenous; and London, smoking royally to the open skies, builds images of a dusty epic fray for possession of the portly dames. There is immensity, swinging motion, collision, dusky richness of colouring, to the sight; and to the mind idea. London presents it. If we can allow ourselves a moment for not inquiring scrupulously (you will do it by inhaling the aroma of the ripe kitchen hour), here is a noble harmony of heaven and the earth of the works of man, speaking a grander tongue than barren sea or wood or wilderness. Just a moment; it goes; as, when a well-attuned barrel-organ in a street has drawn us to recollections of the Opera or Italy, another harshly crashes, and the postman knocks at doors, and perchance a costermonger cries his mash of fruit, a beggar woman wails her hymn. For the pinched are here, the dinnerless, the weedy, the gutter-growths, the forces repressing them. That grand tongue of the giant City inspires none human to Bardic eulogy while we let those discords be. An embittered Muse of Reason prompts her victims to the composition of the adulatory Essay and of the Leading Article, that she may satiate an angry irony 'upon those who pay fee for their filling with the stuff. Song of praise she does not permit. A moment of satisfaction in a striking picture is accorded, and no more. For this London, this England, Europe, world, but especially this London, is rather a thing for hospital operations than for poetic rhapsody; in aspect, too, streaked scarlet and pock-pitted under the most cumbrous of jewelled tiaras; a Titanic work of long-tolerated pygmies; of whom the leaders, until sorely discomforted in body and doubtful in soul, will give gold and labour, will impose restrictions upon activity, to maintain a conservatism of diseases. Mind is absent, or somewhere so low down beneath material accumulations that it is inexpressive, powerless to drive the ponderous bulk to such excisings, purgeings, purifyings as might—as may, we will suppose, render it acceptable, for a theme of panegyric, to the Muse of Reason; ultimately, with her consent, to the Spirit of Song.

But first there must be the cleansing. When Night has fallen upon London, the Rajah remarks:

Monogamic Societies present
A decent visage and a hideous rear.

His Minister (satirically, or in sympathetic Conservatism) would have them not to move on, that they may preserve among beholders the impression of their handsome frontage. Night, however, will

come; and they, adoring the decent face, are moved on, made to expose what the Rajah sees. Behind his courteousness, he is an antagonistic observer of his conquerors; he pushes his questions farther than the need for them; his Minister the same; apparently to retain the discountenanced people in their state of exposure. Up to the time of the explanation of the puzzle on board the departing vessel (on the road to Windsor, at the Premier's reception, in the cell of the Police, in the presence of the Magistrate-whose crack of a totally inverse decision upon their case, when he becomes acquainted with the titles and station of these imputedly peccant, refreshes them), they hold debates over the mysterious contrarities of a people professing in one street what they confound in the next, and practising by day a demureness that yells with the cat of the tiles at night.

Granting all that, it being a transient novelist's business to please the light-winged hosts which live for the hour, and give him his only chance of half of it, let him identify himself with them, in keeping to the quadrille on the surface and shirking the disagreeable.

Clouds of high colour above London City are as the light of the Goddess to lift the angry heroic head over human. They gloriously transfigure. A Murillo beggar is not more precious than sight of London in any of the streets admitting coloured cloud-scenes; the cunning of the sun's hand so speaks to us. And if haply down an alley some olive mechanic of street-organs has quickened little children's legs to rhythmic footing, they strike on thoughts braver than pastoral. Victor Radnor, lover of the country though he was, would have been the first to say it. He would indeed have said it too emphatically. Open London as a theme, to a citizen of London ardent for the clear air out of it, you have roused an orator; you have certainly fired a magazine, and must listen to his reminiscences of one of its paragraphs or pages.

The figures of the hurtled fair ones in sky were wreathing Nelson's cocked hat when Victor, distinguishably bright-faced amid a crowd of the irradiated, emerged from the tideway to cross the square, having thoughts upon Art, which were due rather to the suggestive proximity of the National Gallery than to the Flemish mouldings of cloud-forms under Venetian brushes. His purchases of pictures had been his unhappiest ventures. He had relied and reposed on the dicta of newspaper critics; who are sometimes unanimous, and are then taken for guides, and are fatal. He was led to the conclusion that our modern-lauded pictures do not ripen. They have a chance of it, if abused. But who thinks of buying the abused? Exalted by the critics, they have, during the days of Exhibition, a glow, a significance or a fun, abandoning them where examination is close and constant, and the critic's trumpet-note dispersed to the thinness of the fee for his blowing. As to foreign pictures, classic pictures, Victor had known his purse to leap for a Raphael with a history in stages of descent from the Master, and critics to swarm: a Raphael of the dealers, exposed to be condemned by the critics, universally derided. A real Raphael in your house is aristocracy to the roof-tree. But the wealthy trader will reach to title before he may hope to get the real Raphael or a Titian. Yet he is the one who would, it may be, after enjoyment of his prize, bequeath it to the nation—PRESENTED TO THE NATION BY VICTOR MONTGOMERY RADNOR. There stood the letters in gilt; and he had a thrill of his generosity; for few were the generous acts he could not perform; and if an object haunted the deed, it came of his trader's habit of mind.

He revelled in benevolent projects of gifts to the nation, which would coat a sensitive name. Say, an ornamental City Square, flowers, fountains, afternoon bands of music—comfortable seats in it, and a shelter, and a ready supply of good cheap coffee or tea. Tobacco? why not rolls of honest tobacco! nothing so much soothes the labourer. A volume of plans for the benefit of London smoked out of each ascending pile in his brain. London is at night a moaning outcast round the policeman's legs. What of an all-night-long, cosy, brightly lighted, odoriferous coffee-saloon for rich or poor, on the model of the hospitable Paduan? Owner of a penny, no soul among us shall be rightly an outcast....

Dreams of this kind are taken at times by wealthy people as a cordial at the bar of benevolent intentions. But Victor was not the man to steal his refreshments in that known style. He meant to

make deeds of them, as far as he could, considering their immense extension; and except for the sensitive social name, he was of single-minded purpose.

Turning to the steps of a chemist's shop to get a prescription made up for his Nataly's doctoring of her domestics, he was arrested by a rap on his elbow; and no one was near; and there could not be a doubt of the blow—a sharp hard stroke, sparing the funny-bone, but ringing. His head, at the punctilio bump, throbbed responsively—owing to which or indifference to the prescription, as of no instant requirement, he pursued his course, resembling mentally the wanderer along a misty beach, who hears cannon across the waters.

He certainly had felt it. He remembered the shock: he could not remember much of pain. How about intimations? His asking caused a smile.

Very soon the riddle answered itself. He had come into view of the diminutive marble cavalier of the infantile cerebellum; recollecting a couplet from the pen of the disrespectful Satirist Peter, he thought of a fall: his head and his elbow responded simultaneously to the thought.

All was explained save his consequent rightabout from the chemist's shop: and that belongs to the minor involutions of circumstances and the will. It passed like a giver's wrinkle. He read the placards of the Opera; reminding himself of the day when it was the single Opera-house; and now we have two-or three. We have also a distracting couple of Clowns and Pantaloons in our Pantomimes: though Colney says that the multiplication of the pantaloon is a distinct advance to representative truth—and bother Colney! Two Columbines also. We forbear to speak of men, but where is the boy who can set his young heart upon two Columbines at once! Victor felt the boy within him cold to both: and in his youth he had doated on the solitary twirling spangled lovely Fairy. The tale of a delicate lady dancer leaping as the kernel out of a nut from the arms of Harlequin to the legalized embrace of a wealthy brewer, and thenceforth living, by repute, with unagitated legs, as holy a matron, despite her starry past, as any to be shown in a country breeding the like abundantly, had always delighted him. It seemed a reconciliation of opposing stations, a defeat of Puritanism. Ay, and poor women!—women in the worsen plight under the Puritan's eye. They may be erring and good: yes, finding the man to lift them the one step up! Read the history of the error. But presently we shall teach the Puritan to act by the standards of his religion. All is coming right—must come right. Colney shall be confounded.

Hereupon Victor hopped on to Fenellan's hint regarding the designs of Mrs. Burman.

His Nataly might have to go through a short sharp term of scorching—Godiva to the gossips.

She would come out of it glorified. She would be reconciled with her family. With her story of her devotion to the man loving her, the world would know her for the heroine she was: a born lady, in appearance and manner an empress among women. It was a story to be pleaded in any court, before the sternest public. Mrs. Burman had thrown her into temptation's way. It was a story to touch the heart, as none other ever written of over all the earth was there a woman equalling his Nataly!

And their Nesta would have a dowry to make princesses envious:—she would inherit... he ran up an arithmetical column, down to a line of figures in addition, during three paces of his feet. Dartrey Fenellan had said of little Nesta once, that she had a nature pure and sparkling as mid-sea foam. Happy he who wins her! But she was one of the young women who are easily pleased and hardly enthralled. Her father strained his mind for the shape of the man to accomplish the feat. Whether she had an ideal of a youth in her feminine head, was beyond his guessing. She was not the damsel to weave a fairy waistcoat for the identical prince, and try it upon all comers to discover him: as is done by some; excuseably, if we would be just. Nesta was of the elect, for whom excuses have not to be made. She would probably like a flute-player best; because her father played the flute, and she loved him—laughably a little maiden's reason! Her father laughed at her.

Along the street of Clubs, where a bruised fancy may see black balls raining, the narrow way between ducal mansions offers prospect of the sweep of greensward, all but touching up to the sunset to draw it to the dance.

Formerly, in his very early youth, he clasped a dream of gaining way to an alliance with one of these great surrounding houses; and he had a passion for the acquisition of money as a means. And it has to be confessed, he had sacrificed in youth a slice of his youth, to gain it without labour—usually a costly purchase. It had ended disastrously: or say, a running of the engine off the rails, and a speedy re-establishment of traffic. Could it be a loss, that had led to the winning of his Nataly? Can we really loathe the first of the steps when the one in due sequence, cousin to it, is a blessedness? If we have been righted to health by a medical draught, we are bound to be respectful to our drug. And so we are, in spite of Nature's wry face and shiver at a mention of what we went through during those days, those horrible days:—hide them!

The smothering of them from sight set them sounding he had to listen. Colney Durance accused him of entering into bonds with somebody's grandmother for the simple sake of browsing on her thousands: a picture of himself too abhorrent to Victor to permit of any sort of acceptance. Consequently he struck away to the other extreme of those who have a choice in mixed motives: he protested that compassion had been the cause of it. Looking at the circumstance now, he could see, allowing for human frailty—perhaps a wish to join the ranks of the wealthy compassion for the woman as the principal motive. How often had she not in those old days praised his generosity for allying his golden youth to her withered age—Mrs. Burman's very words! And she was a generous woman or had been: she was generous in saying that. Well, and she was generous in having a well-born, well-bred beautiful young creature like Nataly for her companion, when it was a case of need for the dear girl; and compassionately insisting, against remonstrances: they were spoken by him, though they were but partial. How, then, had she become—at least, how was it that she could continue to behave as the vindictive Fury who persecuted remorselessly, would give no peace, poisoned the wells round every place where he and his dear one pitched their tent!

But at last she had come to charity, as he could well believe. Not too late! Victor's feeling of gratitude to Mrs. Burman assured him it was genuine because of his genuine conviction, that she had determined to end her incomprehensibly lengthened days in reconciliation with him: and he had always been ready to 'forget and forgive.' A truly beautiful old phrase! It thrilled off the most susceptible of men.

His well-kept secret of the spacious country-house danced him behind a sober demeanour from one park to another; and along beside the drive to view of his townhouse—unloved of the inhabitants, although by acknowledgement it had, as Fredi funnily drawled, to express her sense of justice in depreciation, 'good accommodation.' Nataly was at home, he was sure. Time to be dressing: sun sets at six-forty, he said, and glanced at the stained West, with an accompanying vision of outspread primroses flooding banks of shadowy fields near Lakelands.

He crossed the road and rang.

Upon the opening of the door, there was a cascade of muslin downstairs. His darling Fredi stood out of it, a dramatic Undine.

CHAPTER VI. NATALY

‘Il segreto!’ the girl cried commandingly, with a forefinger at his breast

He crossed arms, toning in similar recitative, with anguish, ‘Dove volare!’

They joined in half a dozen bars of operatic duet.

She flew to him, embraced and kissed.

‘I must have it, my papa! unlock. I’ve been spying the bird on its hedgerow nest so long! And this morning, my own dear cunning papa, weren’t you as bare as winter twigs? “Tomorrow perhaps we will have a day in the country.” To go and see the nest? Only, please, not a big one. A real nest; where mama and I can wear dairymaid’s hat and apron all day—the style you like; and strike roots. We’ve been torn away two or three times: twice, I know.’

‘Fixed, this time; nothing shall tear us up,’ said her father, moving on to the stairs, with an arm about her.

‘So, it is...?’

‘She’s amazed at her cleverness!’

‘A nest for three?’

‘We must have a friend or two.’

‘And pretty country?’

‘Trust her papa for that.’

‘Nice for walking and running over fields? No rich people?’

‘How escape that rabble in England! as Colney says. It’s a place for being quite independent of neighbours, free as air.’

‘Oh! bravo!’

‘And Fredi will have her horse, and mama her pony-carriage; and Fredi can have a swim every Summer morning.’

‘A swim?’ Her note was dubious. ‘A river?’

‘A good long stretch—fairish, fairish. Bit of a lake; bathing-shed; the Naiad’s bower: pretty water to see.’

‘Ah. And has the house a name?’

‘Lakelands. I like the name.’

‘Papa gave it the name!’

‘There’s nothing he can conceal from his girl. Only now and then a little surprise.’

‘And his girl is off her head with astonishment. But tell me, who has been sharing the secret with you?’

‘Fredi strikes home! And it is true, you dear; I must have a confidant: Simeon Fenellan.’

‘Not Mr. Durance?’

He shook out a positive negative. ‘I leave Col to his guesses. He’d have been prophesying fire the works before the completion.’

‘Then it is not a dear old house, like Craye and Creckholt?’

‘Wait and see to-morrow.’

He spoke of the customary guests for concert practice; the music, instrumental and vocal; quartet, duet, solo; and advising the girl to be quick, as she had but twenty-five minutes, he went humming and trilling into his dressing-room.

Nesta signalled at her mother’s door for permission to enter. She slipped in, saw that the maid was absent, and said: ‘Yes, mama; and prepare, I feared it; I was sure.’

Her mother breathed a little moan: 'Not a cottage?'

'He has not mentioned it to Mr. Durance.'

'Why not?'

'Mr. Fenellan has been his confidant.'

'My darling, we did wrong to let it go on, without speaking. You don't know for certain yet?'

'It's a large estate, mama, and a big new house.'

Nataly's bosom sank. 'Ah me! here's misery! I ought to have known. And too late now it has gone so far! But I never imagined he would be building.'

She caught herself languishing at her toilette-glass, as, if her beauty were at stake; and shut her eyelids angrily. To be looking in that manner, for a mere suspicion, was too foolish. But Nesta's divinations were target-arrows; they flew to the mark. Could it have been expected that Victor would ever do anything on a small scale? O the dear little lost lost cottage! She thought of it with a strain of the arms of womanhood's longing in the unblessed wife for a babe. For the secluded modest cottage would not rack her with the old anxieties, beset her with suspicions....

'My child, you won't possibly have time before the dinner-hour,' she said to Nesta, dismissing her and taking her kiss of comfort with a short and straining look out of the depths.

Those bitter doubts of the sentiments of neighbours are an incipient dislike, when one's own feelings to the neighbours are kind, could be affectionate. We are distracted, perverted, made strangers to ourselves by a false position.

She heard his voice on a carol. Men do not feel this doubtful position as women must. They have not the same to endure; the world gives them land to tread, where women are on breaking seas. Her Nesta knew no more than the pain of being torn from a home she loved. But now the girl was older, and if once she had her imagination awakened, her fearful directness would touch the spot, question, bring on the scene to-come, necessarily to come, dreaded much more than death by her mother. But if it might be postponed till the girl was nearer to an age of grave understanding, with some knowledge of our world, some comprehension of a case that could be pleaded!

He sang: he never acknowledged a trouble, he dispersed it; and in her present wrestle with the scheme of a large country estate involving new intimacies, anxieties, the courtship of rival magnates, followed by the wretched old cloud, and the imposition upon them to bear it in silence though they knew they could plead a case, at least before charitable and discerning creatures or before heaven, the despondent lady could have asked whether he was perfectly sane.

Who half so brilliantly!—Depreciation of him, fetched up at a stroke the glittering armies of her enthusiasm. He had proved it; he proved it daily in conflicts and in victories that dwarfed emotional troubles like hers: yet they were something to bear, hard to bear, at times unbearable.

But those were times of weakness. Let anything be doubted rather than the good guidance of the man who was her breath of life! Whither he led, let her go, not only submissively, exultingly.

Thus she thought, under pressure of the knowledge, that unless rushing into conflicts bigger than conceivable, she had to do it, and should therefore think it.

This was the prudent woman's clear deduction from the state wherein she found herself, created by the one first great step of the mad woman. Her surrender then might be likened to the detachment of a flower on the river's bank by swell of flood: she had no longer root of her own; away she sailed, through beautiful scenery, with occasionally a crashing fall, a turmoil, emergence from a vortex, and once more the sunny whirling surface. Strange to think, she had not since then power to grasp in her abstract mind a notion of steadfastness without or within.

But, say not the mad, say the enamoured woman. Love is a madness, having heaven's wisdom in it—a spark. But even when it is driving us on the breakers, call it love: and be not unworthy of it, hold to it. She and Victor had drunk of a cup. The philtre was in her veins, whatever the directions of the rational mind.

Exulting or regretting, she had to do it, as one in the car with a racing charioteer. Or up beside a more than Titanically audacious balloonist. For the charioteer is bent on a goal; and Victor's course was an ascension from heights to heights. He had ideas, he mastered Fortune. He conquered Nataly and held her subject, in being above his ambition; which was now but an occupation for his powers, while the aim of his life was at the giving and taking of simple enjoyment. In spite of his fits of unreasonableness in the means—and the woman loving him could trace them to a breath of nature—his gentle good friendly innocent aim in life was of this very simplest; so wonderful, by contrast with his powers, that she, assured of it as she was by experience of him, was touched, in a transfusion of her feelings through lucent globes of admiration and of tenderness, to reverence. There had been occasions when her wish for the whole world to have proof and exhibition of his greatness, goodness, and simplicity amid his gifts, prompted her incitement of him to stand forth eminently: ('lead a kingdom,' was the phrase behind the curtain within her shy bosom;) and it revealed her to herself, upon reflection, as being still the Nataly who drank the cup with him, to join her fate with his.

And why not? Was that regretted? Far from it. In her maturity, the woman was unable to send forth any dwelling thought or more than a flight of twilight fancy, that cancelled the deed of her youth, and therewith seemed to expunge near upon the half—of her term of years. If it came to consideration of her family and the family's opinion of her conduct, her judgement did not side with them or with herself, it whirled, swam to a giddiness and subsided.

Of course, if she and Victor were to inhabit a large country-house, they might as well have remained at Craye Farm or at Creckholt; both places dear to them in turn. Such was the plain sense of the surface question. And how strange it was to her, that he, of the most quivering sensitiveness on her behalf; could not see, that he threw her into situations where hard words of men and women threatened about her head; where one or two might on a day, some day, be heard; and where, in the recollection of two years back, the word 'Impostor' had smacked her on both cheeks from her own mouth.

Now once more they were to run the same round of alarms, undergo the love of the place, with perpetual apprehensions of having to leave it: alarms, throbbing suspicions, like those of old travellers through the haunted forest, where whispers have intensity of meaning, and unseeing we are seen, and unaware awaited.

Nataly shook the rolls of her thick brown hair from her forehead; she took strength from a handsome look of resolution in the glass. She could always honestly say, that her courage would not fail him.

Victor tapped at the door; he stepped into the room, wearing his evening white flower over a more open white waistcoat; and she was composed and uninquiring. Their Nesta was heard on the descent of the stairs, with a rattle of Donizetti's *Il segreto* to the skylights.

He performed his never-omitted lover's homage.

Nataly enfolded him in a homely smile. 'A country-house? We go and see it to-morrow?'

'And you've been pining for a country home, my dear soul.'

'After the summer six weeks, the house in London does not seem a home to return to.'

'And next day, Nataly draws five thousand pounds for the first sketch of the furniture.'

'There is the Creckholt...' she had a difficulty in saying.

'Part of it may do. Lakelands requires—but you will see to-morrow.'

After a close shutting of her eyes, she rejoined: 'It is not a cottage?'

'Well, dear, no: when the Slave of the Lamp takes to building, he does not run up cottages. And we did it without magic, all in a year; which is quite as good as a magical trick in a night.' He drew her close to him. 'When was it my dear girl guessed me at work?'

'It was the other dear girl. Nesta is the guesser.'

'You were two best of souls to keep from bothering me; and I might have had to fib; and we neither of us like that.' He noticed a sidling of her look. 'More than the circumstances oblige:—to be

frank. But now we can speak of them. Wait—and the change comes; and opportunely, I have found. It's true we have waited long; my darling has had her worries. However, it 's here at last. Prepare yourself. I speak positively. You have to brace up for one sharp twitch—the woman's portion! as Natata says—and it's over.' He looked into her eyes for comprehension; and not finding inquiry, resumed: 'Just in time for the entry into Lakelands. With the pronouncement of the decree, we present the licence... at an altar we've stood before, in spirit... one of the ladies of your family to support you:—why not? Not even then?'

'No, Victor; they have cast me off.'

'Count on my cousins, the Duvidney ladies. Then we can say, that those two good old spinsters are less narrow than the Dreightons. I have to confess I rather think I was to blame for leaving Creckholt. Only, if I see my girl wounded, I hate the place that did the mischief. You and Fredi will clap hands for the country about Lakelands.'

'Have you heard from her... of her... is it anything, Victor?' Nataly asked him shyly; with not much of hope, but some readiness to be inflated. The prospect of an entry into the big new house, among a new society, begirt by the old nightmares and fretting devils, drew her into staring daylight or furnace-light.

He answered: 'Mrs. Burman has definitely decided. In pity of us?—to be free herself?—who can say! She 's a woman with a conscience—of a kind: slow, but it brings her to the point at last. You know her, know her well. Fenellan has it from her lawyer—her lawyer! a Mr. Carting; a thoroughly trustworthy man—'

'Fenellan, as a reporter?'

'Thoroughly to be trusted on serious matters. I understand that Mrs. Burman:—her health is awful: yes, yes; poor woman! poor woman! we feel for her:—she has come to perceive her duty to those she leaves behind. Consider: she HAS used the rod. She must be tired out—if human. And she is. One remembers traits.'

Victor sketched one or two of the traits allusively to the hearer acquainted with them. They received strong colouring from midday's Old Veuve in his blood. His voice and words had a swing of conviction: they imparted vinousness to a heart athirst.

The histrionic self-deceiver may be a persuasive deceiver of another, who is again, though not ignorant of his character, tempted to swallow the nostrums which have made so gallant a man of him: his imperceptible sensible playing of the part, on a substratum of sincerity, induces fascinatingly to the like performance on our side, that we may be armed as he is for enjoying the coveted reality through the partial simulation of possessing it. And this is not a task to us when we have looked our actor in the face, and seen him bear the look, knowing that he is not intentionally untruthful; and when we incline to be captivated by his rare theatrical air of confidence; when it seems as an outside thought striking us, that he may not be altogether deceived in the present instance; when suddenly an expectation of the thing desired is born and swims in a credible featureless vagueness on a misty scene: and when we are being kissed and the blood is warmed. In fine, here as everywhere along our history, when the sensations are spirited up to drown the mind, we become drift-matter of tides, metal to magnets. And if we are women, who commonly allow the lead to men, getting it for themselves only by snaky cunning or desperate adventure, credulity—the continued trust in the man—is the alternative of despair.

'But, Victor, I must ask,' Nataly said: 'you have it through Simeon Fenellan; you have not yourself received the letter from her lawyer?'

'My knowledge of what she would do near the grave—poor soul, yes! I shall soon be hearing.'

'You do not, propose to enter this place until—until it is over?'

'We enter this place, my love, without any sort of ceremony. We live there independently, and we can we have quarters there for our friends. Our one neighbour is London—there! And at Lakelands we are able to entertain London and wife;—our friends, in short; with some, what we have

to call, satellites. You inspect the house and grounds to-morrow—sure to be fair. Put aside all but the pleasant recollections of Craye and Creckholt. We start on a different footing. Really nothing can be simpler. Keeping your town-house, you are now and then in residence at Lakelands, where you entertain your set, teach them to feel the charm of country life: we have everything about us; could have had our own milk and cream up to London the last two months. Was it very naughty?—I should have exploded my surprise! You will see, you will see to-morrow.’

Nataly nodded, as required. ‘Good news from the mines?’ she said.

He answered: ‘Dartrey is—yes, poor fellow! Dartrey is confident, from the yield of stones, that the value of our claim counts in a number of millions. The same with the gold. But gold-mines are lodgings, not homes.’

‘Oh, Victor! if money...! But why did you say “poor fellow” of Dartrey Fenellan?’

‘You know how he’s...’

‘Yes, yes,’ she said hastily. ‘But has that woman been causing fresh anxiety?’

‘And Natata’s chief hero on earth is not to be named a poor fellow,’ said he, after a negative of the head on a subject they neither of them liked to touch.

Then he remembered that Dartrey Fenellan was actually a lucky fellow; and he would have mentioned the circumstance confided to him by Simeon, but for a downright dread of renewing his painful fit of envy. He had also another, more distant, very faint idea, that it had better not be mentioned just yet, for a reason entirely undefined.

He consulted his watch. The maid had come in for the robing of her mistress. Nataly’s mind had turned to the little country cottage which would have given her such great happiness. She raised her eyes to him; she could not check their filling; they were like a river carrying moonlight on the smooth roll of a fall.

He loved the eyes, disliked the water in them. With an impatient, ‘There, there!’ and a smart affectionate look, he retired, thinking in our old satirical vein of the hopeless endeavour to satisfy a woman’s mind without the intrusion of hard material statements, facts. Even the best of women, even the most beautiful, and in their moments of supremest beauty, have this gross ravenousness for facts. You must not expect to appease them unless you administer solids. It would almost appear that man is exclusively imaginative and poetical; and that his mate, the fair, the graceful, the bewitching, with the sweetest and purest of natures, cannot help being something of a groveller.

Nataly had likewise her thoughts.

CHAPTER VII. BETWEEN A GENERAL MAN OF THIN WORLD AND A PROFESSIONAL

Rather earlier in the afternoon of that day, Simeon Fenellan, thinking of the many things which are nothing, and so melancholy for lack of amusements properly to follow Old Veuve, that he could ask himself whether he had not done a deed of night, to be blinking at his fellow-men like an owl all mad for the reveller's hoots and flights and mice and moony roundels behind his hypocritical judex air of moping composure, chanced on Mr. Carling, the solicitor, where Lincoln's Inn pumps lawyers into Fleet Street through the drain-pipe of Chancery Lane. He was in the state of the wine when a shake will rouse the sluggish sparkles to foam. Sight of Mrs. Burman's legal adviser had instantly this effect upon him: his bubbling friendliness for Victor Radnor, and the desire of the voice in his bosom for ears to hear, combined like the rush of two waves together, upon which he may be figured as the boat: he caught at Mr. Carling's hand more heartily than their acquaintanceship quite sanctioned; but his grasp and his look of overflowing were immediately privileged; Mr. Carling, enjoying this anecdotal gentleman's conversation as he did, liked the warmth, and was flattered during the squeeze with a prospect of his wife and friends partaking of the fun from time to time.

**'I was telling my wife yesterday your story of the lady contrabandist:
I don't think she has done laughing since,' Mr. Carling said**

Fenellan fluted: 'Ah?' He had scent, in the eulogy of a story grown flat as Election hats, of a good sort of man in the way of men, a step or two behind the man of the world. He expressed profound regret at not having heard the silvery ring of the lady's laughter.

Carling genially conceived a real gratification to be conferred on his wife. 'Perhaps you will some day honour us?'

'You spread gold-leaf over the days to come, sir.'

'Now, if I might name the day?'

'You lump the gold and make it current coin;—says the blushing bride, who ought not to have delivered herself so boldly, but she had forgotten her bashful part and spoilt the scene, though, luckily for the damsel, her swain was a lover of nature, and finding her at full charge, named the very next day of the year, and held her to it, like the complimentary tyrant he was.'

'To-morrow, then!' said Carling intrepidly, on a dash of enthusiasm, through a haggard thought of his wife and the cook and the netting of friends at short notice. He urged his eagerness to ask whether he might indeed have the satisfaction of naming to-morrow.

'With happiness,' Fenellan responded.

Mrs. Carling was therefore in for it.

'To-morrow, half-past seven: as for company to meet you, we will do what we can. You go Westward?'

'To bed with the sun,' said the reveller.

'Perhaps by Covent Garden? I must give orders there.'

'Orders given in Covent Garden, paint a picture for bachelors of the domestic Paradise an angel must help them to enter! Ah, dear me! Is there anything on earth to compare with the pride of a virtuous life?'

'I was married at four and twenty,' said Carling, as one taking up the expository second verse of a poem; plain facts, but weighty and necessary: 'my wife was in her twentieth year: we have five children; two sons, three daughters, one married, with a baby. So we are grandfather and mother, and have never regretted the first step, I may say for both of us.'

‘Think of it! Good luck and sagacity joined hands overhead on the day you proposed to the lady: and I’d say, that all the credit is with her, but that it would seem to be at the expense of her sex.’

‘She would be the last to wish it, I assure you.’

‘True of all good women! You encourage me, touching a matter of deep interest, not unknown to you. The lady’s warm heart will be with us. Probably she sees Mrs. Burman?’

‘Mrs. Burman Radnor receives no one.’

A comic severity in the tone of the correction was deferentially accepted by Fenellan.

‘Pardon. She flies her flag, with her captain wanting; and she has, queerly, the right. So, then, the worthy dame who receives no one, might be treated, it struck us, conversationally, as a respectable harbour-hulk, with more history than top-honours. But she has the indubitable legal right to fly them—to proclaim it; for it means little else.’

‘You would have her, if I follow you, divest herself of the name?’

‘Pin me to no significations, if you please, O shrewdest of the legal sort! I have wit enough to escape you there. She is no doubt an estimable person.’

‘Well, she is; she is in her way a very good woman.’

‘Ah. You see, Mr. Carling, I cannot bring myself to rank her beside another lady, who has already claimed the title of me; and you will forgive me if I say, that your word “good” has a look of being stuck upon the features we know of her, like a coquette’s naughty patch; or it’s a jewel of an eye in an ebony idol: though I’ve heard tell she performs her charities.’

‘I believe she gives away three parts of her income and that is large.’

‘Leaving the good lady a fine fat fourth.’

‘Compare her with other wealthy people.’

‘And does she outshine the majority still with her personal attractions.’

Carling was instigated by the praise he had bestowed on his wife to separate himself from a female pretender so ludicrous; he sought Fenellan’s nearest ear, emitting the sound of ‘hum.’

‘In other respects, unimpeachable!’

‘Oh! quite!’

‘There was a fishfag of classic Billingsgate, who had broken her husband’s nose with a sledgehammer fist, and swore before the magistrate, that the man hadn’t a crease to complain of in her character. We are condemned, Mr. Carling, sometimes to suffer in the flesh for the assurance we receive of the inviolability of those moral fortifications.’

‘Character, yes, valuable—I do wish you had named to-night for doing me the honour of dining with me!’ said the lawyer impulsively, in a rapture of the appetite for anecdotes. ‘I have a ripe Pichon Longueville, ‘65.’

‘A fine wine. Seductive to hear of. I dine with my friend Victor Radnor. And he knows wine.—There are good women in the world, Mr. Carling, whose characters...’

‘Of course, of course there are; and I could name you some. We lawyers...!’

‘You encounter all sorts.’

‘Between ourselves,’ Carling sank his tones to the indiscriminate, where it mingled with the roar of London.

‘You do?’ Fenellan hazarded a guess at having heard enlightened liberal opinions regarding the sex. ‘Right!’

‘Many!’

‘I back you, Mr. Carling.’

The lawyer pushed to yet more confidential communication, up to the verge of the clearly audible: he spoke of examples, experiences. Fenellan backed him further.

‘Acting on behalf of clients, you understand, Mr. Fenellan.’

‘Professional, but charitable; I am with you.’

‘Poor things! we—if we have to condemn—we owe them something.’

‘A kind word for poor Polly Venus, with all the world against her! She doesn’t hear it often.’

‘A real service,’ Carling’s voice deepened to the legal ‘without prejudice,’—‘I am bound to say it—a service to Society.’

‘Ah, poor wench! And the kind of reward she gets?’

‘We can hardly examine... mysterious dispensations... here we are to make the best we can of it.’

‘For the creature Society’s indebted to? True. And am I to think there’s a body of legal gentlemen to join with you, my friend, in founding an Institution to distribute funds to preach charity over the country, and win compassion for her, as one of the principal persons of her time, that Society’s indebted to for whatever it’s indebted for?’

‘Scarcely that,’ said Carling, contracting.

‘But you ‘re for great Reforms?’

‘Gradual.’

‘Then it’s for Reformatories, mayhap.’

‘They would hardly be a cure.’

‘You ‘re in search of a cure?’

‘It would be a blessed discovery.’

‘But what’s to become of Society?’

‘It’s a puzzle to the cleverest.’

‘All through History, my dear Mr. Carling, we see that.

‘Establishments must have their sacrifices. Beware of interfering: eh?’

‘By degrees, we may hope...’

‘Society prudently shuns the topic; and so ‘ll we. For we might tell of one another, in a fit of distraction, that t’ other one talked of it, and we should be banished for an offence against propriety. You should read my friend Durance’s Essay on Society. Lawyers are a buttress of Society. But, come: I wager they don’t know what they support until they read that Essay.’

Carling had a pleasant sense of escape, in not being personally asked to read the Essay, and not hearing that a copy of it should be forwarded to him.

He said: ‘Mr. Radnor is a very old friend?’

‘Our fathers were friends; they served in the same regiment for years. I was in India when Victor Radnor took the fatal!’

‘Followed by a second, not less...?’

‘In the interpretation of a rigid morality arming you legal gentlemen to make it so!’

‘The Law must be vindicated.’

‘The law is a clumsy bludgeon.’

‘We think it the highest effort of human reason—the practical instrument.’

‘You may compare it to a rustic’s finger on a fiddlestring, for the murdered notes you get out of the practical instrument.

‘I am bound to defend it, clumsy bludgeon or not.’

‘You are one of the giants to wield it, and feel humanly, when, by chance, down it comes on the foot an inch off the line.—Here’s a peep of Old London; if the habit of old was not to wash windows. I like these old streets!’

‘Hum,’ Carling hesitated. ‘I can remember when the dirt at the windows was appalling.’

‘Appealing to the same kind of stuff in the passing youngster’s green-scum eye: it was. And there your Law did good work.—You’re for Bordeaux. What is your word on Burgundy?’

‘Our Falernian!’

‘Victor Radnor has the oldest in the kingdom. But he will have the best of everything. A Romanee! A Musigny! Sip, my friend, you embrace the Goddess of your choice above. You are up beside her at a sniff of that wine.—And lo, venerable Drury! we duck through the court, reminded

a bit by our feelings of our first love, who hadn't the cleanest of faces or nicest of manners, but she takes her station in memory because we were boys then, and the golden halo of youth is upon her.'

Carling, as a man of the world, acquiesced in souvenirs he did not share. He said urgently: 'Understand me; you speak of Mr. Radnor; pray, believe I have the greatest respect for Mr. Radnor's abilities. He is one of our foremost men... proud of him. Mr. Radnor has genius; I have watched him; it is genius; he shows it in all he does; one of the memorable men of our times. I can admire him, independent of—well, misfortune of that kind... a mistaken early step. Misfortune, it is to be named. Between ourselves—we are men of the world—if one could see the way! She occasionally... as I have told you. I have ventured suggestions. As I have mentioned, I have received an impression...'

'But still, Mr. Carling, if the lady doesn't release him and will keep his name, she might stop her cowardly persecutions.'

'Can you trace them?'

'Undisguised!'

'Mrs. Burman Radnor is devout. I should not exactly say revengeful. We have to discriminate. I gather, that her animus is, in all honesty, directed at the—I quote—state of sin. We are mixed, you know.'

The Winegod in the blood of Fenellan gave a leap. 'But, fifty thousand times more mixed, she might any moment stop the state of sin, as she calls it, if it pleased her.'

'She might try. Our Judges look suspiciously on long delayed actions. And there are, too, women who regard the marriage-tie as indissoluble. She has had to combat that scruple.'

'Believer in the renewing of the engagement overhead!—well. But put a by-word to Mother Nature about the state of sin. Where, do you imagine, she would lay it? You'll say, that Nature and Law never agreed. They ought.'

'The latter deferring to the former?'

'Moulding itself on her swelling proportions. My dear dear sir, the state of sin was the continuing to live in defiance of, in contempt of, in violation of, in the total degradation of, Nature.'

'He was under no enforcement to take the oath at the altar.'

'He was a small boy tempted by a varnished widow, with pounds of barley sugar in her pockets;—and she already serving as a test-vessel or mortar for awful combinations in druggery! Gilt widows are equal to decrees of Fate to us young ones. Upon my word, the cleric who unites, and the Law that sanctions, they're the criminals. Victor Radnor is the noblest of fellows, the very best friend a man can have. I will tell you: he saved me, after I left the army, from living on the produce of my pen—which means, if there is to be any produce, the prostrating of yourself to the level of the round middle of the public: saved me from that! Yes, Mr. Carling, I have trotted our thoroughfares a poor Polly of the pen; and it is owing to Victor Radnor that I can order my thoughts as an individual man again before I blacken paper. Owing to him, I have a tenderness for mercenaries; having been one of them and knowing how little we can help it. He is an Olympian—who thinks of them below. The lady also is an admirable woman at all points. The pair are a mated couple, such as you won't find in ten households over Christendom. Are you aware of the story?'

Carling replied: 'A story under shadow of the Law, has generally two very distinct versions.'

'Hear mine.—And, by Jove! a runaway cab. No, all right. But a crazy cab it is, and fit to do mischief in narrow Drury. Except that it's sheer riff-raff here to knock over.'

'Hulloa?—come!' quoth the wary lawyer.

'There's the heart I wanted to rouse to hear me! One may be sure that the man for old Burgundy has it big and sound, in spite of his legal practices; a dear good spherical fellow! Some day, we'll hope, you will be sitting with us over a magnum of Victor Radnor's Romance Conti aged thirty-one: a wine, you'll say at the second glass, High Priest for the celebration of the uncommon nuptials between the body and the soul of man.'

‘You hit me rightly,’ said Carting, tickled and touched; sensually excited by the bouquet of Victor Radnor’s hospitality and companionship, which added flavour to Fenellan’s compliments. These came home to him through his desire to be the ‘good spherical fellow’; for he, like modern diplomatists in the track of their eminent Berlinese New Type of the time, put on frankness as an armour over wariness, holding craft in reserve: his aim was at the refreshment of honest fellowship: by no means to discover that the coupling of his native bias with his professional duty was unprofitable nowadays. Wariness, however, was not somnolent, even when he said: ‘You know, I am never the lawyer out of my office. Man of the world to men of the world; and I have not lost by it. I am Mrs. Barman Radnor’s legal adviser: you are Mr. Victor Radnor’s friend. They are, as we see them, not on the best of terms. I would rather—at its lowest, as a matter of business—be known for having helped them to some kind of footing than send in a round bill to my client—or another. I gain more in the end. Frankly, I mean to prove, that it’s a lawyer’s interest to be human.’

‘Because, now, see!’ said Fenellan, ‘here’s the case. Miss Natalia Dreighton, of a good Yorkshire family—a large one, reads an advertisement for the post of companion to a lady, and answers it, and engages herself, previous to the appearance of the young husband. Miss Dreighton is one of the finest young women alive. She has a glorious contralto voice. Victor and she are encouraged by Mrs. Barman to sing duets together. Well?

Why, Euclid would have theorem’d it out for you at a glance at the trio. You have only to look on them, you chatter out your three Acts of a Drama without a stop. If Mrs. Barman cares to practise charity, she has only to hold in her Fury-forked tongue, or her Jarniman I think ‘s the name.’

Carting shrugged.

‘Let her keep from striking, if she’s Christian,’ pursued Fenellan, ‘and if kind let her resume the name of her first lord, who did a better thing for himself than for her, when he shook off his bars of bullion, to rise the lighter, and left a wretched female soul below, with the devil’s own testimony to her attractions—thousands in the Funds, houses in the City. She threw the young couple together. And my friend Victor Radnor is of a particularly inflammable nature. Imagine one of us in such a situation, Mr. Carting!’

‘Trying!’ said the lawyer.

‘The dear fellow was as nigh death as a man can be and know the sweetness of a woman’s call to him to live. And here’s London’s garden of pines, bananas, oranges; all the droppings of the Hesperides here! We don’t reflect on it, Mr. Carling.’

‘Not enough, not enough.’

‘I feel such a spout of platitudes that I could out With a Leading Article on a sheet of paper on your back while you’re bending over the baskets. I seem to have got circularly round again to Eden when I enter a garden. Only, here we have to pay for the fruits we pluck. Well, and just the same there; and no end to the payment either. We’re always paying! By the way, Mrs. Victor Radnor’s dinner-table’s a spectacle. Her taste in flowers equals her lord’s in wine. But age improves the wine and spoils the flowers, you’ll say. Maybe you’re for arguing that lovely women show us more of the flower than the grape, in relation to the course of time. I pray you not to forget the terrible intoxicant she is. We reconcile it, Mr. Carling, with the notion that the grape’s her spirit, the flower her body. Or is it the reverse? Perhaps an intertwining. But look upon bouquets and clusters, and the idea of woman springs up at once, proving she’s composed of them. I was about to remark, that with deference to the influence of Mrs. Burman’s legal adviser, an impenitent or penitent sinner’s pastor, the Reverend gentleman ministering to her spiritual needs, would presumptively exercise it, in this instance, in a superior degree.’

Carling murmured: ‘The Rev. Groseman Buttermore’; and did so for something of a cover, to continue a run of internal reflections: as, that he was assuredly listening to vinous talk in the streets by day; which impression placed him on a decorous platform above the amusing gentleman; to whom, however, he grew cordial, in recognizing consequently, that his exuberant flow could hardly

be a mask; and that an indication here and there of a trap in his talk, must have been due rather to excess of wariness, habitual in the mind of a long-headed man, whose incorrigibly impulsive fits had necessarily to be rectified by a vigilant dexterity.

‘Buttermore!’ ejaculated Fenellan: ‘Groseman Buttermore! Mrs. Victor’s Father Confessor is the Rev. Septimus Barmby. Groseman Buttermore—Septimus Barmby. Is there anything in names? Truly, unless these clerical gentlemen take them up at the crossing of the roads long after birth, the names would appear the active parts of them, and themselves mere marching supports, like the bearers of street placard-advertisements. Now, I know a Septimus Barmby, and you a Groseman Buttermore, and beyond the fact that Reverend starts up before their names without mention, I wager it’s about all we do know of them. They’re Society’s trusty rock-limpets, no doubt.’

‘My respect for the cloth is extreme.’ Carling’s short cough prepared the way for deductions. ‘Between ourselves, they are men of the world.’

Fenellan eyed benevolently the worthy attorney, whose innermost imp burst out periodically, like a Dutch clocksentry, to trot on his own small grounds for thinking himself of the community of the man of the world. ‘You lawyers dress in another closet,’ he said. ‘The Rev. Groseman has the ear of the lady?’

‘He has:—one ear.’

‘Ah? She has the other open for a man of the world, perhaps.’

‘Listens to him, listens to me, listens to Jarniman; and we neither of us guide her. She’s very curious—a study. You think you know her—next day she has eluded you. She’s emotional, she’s hard; she’s a woman, she’s a stone. Anything you like; but don’t count on her. And another thing—I’m bound to say it of myself,’ Carling claimed close hearing of Fenellan over a shelf of saladstuff, ‘no one who comes near her has any real weight with her in this matter.’

‘Probably you mix cream in your salad of the vinegar and oil,’ said Fenellan. ‘Try jelly of mutton.’—‘You give me a new idea. Latterly, fond as I am of salads, I’ve had rueful qualms. We’ll try it.’

‘You should dine with Victor Radnor.’

‘French cook, of course!’

‘Cordon bleu.’

‘I like to be sure of my cutlet.’

‘I like to be sure of a tastiness in my vegetables.’

‘And good sauces!’

‘And pretty pastry. I said, Cordon bleu. The miracle is, it’s a woman that Victor Radnor has trained: French, but a woman; devoted to him, as all who serve him are. Do I say “but” a woman? There’s not a Frenchman alive to match her. Vatel awaits her in Paradise with his arms extended; and may he wait long!’

Carling indulged his passion for the genuine by letting a flutter of real envy be seen. ‘My wife would like to meet such a Frenchwoman. It must be a privilege to dine with him—to know him. I know what he has done for English Commerce, and to build a colossal fortune: genius, as I said: and his donations to Institutions. Odd, to read his name and Mrs. Burman Radnor’s at separate places in the lists! Well, we’ll hope. It’s a case for a compromise of sentiments and claims.’

‘A friend of mine, spiced with cynic, declares that there’s always an amicable way out of a dissension, if we get rid of Lupus and Vulpus.’

Carling spied for a trap in the citation of Lupus and Vulpus; he saw none, and named the square of his residence on the great Russell property, and the number of the house, the hour of dinner next day. He then hung silent, breaking the pause with his hand out and a sharp ‘Well?’ that rattled a whirligig sound in his head upward. His leave of people was taken in this laughing falsetto, as of one affected by the curious end things come to.

Fenellan thought of him for a moment or two, that he was a better than the common kind of lawyer; who doubtless knew as much of the wrong side of the world as lawyers do, and held his knowledge for the being a man of the world:—as all do, that have not Alpine heights in the mind to mount for a look out over their own and the world's pedestrian tracks. I could spot the lawyer in your composition, my friend, to the exclusion of the man he mused. But you're right in what you mean to say of yourself: you're a good fellow, for a lawyer, and together we may manage somehow to score a point of service to Victor Radnor.

CHAPTER VIII. SOME FAMILIAR GUESTS

Nesta read her mother's face when Mrs. Victor entered the drawing-room to receive the guests. She saw a smooth fair surface, of the kind as much required by her father's eyes as innocuous air by his nostrils: and it was honest skin, not the deceptive feminine veiling, to make a dear man happy over his volcano. Mrs. Victor was to meet the friends with whom her feelings were at home, among whom her musical gifts gave her station: they liked her for herself; they helped her to feel at home with herself and be herself: a rarer condition with us all than is generally supposed. So she could determine to be cheerful in the anticipation of an evening that would at least be restful to the outworn sentinel nerve of her heart, which was perpetually alert and signalling to the great organ; often colouring the shows and seems of adverse things for an apeing of reality with too cruel a resemblance. One of the scraps of practical wisdom gained by hardened sufferers is, to keep from spying at horizons when they drop into a pleasant dingle. Such is the comfort of it, that we can dream, and lull our fears, and half think what we wish: and it is a heavenly truce with the fretful mind divided from our wishes.

Nesta wondered at her mother's complacent questions concerning this Lakelands: the house, the county, the kind of people about, the features of the country. Physically unable herself to be regretful under a burden three parts enrapturing her, the girl expected her mother to display a shadowy vexation, with a proud word or two, that would summon her thrilling sympathy in regard to the fourth part: namely, the aristocratic iciness of country magnates, who took them up and cast them off; as they had done, she thought, at Craye Farm and at Creckholt: she remembered it, of the latter place, wincingly, insurgently, having loved the dear home she had been expelled from by her pride of the frosty surrounding people—or no, not all, but some of them. And what had roused their pride?

Striking for a reason, her inexperience of our modern England, supplemented by readings in the England of a preceding generation, had hit on her father's profession of merchant. It accounted to her for the behaviour of the haughty territorial and titled families. But certain of the minor titles headed City Firms, she had heard; certain of the families were avowedly commercial. 'They follow suit,' her father said at Creckholt, after he had found her mother weeping, and decided instantly to quit and fly once more. But if they followed suit in such a way, then Mr. Durance must be right when he called the social English the most sheepy of sheep:—and Nesta could not consent to the cruel verdict, she adored her compatriots. Incongruities were pacified for her by the suggestion of her quick wits, that her father, besides being a merchant, was a successful speculator; and perhaps the speculator is not liked by merchants; or they were jealous of him; or they did not like his being both.

She pardoned them with some tenderness, on a suspicion that a quaint old high-frilled bleached and puckered Puritanical rectitude (her thoughts rose in pictures) possibly condemned the speculator as a description of gambler. An erratic severity in ethics is easily overlooked by the enthusiast for things old English. She was consciously ahead of them in the knowledge that her father had been, without the taint of gambling, a beneficent speculator. The Montgomery colony in South Africa, and his dealings with the natives in India, and his Railways in South America, his establishment of Insurance Offices, which were Savings Banks, and the Stores for the dispensing of sound goods to the poor, attested it. O and he was hospitable, the kindest, helpfulest of friends, the dearest, the very brightest of parents: he was his girl's playmate. She could be critic of him, for an induction to the loving of him more justly: yet if he had an excessive desire to win the esteem of people, as these keen young optics perceived in him, he strove to deserve it; and no one could accuse him of laying stress on the benefits he conferred. Designedly, frigidly to wound a man so benevolent, appeared to her as an incomprehensible baseness. The dropping of acquaintanceship with him, after the taste of its privileges, she ascribed, in the void of any better elucidation, to a mania of aristocratic conceit. It drove her, despite her youthful contempt of politics, into a Radicalism that could find food in the epigrams of Mr. Colney Durance, even when they passed her understanding; or when he was not too

distinctly seen by her to be shooting at all the parties of her beloved England, beneath the wicked semblance of shielding each by turns.

The young gentleman introduced to the Radnor Concert-parties by Lady Grace Halley as the Hon. Dudley Sowerby, had to bear the sins of his class. Though he was tall, straight-featured, correct in costume, appearance, deportment, second son of a religious earl and no scandal to the parentage, he was less noticed by Nesta than the elderly and the commoners. Her father accused her of snubbing him. She reproduced her famous copy of the sugared acid of Mr. Dudley Sowerby's closed mouth: a sort of sneer in meekness, as of humility under legitimate compulsion; deploring Christianly a pride of race that stamped it for this cowed exhibition: the wonderful mimicry was a flash thrown out by a born mistress of the art, and her mother was constrained to laugh, and so was her father; but he wilfully denied the likeness. He charged her with encouraging Colney Durance to drag forth the sprig of nobility, in the nakedness of evicted shell-fish, on themes of the peril to England, possibly ruin, through the loss of that ruling initiative formerly possessed, in the days of our glory, by the titular nobles of the land. Colney spoke it effectively, and the Hon. Dudley's expressive lineaments showed print of the heaving word *Alas*, as when a target is penetrated, centrally. And he was not a particularly dull fellow 'for his class and country,' Colney admitted; adding: 'I hit his thought and out he came.' One has, reluctantly with Victor Radnor, to grant, that when a man's topmost unspoken thought is hit, he must be sharp on his guard to keep from coming out:—we have won a right to him.

'Only, it's too bad; it 's a breach of hospitality,' Victor said, both to Nesta and to Nataly, alluding to several instances of Colney's ironic handling of their guests, especially of this one, whom Nesta would attack, and Nataly would not defend.

They were alive at a signal to protect the others. Miss Priscilla Graves, an eater of meat, was ridiculous in her ant'alcoholic exclusiveness and scorn: Mr. Pempton, a drinker of wine, would laud extravagantly the more transparent purity of vegetarianism. Dr. Peter Yatt jeered at globules: Dr. John Cormyn mourned over human creatures treated as cattle by big doses. The Rev. Septimus Barmby satisfactorily smoked: Mr. Peridon traced mortal evil to that act. Dr. Schlesien had his German views, Colney Durance his ironic, Fenellan his fanciful and free-lance. And here was an optimist, there a pessimist; and the rank Radical, the rigid Conservative, were not wanting. All of them were pointedly opposed, extraordinarily for so small an assembly: absurdly, it might be thought: but these provoked a kind warm smile, with the exclamation: 'They are dears!' They were the dearer for their fads and foibles.

Music harmonized them. Music, strangely, put the spell on Colney Durance, the sayer of bitter things, manufacturer of prickly balls, in the form of *Discord's* apples of whom Fenellan remarked, that he took to his music like an angry little boy to his barley-sugar, with a growl and a grunt. All these diverse friends could meet and mix in Victor's Concert-room with an easy homely recognition of one another's musical qualities, at times enthusiastic; and their natural divergencies and occasional clashes added a salient tastiness to the group of whom Nesta could say: 'Mama, was there ever such a collection of dear good souls with such contrary minds?' Her mother had the deepest of reasons for loving them, so as not to wish to see the slightest change in their minds, that the accustomed features making her nest of homeliness and real peace might be retained, with the humour of their funny silly antagonisms and the subsequent march in concord; excepting solely as regarded the perverseness of Priscilla Graves in her open contempt of Mr. Pempton's innocent two or three wine-glasses. The vegetarian gentleman's politeness forbore to direct attention to the gobbets of meat Priscilla consumed, though he could express disapproval in general terms; but he entertained sentiments as warlike to the lady's habit of 'drinking the blood of animals.' The mockery of it was, that Priscilla liked Mr. Pempton and admired his violoncello-playing, and he was unreserved in eulogy of her person and her pure soprano tones. Nataly was a poetic match-maker. Mr. Peridon was intended for *Mademoiselle de Seilles*, Nesta's young French governess; a lady of a courtly bearing, with placid

speculation in the eyes she cast on a foreign people, and a voluble muteness shadowing at intervals along the line of her closed lips.

The one person among them a little out of tune with most, was Lady Grace Halley. Nataly's provincial gentlewoman's traditions of the manners indicating conduct, reproved unwonted licences assumed by Lady Grace; who, in allusion to Hymen's weaving of a cousinship between the earldom of Southwreare and that of Cantor, of which Mr. Sowerby sprang, set her mouth and fan at work to delineate total distinctions, as it were from the egg to the empyrean. Her stature was rather short, all of it conversational, at the eyebrows, the shoulders, the finger-tips, the twisting shape; a ballerina's expressiveness; and her tongue dashed half sentences through and among these hieroglyphs, loosely and funnily candid. Anybody might hear that she had gone gambling into the City, and that she had got herself into a mess, and that by great good luck she had come across Victor Radnor, who, with two turns of the wrist, had plucked her out of the mire, the miraculous man! And she had vowed to him, never again to run doing the like without his approval.

The cause of her having done it, was related with the accompaniments; brows twitching, flitting smiles, shrugs, pouts, shifts of posture: she was married to a centaur; out of the saddle a man of wood, 'an excellent man.' For the not colloquial do not commit themselves. But one wants a little animation in a husband. She called on bell-motion of the head to toll forth the utter nightcap negative. He had not any: out of the saddle, he was asleep:—'next door to the Last Trump,' Colney Durance assisted her to describe the soundest of sleep in a husband, after wooing her to unbosom herself. She was awake to his guileful arts, and sailed along with him, hailing his phrases, if he shot a good one; frankly exposing a flexible nature, that took its holiday thus in a grinding world, among maskers, to the horrification of the prim. So to refresh ourselves, by having publicly a hip-bath in the truth while we shock our hearers enough to be discredited for what we reveal, was a dexterous merry twist, amusing to her; but it was less a cynical malice than her nature that she indulged, 'A woman must have some excitement.' The most innocent appeared to her the Stock Exchange. The opinions of husbands who are not summoned to pay are hardly important; they vary.

Colney helped her now and then to step the trifle beyond her stride, but if he was humorous, she forgave; and if together they appalled the decorous, it was great gain. Her supple person, pretty lips, the style she had, gave a pass to the wondrous confidings, which were for masculine ears, whatever the sex. Nataly might share in them, but women did not lead her to expansiveness; or not the women of the contracted class: Miss Graves, Mrs. Cormyn, and others at the Radnor Concerts. She had a special consideration for Mademoiselle de Seilles, owing to her exquisite French, as she said; and she may have liked it, but it was the young Frenchwoman's air of high breeding that won her esteem. Girls were spring frosts to her. Fronting Nesta, she put on her noted smile, or wood-cut of a smile, with its label of indulgence; except when the girl sang. Music she loved. She said it was the saving of poor Dudley. It distinguished him in the group of the noble Evangelical Cantor Family; and it gave him a subject of assured discourse in company; and oddly, it contributed to his comelier air. Flute [This would be the German Blockeflute or our Recorder. D.W.] in hand, his mouth at the blow-stop was relieved of its pained updraw by the form for puffing; he preserved a gentlemanly high figure in his exercises on the instrument, out of ken of all likeness to the urgent insistency of Victor Radnor's punctuating trunk of the puffing frame at almost every bar—an Apollo brilliancy in energetic pursuit of the nymph of sweet sound. Too methodical one, too fiery the other.

In duets of Hauptmann's, with Nesta at the piano, the contrast of dull smoothness and overstressed significance was very noticeable beside the fervent accuracy of her balanced fingering; and as she could also flute, she could criticize; though latterly, the flute was boxed away from lips that had devoted themselves wholly to song: song being one of the damsel's present pressing ambitions. She found nothing to correct in Mr. Sowerby, and her father was open to all the censures; but her father could plead vitality, passion. He held his performances cheap after the vehement display; he

was a happy listener, whether to the babble of his 'dear old Corelli,' or to the majesty of the rattling heavens and swaying forests of Beethoven.

His air of listening was a thing to see; it had a look of disembodiment; the sparkle conjured up from deeps, and the life in the sparkle, as of a soul at holiday. Eyes had been given this man to spy the pleasures and reveal the joy of his pasture on them: gateways to the sunny within, issues to all the outer Edens. Few of us possess that double significance of the pure sparkle. It captivated Lady Grace. She said a word of it to Fenellan: 'There is a man who can feel rapture!' He had not to follow the line of her sight: she said so on a previous evening, in a similar tone; and for a woman to repeat herself, using the very emphasis, was quaint. She could feel rapture; but her features and limbs were in motion to designate it, between simply and wilfully; she had the instinct to be dimpling, and would not for a moment control it, and delighted in its effectiveness: only when observing that winged sparkle of eyes did an idea of envy, hardly a consciousness, inform her of being surpassed; and it might be in the capacity to feel besides the gift to express. Such a reflection relating to a man, will make women mortally sensible that they are the feminine of him.

'His girl has the look,' Fenellan said in answer.

She cast a glance at Nesta, then at Nataly.

And it was true, that the figure of a mother, not pretending to the father's vividness, eclipsed it somewhat in their child. The mother gave richness of tones, hues and voice, and stature likewise, and the thick brown locks, which in her own were threads of gold along the brush from the temples: she gave the girl a certain degree of the composure of manner which Victor could not have bestowed; she gave nothing to clash with his genial temper; she might be supposed to have given various qualities, moral if you like. But vividness was Lady Grace's admirable meteor of the hour: she was unable to perceive, so as to compute, the value of obscurer lights. Under the charm of Nataly's rich contralto during a duet with Priscilla Graves, she gesticulated ecstasies, and uttered them, and genuinely; and still, when reduced to meditations, they would have had no weight, they would hardly have seemed an apology for language, beside Victor's gaze of pleasure in the noble forthroll of the notes.

Nataly heard the invitation of the guests of the evening to Lakelands next day.

Her anxieties were at once running about to gather provisions for the baskets. She spoke of them at night. But Victor had already put the matter in the hands of Madame Callet; and all that could be done, would be done by Armandine, he knew. 'If she can't muster enough at home, she'll be off to her Piccadilly shop by seven A.M. Count on plenty for twice the number.'

Nataly was reposing on the thought that they were her friends, when Victor mentioned his having in the afternoon despatched a note to his relatives, the Duvidney ladies, inviting them to join him at the station to-morrow, for a visit of inspection to the house of his building on his new estate. He startled her. The Duvidney ladies were, to his knowledge, of the order of the fragile minds which hold together by the cement of a common trepidation for the support of things established, and have it not in them to be able to recognize the unsanctioned. Good women, unworldly of the world, they were perforce harder than the world, from being narrower and more timorous.

'But, Victor, you were sure they would refuse!'

He answered: 'They may have gone back to Tunbridge Wells. By the way, they have a society down there I want for Fredi. Sure, do you say, my dear? Perfectly sure. But the accumulation of invitations and refusals in the end softens them, you will see. We shall and must have them for Fredi.'

She was used to the long reaches of his forecasts, his burning activity on a project; she found it idle to speak her thought, that his ingenuity would have been needless in a position dictated by plain prudence, and so much happier for them.

They talked of Mrs. Burman until she had to lift a prayer to be saved from darker thoughts, dreadfully prolific, not to be faced. Part of her prayer was on behalf of Mrs. Burman, for life to be extended to her, if the poor lady clung to life—if it was really humane to wish it for her: and heaven would know: heaven had mercy on the afflicted.

Nataly heard the snuffle of hypocrisy in her prayer. She had to cease to pray.

CHAPTER IX. AN INSPECTION OF LAKELANDS

One may not have an intention to flourish, and may be pardoned for a semblance of it, in exclaiming, somewhat royally, as creator and owner of the place: 'There you see Lakelands.'

The conveyances from the railway station drew up on a rise of road fronting an undulation, where our modern English architect's fantasia in crimson brick swept from central gables to flying wings, over pents, crooks, curves, peaks, cowled porches, balconies, recesses, projections, away to a red village of stables and dependent cottages; harmonious in irregularity; and coloured homely with the greensward about it, the pines beside it, the clouds above it. Not many palaces would be reckoned as larger. The folds and swells and stream of the building along the roll of ground, had an appearance of an enormous banner on the wind. Nataly looked. Her next look was at Colney Durance. She sent the expected nods to Victor's carriage. She would have given the whole prospect for the covering solitariness of her chamber. A multitude of clashing sensations, and a throat-thickening hateful to her, compelled her to summon so as to force herself to feel a groundless anger, directed against none, against nothing, perfectly crazy, but her only resource for keeping down the great wave surgent at her eyes.

Victor was like a swimmer in morning sea amid the exclamations encircling him. He led through the straight passage of the galleried hall, offering two fair landscapes at front door and at back, down to the lake, Fredi's lake; a good oblong of water, notable in a district not abounding in the commodity. He would have it a feature of the district; and it had been deepened and extended; up rose the springs, many ran the ducts. Fredi's pretty little bathshed or bower had a space of marble on the three-feet shallow it overhung with a shade of carved woodwork; it had a diving-board for an eight-feet plunge; a punt and small row-boat of elegant build hard by. Green ran the banks about, and a beechwood fringed with birches curtained the Northward length: morning sun and evening had a fair face of water to paint. Saw man ever the like for pleasing a poetical damsel? So was Miss Fredi, the coldest of the party hitherto, and dreaming a preference of 'old places' like Creckholt and Craye Farm, 'captured to be enraptured,' quite according to man's ideal of his beneficence to the sex. She pressed the hand of her young French governess, Louise de Seilles. As in everything he did for his girl, Victor pointed boastfully to his forethought of her convenience and her tastes: the pine-panels of the interior, the shelves for her books, pegs to hang her favourite drawings, and the couch-bunk under a window to conceal the summerly recliner while throwing full light on her book; and the hearth-square for logs, when she wanted fire: because Fredi bathed in any weather: the oaken towel-coffer; the wood-carvings of doves, tits, fishes; the rod for the flowered silken hangings she was to choose, and have shy odalisque peeps of sunny water from her couch.

'Fredi's Naiad retreat, when she wishes to escape Herr Strauscher or Signor Ruderer,' said Victor, having his grateful girl warm in an arm; 'and if they head after her into the water, I back her to leave them puffing; she's a dolphin. That water has three springs and gets all the drainage of the upland round us. I chose the place chiefly on account of it and the pines. I do love pines!'

'But, excellent man! what do you not love?' said Lady Grace, with the timely hit upon the obvious, which rings.

'It saves him from accumulation of tissue,' said Colney.

'What does?' was eagerly asked by the wife of the homoeopathic Dr. John Cormyn, a sentimental lady beset with fears of stoutness.

Victor cried: 'Tush; don't listen to Colney, pray.'

But she heard Colney speak of a positive remedy; more immediately effective than an abjuration of potatoes and sugar. She was obliged by her malady to listen, although detesting the irreverent ruthless man, who could direct expanding frames, in a serious tone, to love; love everybody, everything; violently and universally love; and so without intermission pay out the fat created by a

rapid assimilation of nutriment. Obeseness is the most sensitive of our ailments: probably as being aware, that its legitimate appeal to pathos is ever smothered in its pudding-bed of the grotesque. She was pained, and showed it, and was ashamed of herself for showing it; and that very nearly fetched the tear.

‘Our host is an instance in proof,’ Colney said. He waved hand at the house. His meaning was hidden; evidently he wanted victims. Sight of Lakelands had gripped him with the fell satiric itch; and it is a passion to sting and tear, on rational grounds. His face meanwhile, which had points of the handsome, signified a smile asleep, as if beneath a cloth. Only those who knew him well were aware of the claw-like alertness under the droop of eyelids.

Admiration was the common note, in the various keys. The station selected for the South-eastward aspect of the dark-red gabled pile on its white shell-terrace, backed by a plantation of tall pines, a mounded and full-plumed company, above the left wing, was admired, in files and in volleys. Marvellous, effectively miraculous, was the tale of the vow to have the great edifice finished within one year: and the strike of workmen, and the friendly colloquy with them, the good reasoning, the unanimous return to duty; and the doubling, the trebling of the number of them; and the most glorious of sights—O the grand old English working with a will! as Englishmen do when they come at last to heat; and they conquer, there is then nothing that they cannot conquer. So the conqueror said.—And admirable were the conservatories running three long lines, one from the drawing-room, to a central dome for tropical growths. And the parterres were admired; also the newly-planted Irish junipers bounding the West-walk; and the three tiers of stately descent from the three green terrace banks to the grassy slopes over the lake. Again the lake was admired, the house admired. Admiration was evoked for great orchid-houses ‘over yonder,’ soon to be set up.

Off we go to the kitchen-garden. There the admiration is genial, practical. We admire the extent of the beds marked out for asparagus, and the French disposition of the planting at wide intervals; and the French system of training peach, pear, and plum trees on the walls to win length and catch sun, we much admire. We admire the gardener. We are induced temporarily to admire the French people. They are sagacious in fruit-gardens. They have not the English Constitution, you think rightly; but in fruit-gardens they grow for fruit, and not, as Victor quotes a friend, for wood, which the valiant English achieve. We hear and we see examples of sagacity; and we are further brought round to the old confession, that we cannot cook; Colney Durance has us there; we have not studied herbs and savours; and so we are shocked backward step by step until we retreat precipitately into the nooks where waxen tapers, carefully tended by writers on the Press, light-up mysterious images of our national selves for admiration. Something surely we do, or we should not be where we are. But what is it we do (excepting cricket, of course) which others cannot do? Colney asks; and he excludes cricket and football.

An acutely satiric man in an English circle, that does not resort to the fist for a reply to him, may almost satiate the excessive fury roused in his mind by an illogical people of a provocative prosperity, mainly tongueless or of leaden tongue above the pressure of their necessities, as he takes them to be. They give him so many opportunities. They are angry and helpless as the log hissing to the saw. Their instinct to make use of the downright in retort, restrained as it is by a buttoned coat of civilization, is amusing, inviting. Colney Durance allured them to the quag’s edge and plunged them in it, to writhe patriotically; and although it may be said, that they felt their situation less than did he the venom they sprang in his blood, he was cruel; he caused discomfort. But these good friends about him stood for the country, an illogical country; and as he could not well attack his host Victor Radnor, an irrational man, he selected the abstract entity for the discharge of his honest spite.

The irrational friend was deeper at the source of his irritation than the illogical old motherland. This house of Lakelands, the senselessness of his friend in building it and designing to live in it, after experiences of an incapacity to stand in a serene contention with the world he challenged, excited Colney’s wasp. He was punished, half way to frenzy behind his placable demeanour, by having Dr. Schlesien for chorus. And here again, it was the unbecoming, not the person, which stirred his wrath. A

German on English soil should remember the dues of a guest. At the same time, Colney said things to snare the acclamation of an observant gentleman of that race, who is no longer in his first enthusiasm for English beef and the complexion of the women. 'Ah, ya, it is true, what you say: "The English grow as fast as odders, but they grow to corns instead of brains." They are Bull. Quaat true.' He bellowed on a laugh the last half of the quotation.

Colney marked him. His encounters with Fenellan were enlivening engagements and left no malice; only a regret, when the fencing passed his guard, that Fenellan should prefer to flash for the minute. He would have met a pert defender of England, in the person of Miss Priscilla Graves, if she had not been occupied with observation of the bearing of Lady Grace Halley toward Mr. Victor Radnor; which displeased her on behalf of Mrs. Victor; she was besides hostile by race and class to an aristocratic assumption of licence. Sparing Colney, she with some scorn condemned Mr. Pempton for allowing his country to be ridiculed without a word. Mr. Pempton believed that the Vegetarian movement was more progressive in England than in other lands, but he was at the disadvantage with the fair Priscilla, that eulogy of his compatriots on this account would win her coldest approval. 'Satire was never an argument,' he said, too evasively.

The Rev. Septimus Barmby received the meed of her smile, for saying in his many-fathom bass, with an eye on Victor: 'At least we may boast of breeding men, who are leaders of men.'

The announcement of luncheon, by Victor's butler Arlington, opportunely followed and freighted the remark with a happy recognition of that which comes to us from the hands of conquerors. Dr. Schlessien himself, no antagonist to England, but like Colney Durance, a critic, speculated in view of the spread of pic-nic provision beneath the great glass dome, as to whether it might be, that these English were on another start out of the dust in vigorous commercial enterprise, under leadership of one of their chance masterly minds-merchant, in this instance: and be debated within, whether Genius, occasionally developed in a surprising superior manner by these haphazard English, may not sometimes wrest the prize from Method; albeit we count for the long run, that Method has assurance of success, however late in the race to set forth.

Luncheon was a merry meal, with Victor and Nataly for host and hostess; Fenellan, Colney Durance, and Lady Grace Halley for the talkers. A gusty bosom of sleet overhung the dome, rattled on it, and rolling Westward, became a radiant mountain-land, partly worthy of Victor's phrase: 'A range of Swiss Alps in air.'

'With periwigs Louis Quatorze for peaks,' Colney added.

And Fenellan improved on him: 'Or a magnified Bench of Judges at the trial of your caerulean Phryne.'

The strip of white cloud flew on a whirl from the blue, to confirm it.

But Victor and Lady Grace rejected any play of conceits upon nature. Violent and horrid interventions of the counterfeit, such mad similes appeared to them, when pure coin was offered. They loathed the Rev. Septimus Barmby for proclaiming, that he had seen 'Chapters of Hebrew History in the grouping of clouds.'

His gaze was any one of the Chapters upon Nesta. The clerical gentleman's voice was of a depth to claim for it the profoundest which can be thought or uttered; and Nesta's tender youth had taken so strong an impression of sacredness from what Fenellan called 'his chafer tones,' that her looks were often given him in gratitude, for the mere sound. Nataly also had her sense of safety in acquiescing to such a voice coming from such a garb. Consequently, whenever Fenellan and Colney were at him, drawing him this way and that for utterances cathedral in sentiment and sonorousness, these ladies shed protecting beams; insomuch that he was inspired to the agreeable conceptions whereof frequently rash projects are an issue.

Touching the neighbours of Lakelands, they were principally enriched merchants, it appeared; a snippet or two of the fringe of aristocracy lay here and there among them; and one racy-of-the-soil old son of Thames, having the manners proper to last century's yeoman. Mr. Pempton knew

something of this quaint Squire of Hefferstone, Beaves Urmsing by name; a ruddy man, right heartily Saxon; a still glowing brand amid the ashes of the Heptarchy hearthstone; who had a song, The Marigolds, which he would troll out for you anywhere, on any occasion. To have so near to the metropolis one from the centre of the venerable rotundity of the country, was rare. Victor exclaimed 'Come!' in rapture over the picturesqueness of a neighbour carrying imagination away to the fountains of England; and his look at Nataly proposed. Her countenance was inapprehensive. He perceived resistance, and said: 'I have met two or three of them in the train: agreeable men: Gladding, the banker; a General Fanning; that man Blathenoy, great billbroker. But the fact is, close on London, we're independent of neighbours; we mean to be. Lakelands and London practically join.'

'The mother city becoming the suburb,' murmured Colney, in report of the union.

'You must expect to be invaded, sir,' said Mr. Sowerby; and Victor shrugged: 'We are pretty safe.'

'The lock of a door seems a potent security until some one outside is heard fingering the handle nigh midnight,' Fenellan threw out his airy nothing of a remark.

It struck on Nataly's heart. 'So you will not let us be lonely here,' she said to her guests.

The Rev. Septimus Barmby was mouthpiece for congregations. Sound of a subterranean roar, with a blast at the orifice, informed her of their 'very deep happiness in the privilege.'

He comforted her. Nesta smiled on him thankfully.

'Don't imagine, Mrs. Victor, that you can be shut off from neighbours, in a house like this; and they have a claim,' said Lady Grace, quitting the table.

Fenellan and Colney thought so:

'Like mice at a cupboard.'

'Beetles in a kitchen.'

'No, no-no, no!' Victor shook head, pitiful over the good people likened to things unclean, and royally upraising them: in doing which, he scattered to vapour the leaden incubi they had been upon his flatter moods of late. 'No, but it's a rapture to breathe the air here!' His lifted chest and nostrils were for the encouragement of Nataly to soar beside him.

She summoned her smile and nodded.

He spoke aside to Lady Grace: 'The dear soul wants time to compose herself after a grand surprise.'

She replied: 'I think I could soon be reconciled. How much land?'

'In treaty for some hundred and eighty or ninety acres... in all at present three hundred and seventy, including plantations, lake, outhouses.'

'Large enough; land paying as it does—that is, not paying. We shall be having to gamble in the City systematically for subsistence.'

'You will not so much as jest on the subject.'

Coming from such a man, that was clear sky thunder. The lady played it off in a shadowy pout and shrug while taking a stamp of his masterfulness, not so volatile.

She said to Nataly: 'Our place in Worcestershire is about half the size, if as much. Large enough when we're not crowded out with gout and can open to no one. Some day you will visit us, I hope.'

'You we count on here, Lady Grace.'

It was an over-accentuated response; unusual with this well-bred woman; and a bit of speech that does not flow, causes us to speculate. The lady resumed: 'I value the favour. We're in a horsey-doggy-foxy circle down there. We want enlivening. If we had your set of musicians and talkers!'

Nataly smiled in vacuous kindness, at a loss for the retort of a compliment to a person she measured. Lady Grace also was an amiable hostile reviewer. Each could see, to have cited in the other, defects common to the lower species of the race, admitting a superior personal quality or two; which might be pleaded in extenuation; and if the apology proved too effective, could be dispersed

by insistence upon it, under an implied appeal to benevolence. When we have not a liking for the creature whom we have no plain cause to dislike, we are minutely just.

During the admiratory stroll along the ground-floor rooms, Colney Durance found himself beside Dr. Schlesien; the latter smoking, striding, emphasizing, but bearable, as the one of the party who was not perpetually at the gape in laudation. Colney was heard to say: 'No doubt: the German is the race the least mixed in Europe: it might challenge aboriginals for that. Oddly, it has invented the Cyclopaedia for knowledge, the sausage for nutrition! How would you explain it?'

Dr. Schlesien replied with an Atlas shrug under fleabite to the insensately infantile interrogation. He in turn was presently heard.

'But, my good sir! you quote me your English Latin. I must beg of you you write it down. It is orally incomprehensible to Continentals.'

'We are Islanders!' Colney shrugged in languishment.

'Oh, you do great things... ' Dr. Schlesien rejoined in kindness, making his voice a musical intimation of the smallness of the things.

'We build great houses, to employ our bricks'

'No, Colney, to live in,' said Victor.

'Scarcely long enough to warm them.'

'What do you... fiddle!'

'They are not Hohenzollerns!'

'It is true,' Dr. Schlesien called. 'No, but you learn discipline; you build. I say wid you, not Hohenzollerns you build! But you shall look above: Eyes up. Ire necesse est. Good, but mount; you come to something. Have ideas.'

'Good, but when do we reach your level?'

'Sir, I do not say more than that we do not want instruction from foreigners.'

'Pupil to paedagogue indeed. You have the wreath in Music, in Jurisprudence, Chemistry, Scholarship, Beer, Arms, Manners.'

Dr. Schlesien puffed a tempest of tobacco and strode.

'He is chiselling for wit in the Teutonic block,' Colney said, falling back to Fenellan.

Fenellan observed: 'You might have credited him with the finished sculpture.'

'They're ahead of us in sticking at the charge of wit.'

'They've a widening of their swallow since Versailles.'

'Manners?'

'Well, that's a tight cravat for the Teutonic thrapple! But he's off by himself to loosen it.'

Victor came on the couple testily. 'What are you two concocting! I say, do keep the peace, please. An excellent good fellow; better up in politics than any man I know; understands music; means well, you can see. You two hate a man at all serious. And he doesn't bore with his knowledge. A scholar too.'

'If he'll bring us the atmosphere of the groves of Academe, he may swing his ferule pickled in himself, and welcome,' said Fenellan.

'Yes!' Victor nodded at a recognized antagonism in Fenellan; 'but Colney's always lifting the Germans high above us.'

'It's to exercise his muscles.'

Victor headed to the other apartments, thinking that the Rev. Septimus and young Sowerby, Old England herself, were spared by the diversion of these light skirmishing shots from their accustomed victims to the 'masculine people of our time. His friends would want a drilling to be of aid to him in his campaign to come. For it was one, and a great one. He remembered his complete perception of the plan, all the elements of it, the forward whirling of it, just before the fall on London Bridge. The greatness of his enterprise laid such hold of him that the smallest of obstacles had a villanous aspect; and when, as anticipated, Colney and Fenellan were sultry flies for whomsoever they could

fret, he was blind to the reading of absurdities which caused Fredi's eyes to stream and Lady Grace beside him to stand awhile and laugh out her fit. Young Sowerby appeared forgiving enough—he was a perfect gentleman: but Fredi's appalling sense of fun must try him hard. And those young fellows are often more wounded by a girl's thoughtless laughter than by a man's contempt. Nataly should have protected him. Her face had the air of a smiling general satisfaction; sign of a pleasure below the mark required; sign too of a sleepy partner for a battle. Even in the wonderful kitchen, arched and pillared (where the explanation came to Nesta of Madame Callet's frequent leave of absence of late, when an inferior dinner troubled her father in no degree), even there his Nataly listened to the transports of the guests with benign indulgence.

'Mama!' said Nesta, ready to be entranced by kitchens in her bubbling animation: she meant the recalling of instances of the conspirator her father had been.

'You none of you guessed Armandine's business!' Victor cried, in a glee that pushed to make the utmost of this matter and count against chagrin. 'She was off to Paris; went to test the last inventions:—French brains are always alert:—and in fact, those kitchen-ranges, gas and coal, and the apparatus for warming plates and dishes, the whole of the battery is on the model of the Duc d'Ariane's—finest in Europe. Well,' he agreed with Colney, 'to say France is enough.'

Mr. Pempton spoke to Miss Graves of the task for a woman to conduct a command so extensive. And, as when an inoffensive wayfarer has chanced to set foot near a wasp's nest, out on him came woman and her champions, the worthy and the sham, like a blast of powder.

Victor ejaculated: 'Armandine!' Whoever doubted her capacity, knew not Armandine; or not knowing Armandine, knew not the capacity in women.

With that utterance of her name, he saw the orangey spot on London Bridge, and the sinking Tower and masts and funnels, and the rising of them, on his return to his legs; he recollected, that at the very edge of the fall he had Armandine strongly in his mind. She was to do her part: Fenellan and Colney on the surface, she below: and hospitality was to do its part, and music was impressed—the innocent Concerts; his wealth, all his inventiveness were to serve;—and merely to attract and win the tastes of people, for a social support to Lakelands! Merely that? Much more:—if Nataly's coldness to the place would but allow him to form an estimate of how much. At the same time, being in the grasp of his present disappointment, he perceived a meanness in the result, that was astonishing and afflicting. He had not ever previously felt imagination starving at the vision of success. Victor had yet to learn, that the man with a material object in aim, is the man of his object; and the nearer to his mark, often the farther is he from a sober self; he is more the arrow of his bow than bow to his arrow. This we pay for scheming: and success is costly; we find we have pledged the better half of ourselves to clutch it; not to be redeemed with the whole handful of our prize! He was, however, learning after his leaping fashion. Nataly's defective sympathy made him look at things through the feelings she depressed. A shadow of his missed Idea on London Bridge seemed to cross him from the close flapping of a wing within reach. He could say only, that it would, if caught, have been an answer to the thought disturbing him.

Nataly drew Colney Durance with her eyes to step beside her, on the descent to the terrace. Little Skepsey hove in sight, coming swift as the point of an outrigger over the flood.

CHAPTER X. SKEPSEY IN MOTION

The bearer of his master's midday letters from London shot beyond Nataly as soon as seen, with an apparent snap of his body in passing. He steamed to the end of the terrace and delivered the packet, returning at the same rate of speed, to do proper homage to the lady he so much respected. He had left the railway-station on foot instead of taking a fly, because of a calculation that he would save three minutes; which he had not lost for having to come through the raincloud. 'Perhaps the contrary,' Skepsey said: it might be judged to have accelerated his course: and his hat dripped, and his coat shone, and he soaped his hands, cheerful as an ouzel-cock when the sun is out again.

'Many cracked crowns lately, in the Manly Art?' Colney inquired of him. And Skepsey answered with precision of statement: 'Crowns, no, sir; the nose, it may happen; but it cannot be said to be the rule.'

'You are of opinion, that the practice of Scientific Pugilism offers us compensation for the broken bridge of a nose?'

'In an increase of manly self-esteem: I do, sir, yes.'

Skepsey was shy of this gentleman's bite; and he fancied his defence had been correct. Perceiving a crumple of the lips of Mr. Durance, he took the attitude of a watchful dubiety.

'But, my goodness, you are wet through!' cried Nataly, reproaching herself for the tardy compassion; and Nesta ran up to them and heaped a thousand pities on her 'poor dear Skip,' and drove him in beneath the glass-dome to the fragments of pic-nic, and poured champagne for him, 'lest his wife should have to doctor him for a cold,' and poured afresh, when he had obeyed her: 'for the toasting of Lakelands, dear Skepsey!' impossible to resist: so he drank, and blinked; and was then told, that before using his knife and fork he must betake himself to some fire of shavings and chips, where coffee was being made, for the purpose of drying his clothes. But this he would not hear of: he was pledged to business, to convey his master's letters, and he might have to catch a train by the last quarter-minute, unless it was behind the time-tables; he must hold himself ready to start. Entreated, adjured, commanded, Skepsey commiseratingly observed to Colney Durance, 'The ladies do not understand, sir!' For Turk of Constantinople had never a more hared opinion of the unfitness of women in the brave world of action. The persistence of these ladies endeavouring to obstruct him in the course of his duty, must have succeeded save that for one word of theirs he had two, and twice the promptitude of motion. He explained to them, as to good children, that the loss of five minutes might be the loss of a Post, the loss of thousands of pounds, the loss of the character of a Firm; and he was away to the terrace. Nesta headed him and waved him back. She and her mother rebuked him: they called him unreasonable; wherein they resembled the chief example of the sex to him, in a wife he had at home, who levelled that charge against her husband when most she needed discipline: the woman laid hand on the very word legitimately his own for the justification of his process with her.

'But, Skips! if you are ill and we have to nurse you!' said Nesta.

She forgot the hospital, he told her cordially, and laughed at the notion of a ducking producing a cold or a cold a fever, or anything consumption, with him. So the ladies had to keep down their anxious minds and allow him to stand in wet clothing to eat his cold pie and salad.

Miss Priscilla Graves entering to them, became a witness that they were seductresses for inducing him to drink wine—and a sparkling wine.

'It is to warm him,' they pleaded; and she said: 'He must be warm from his walk'; and they said: 'But he is wet'; and said she, without a show of feeling: 'Warm water, then'; and Skepsey writhed, as if in the grasp of anatomists, at being the subject of female contention or humane consideration. Miss Graves caught signs of the possible proselyte in him; she remarked encouragingly:

'I am sure he does not like it; he still has a natural taste.'

She distressed his native politeness, for the glass was in his hand, and he was fully aware of her high-principled aversion; and he profoundly bowed to principles, believing his England to be pillared on them; and the lady looked like one who bore the standard of a principle; and if we slap and pinch and starve our appetites, the idea of a principle seems entering us to support. Subscribing to a principle, our energies are refreshed; we have a faith in the country that was not with us before the act; and of a real well-founded faith come the glowing thoughts which we have at times: thoughts of England heading the nations; when the smell of an English lane under showers challenges Eden, and the threading of a London crowd tunes discords to the swell of a cathedral organ. It may be, that by the renunciation of any description of alcohol, a man will stand clearer-headed to serve his country. He may expect to have a clearer memory, for certain: he will not be asking himself, unable to decide, whether his master named a Mr. Journeyman or a Mr. Jarniman, as the person he declined to receive. Either of the two is repulsed upon his application, owing to the guilty similarity of sounds but what we are to think of is, our own sad state of inefficiency in failing to remember; which accuses our physical condition, therefore our habits.—Thus the little man debated, scarcely requiring more than to hear the right word, to be a convert and make him a garland of the proselyte's fetters.

Destructively for the cause she advocated, Miss Priscilla gestured the putting forth of an abjuring hand, with the recommendation to him, so to put aside temptation that instant; and she signified in a very ugly jerk of her features, the vilely filthy stuff Morality thought it, however pleasing it might be to a palate corrupted by indulgence of the sensual appetites.

But the glass had been handed to him by the lady he respected, who looked angelical in offering it, divinely other than ugly; and to her he could not be discourteous; not even to pay his homage to the representative of a principle. He bowed to Miss Graves, and drank, and rushed forth; hearing shouts behind him.

His master had a packet of papers ready, easy for the pocket.

'By the way, Skepsey,' he said, 'if a man named Jarniman should call at the office, I will see him.'
Skepsey's grey eyes came out.

Or was it Journeyman, that his master would not see; and Jarniman that he would?

His habit of obedience, pride of apprehension, and the time to catch the train, forbade inquiry. Besides he knew of himself of old, that his puzzles were best unriddled running.

The quick of pace are soon in the quick of thoughts.

Jarniman, then, was a man whom his master, not wanting to see, one day, and wanting to see, on another day, might wish to conciliate: a case of policy. Let Jarniman go. Journeyman, on the other hand, was nobody at all, a ghost of the fancy. Yet this Journeyman was as important an individual, he was a dread reality; more important to Skepsey in the light of patriot: and only in that light was he permitted of a scrupulous conscience and modest mind to think upon himself when the immediate subject was his master's interests. For this Journeyman had not an excuse for existence in Mr. Radnor's pronunciation: he was born of the buzz of a troubled ear, coming of a disordered brain, consequent necessarily upon a disorderly stomach, that might protest a degree of comparative innocence, but would be shamed utterly under inspection of the eye of a lady of principle.

What, then, was the value to his country of a servant who could not accurately recollect his master's words! Miss Graves within him asked the rapid little man, whether indeed his ideas were his own after draughts of champagne.

The ideas, excited to an urgent animation by his racing trot, were a quiverful in flight over an England terrible to the foe and dancing on the green. Right so: but would we keep up the dance, we must be red iron to touch: and the fighter for conquering is the one who can last and has the open brain;—and there you have a point against alcohol. Yes, and Miss Graves, if she would press it, with her natural face, could be pleasant and persuasive: and she ought to be told she ought to marry, for the good of the country. Women taking liquor: Skepsey had a vision of his wife with rheumy peepers and miauly mouth, as he had once beheld the creature:—Oh! they need discipline not such would we have

for the mothers of our English young. Decidedly the women of principle are bound to enter wedlock; they should be bound by law. Whereas, in the opposing case—the binding of the unprincipled to a celibate state—such a law would have saved Skepsey from the necessitated commission of deeds of discipline with one of the female sex, and have rescued his progeny from a likeness to the corn-stalk reverting to weed. He had but a son for England's defence; and the frame of his boy might be set quaking by a thump on the wind of a drum; the courage of William Barlow Skepsey would not stand against a sheep; it would wind-up hares to have a run at him out in the field. Offspring of a woman of principle!... but there is no rubbing out in life: why dream of it? Only that one would not have one's country the loser!

Dwell a moment on the reverse—and first remember the lesson of the Captivity of the Jews and the outcry of their backsliding and repentance:—see a nation of the honourably begotten; muscular men disdain the luxuries they will occasionally condescend to taste, like some tribe in Greece; boxers, rowers, runners, climbers; braced, indomitable; magnanimous, as only the strong can be; an army at word, winning at a stroke the double battle of the hand and the heart: men who can walk the paths through the garden of the pleasures. They receive fitting mates, of a build to promise or aid in ensuring depth of chest and long reach of arm for their progeny.

Down goes the world before them.

And we see how much would be due for this to a corps of ladies like Miss Graves, not allowed to remain too long on the stalk of spinsterhood. Her age might count twenty-eight: too long! She should be taught that men can, though truly ordinary women cannot, walk these orderly paths through the garden. An admission to women, hinting restrictions, on a ticket marked 'in moderation' (meaning, that they may pluck a flower or fruit along the pathway border to which they are confined), speedily, alas, exhibits them at a mad scramble across the pleasure-beds. They know not moderation. Neither for their own sakes nor for the sakes of Posterity will they hold from excess, when they are not pledged to shun it.

The reason is, that their minds cannot conceive the abstract, as men do.

But there are grounds for supposing that the example before them of a sex exercising self-control in freedom, would induce women to pledge themselves to a similar abnegation, until they gain some sense of touch upon the impalpable duty to the generations coming after us thanks to the voluntary example we set them.

The stupendous task, which had hitherto baffled Skepsey in the course of conversational remonstrances with his wife;—that of getting the Idea of Posterity into the understanding of its principal agent, might then be mastered.

Therefore clearly men have to begin the salutary movement: it manifestly devolves upon them. Let them at once take to rigorous physical training. Women under compulsion, as vessels: men in their magnanimity, patriotically, voluntarily.

Miss Graves must have had an intimation for him; he guessed it; and it plunged him into a conflict with her, that did not suffer him to escape without ruefully feeling the feebleness of his vocabulary: and consequently he made a reluctant appeal to figures, and it hung upon the bolder exhibition of lists and tables as to whether he was beaten; and if beaten, he was morally her captive; and this being the case, nothing could be more repulsive to Skepsey; seeing that he, unable of his nature passively or partially to undertake a line of conduct, beheld himself wearing a detestable 'ribbon,' for sign of an oath quite needlessly sworn (simply to satisfy the lady overcoming him with nimbler tongue), and blocking the streets, marching in bands beneath banners, howling hymns.

Statistics, upon which his master and friends, after exchanging opinions in argument, always fell back, frightened him. As long as they had no opponents of their own kind, they swept the field, they were intelligible, as the word 'principle' had become. But the appearance of one body of Statistics invariably brought up another; and the strokes and counterstrokes were like a play of quarter-staff on the sconce, to knock all comprehension out of Skepsey. Otherwise he would not unwillingly have

inquired to-morrow into the Statistics of the controversy between the waters of the wells and of the casks, prepared to walk over to the victorious, however objectionable that proceeding. He hoped to question his master some day except that his master would very naturally have a tendency to sum-up in favour of wine—good wine, in moderation; just as Miss Graves for the cup of tea—not so thoughtfully stipulating that it should be good and not too copious. Statistics are according to their conjurors; they are not independent bodies, with native colours; they needs must be painted by the different hands they pass through, and they may be multiplied; a nought or so counts for nothing with the teller. Skepsey saw that. Yet they can overcome: even as fictitious battalions, they can overcome. He shrank from the results of a ciphering match having him for object, and was ashamed of feeling to Statistics as women to giants; nevertheless he acknowledged that the badge was upon him, if Miss Graves should beat her master in her array of figures, to insist on his wearing it, as she would, she certainly would. And against his internal conviction perhaps; with the knowledge that the figures were an unfortified display, and his oath of bondage an unmanly servility, the silliest of ceremonies! He was shockingly feminine to Statistics.

Mr. Durance despised them: he called them, arguing against Mr. Radnor, ‘those emotional things,’ not comprehensibly to Skepsey. But Mr. Durance, a very clever gentleman, could not be right in everything. He made strange remarks upon his country. Dr. Yatt attributed them to the state of ‘his digestion.

And Mr. Fenellan had said of Mr. Durance that, as ‘a barrister wanting briefs, the speech in him had been bottled too long and was an overripe wine dripping sour drops through the rotten cork.’ Mr. Fenellan said it laughing, he meant no harm. Skepsey was sure he had the words. He heard no more than other people hear; he remembered whole sentences, and many: on one of his runs, this active little machine, quickened by motion to fire, revived the audible of years back; whatever suited his turn of mind at the moment rushed to the rapid wheels within him. His master’s business and friends, his country’s welfare and advancement, these, with records, items, anticipations, of the manlier sports to decorate, were his current themes; all being chopped and tossed and mixed in salad accordance by his fervour of velocity. And if you would like a further definition of Genius, think of it as a form of swiftness. It is the lively young great-grandson, in the brain, of the travelling force which mathematicians put to paper, in a row of astounding ciphers, for the motion of earth through space; to the generating of heat, whereof is multiplication, whereof deposited matter, and so your chaos, your half-lighted labyrinth, your, ceaseless pressure to evolvment; and then Light, and so Creation, order, the work of Genius. What do you say?

Without having a great brain, the measure of it possessed by Skepsey was alive under strong illumination. In his heart, while doing penance for his presumptuousness, he believed that he could lead regiments of men. He was not the army’s General, he was the General’s Lieutenant, now and then venturing to suggest a piece of counsel to his Chief. On his own particular drilled regiments, his Chief may rely; and on his knowledge of the country of the campaign, roads, morasses, masking hills, dividing rivers. He had mapped for himself mentally the battles of conquerors in his favourite historic reading; and he understood the value of a plan, and the danger of sticking to it, and the advantage of a big army for flanking; and he manoeuvred a small one cunningly to make it a bolt at the telling instant. Dartrey Fenellan had explained to him Frederick’s oblique attack, Napoleon’s employment of the artillery arm preparatory to the hurling of the cataract on the spot of weakness, Wellington’s parallel march with Marmont up to the hour of the decisive cut through the latter at Salamanca; and Skepsey treated his enemy to the like, deferentially reporting the engagement to a Chief whom his modesty kept in eminence, for the receiving of the principal honours. As to his men, of all classes and sorts, they are so supple with training that they sustain a defeat like the sturdy pugilist a knock off his legs, and up smiling a minute after—one of the truly beautiful sights on this earth! They go at the double half a day, never sounding a single pair of bellows among them. They have their appetites in full control, to eat when they can, or cheerfully fast. They have healthy frames, you see; and as

the healthy frame is not artificially heated, it ensues that, under any title you like, they profess the principles—into the bog we go, we have got round to it!—the principles of those horrible marching and chanting people!

Then, must our England, to be redoubtable to the enemy, be a detestable country for habitation? Here was a knot.

Skepsey's head dropped lower, he went as a ram. The sayings of Mr. Durance about his dear England: that 'her remainder of life is in the activity of her diseases'—that 'she has so fed upon Pap of Compromise as to be unable any longer to conceive a muscular resolution': that 'she is animated only as the carcase to the blow-fly'; and so forth:—charged on him during his wrestle with his problem. And the gentlemen had said, had permitted himself to say, that our England's recent history was a provincial apothecary's exhibition of the battle of bane and antidote. Mr. Durance could hardly mean it. But how could one answer him when he spoke of the torpor of the people, and of the succeeding Governments as a change of lacqueys—or the purse-string's lacqueys? He said, that Old England has taken to the arm-chair for good, and thinks it her whole business to pronounce opinions and listen to herself; and that, in the face of an armed Europe, this great nation is living on sufferance. Oh!

Skepsey had uttered the repudiating exclamation.

'Feel quite up to it?' he was asked by his neighbour.

The mover of armed hosts for the defence of the country sat in a third-class carriage of the train, approaching the first of the stations on the way to town. He was instantly up to the level of an external world, and fell into give and take with a burly broad communicative man; located in London, but born in the North, in view of Durham cathedral, as he thanked his Lord; who was of the order of pork-butcher; which succulent calling had carried him down to near upon the borders of Surrey and Sussex, some miles beyond the new big house of a Mister whose name he had forgotten, though he had heard it mentioned by an acquaintance interested in the gentleman's doings. But his object was to have a look at a rare breed of swine, worth the journey; that didn't run to fat so much as to flavour, had longer legs, sharp snouts to plump their hams; over from Spain, it seemed; and the gentleman owning them was for selling them, finding them wild past correction. But the acquaintance mentioned, who was down to visit t' other gentleman's big new edifice in workmen's hands, had a mother, who had been cook to a family, and was now widow of a cook's shop; ham, beef, and sausages, prime pies to order; and a good specimen herself; and if ever her son saw her spirit at his bedside, there wouldn't be room for much else in that chamber—supposing us to keep our shapes. But he was the right sort of son, anxious to push his mother's shop where he saw a chance, and do it cheap; and those foreign pigs, after a disappointment to their importer, might be had pretty cheap, and were accounted tasty.

Skepsey's main thought was upon war: the man had discoursed of pigs.

He informed the man of his having heard from a scholar, that pigs had been the cause of more bloody battles than any other animal.

How so? the pork-butcher asked, and said he was not much of a scholar, and pigs might be provoking, but he had not heard they were a cause of strife between man and man. For possession of them, Skepsey explained. Oh! possession! Why, we've heard of bloody battles for the possession of women! Men will fight for almost anything they care to get or call their own, the pork-butcher said; and he praised Old England for avoiding war. Skepsey nodded. How if war is forced on us? Then we fight. Suppose we are not prepared?—We soon get that up. Skepsey requested him to state the degree of resistance he might think he could bring against a pair of skilful fists, in a place out of hearing of the police.

'Say, you!' said the pork-butcher, and sharply smiled, for he was a man of size.

'I would give you two minutes,' rejoined Skepsey, eyeing him intently and kindly: inasmuch that it could be seen he was not in the conundrum vein.

'Rather short allowance, eh, master?' said the bigger man. 'Feel here'; he straightened out his arm and doubled it, raising a proud bridge of muscle.

Skepsey performed the national homage to muscle.

‘Twice that, would not help without the science,’ he remarked, and let his arm be gripped in turn.

The pork-butcher’s throat sounded, as it were, commas and colons, punctuations in his reflections, while he tightened fingers along the iron lump. ‘Stringy. You’re a wiry one, no mistake.’ It was encomium. With the ingrained contempt of size for a smallness that has not yet taught it the prostrating lesson, he said: ‘Weight tells.’

‘In a wrestle,’ Skepsey admitted. ‘Allow me to say, you would not touch me.’

‘And how do you know I’m not a trifle handy with the maulers myself?’

‘You will pardon me for saying, it would be worse for you if you were.’

The pork-butcher was flung backward. ‘Are you a Professor, may I inquire?’

Skepsey rejected the title. ‘I can engage to teach young men, upon a proper observance of first principles.’

‘They be hanged!’ cried the ruffled pork-butcher. ‘Our best men never got it out of books. Now, you tell me—you’ve got a spiflicating style of talk about you—no brag, you tell me—course, the best man wins, if you mean that: now, if I was one of ‘em, and I fetches you a bit of a flick, how then? Would you be ready to step out with a real Professor?’

‘I should claim a fair field,’ was the answer, made in modesty.

‘And you’d expect to whop me with they there principles of yours?’

‘I should expect to.’

‘Bang me!’ was roared. After a stare at the mild little figure with the fitfully dead-levelled large grey eyes in front of him, the pork-butcher resumed: ‘Take you for the man you say you be, you’re just the man for my friend Jam and me. He dearly loves to see a set-to, self the same. What prettier? And if you would be so obliging some day as to favour us with a display, we’d head a cap conformably, whether you’d the best of it, according to your expectations, or t’ other way:—For there never was shame in a jolly good licking as the song says: that is, if you take it and make it appear jolly good. And find you an opponent meet and fit, never doubt. Ever had the worse of an encounter, sir?’

‘Often, Sir.’

‘Well, that’s good. And it didn’t destroy your confidence?’

‘Added to it, I hope.’

At this point, it became a crying necessity for Skepsey to escape from an area of boastfulness, into which he had fallen inadvertently; and he hastened to apologize ‘for his personal reference,’ that was intended for an illustration of our country caught unawares by a highly trained picked soldiery, inferior in numbers to the patriotic levies, but sharp at the edge and knowing how to strike. Measure the axe, measure the tree; and which goes down first?

‘Invasion, is it?—and you mean, we’re not to hit back?’ the pork-butcher bellowed, and presently secured a murmured approbation from an audience of three, that had begun to comprehend the dialogue, and strengthened him in a manner to teach Skepsey the foolishness of ever urging analogies of too extended a circle to close sharply on the mark. He had no longer a chance, he was overborne, identified with the fated invader, rolled away into the chops of the Channel, to be swallowed up entire, and not a rag left of him, but John Bull tucking up his shirtsleeves on the shingle beach, ready for a second or a third; crying to them to come on.

Warmed by his Bullish victory, and friendly to the vanquished, the pork-butcher told Skepsey he should like to see more of him, and introduced himself on a card Benjamin Shaplow, not far from the Bank.

They parted at the Terminus, where three shrieks of an engine, sounding like merry messages of the damned to their congeners in the anticipatory stench of the cab-droppings above, disconnected sane hearing; perverted it, no doubt. Or else it was the stamp of a particular name on his mind, which impressed Skepsey, as he bored down the street and across the bridge, to fancy in recollection, that Mr. Shaplow, when reiterating the wish for self and friend to witness a display of his cunning with

the fists, had spoken the name of Jarniman. An unusual name yet more than one Jarniman might well exist. And unlikely that a friend of the pork-butcher would be the person whom Mr. Radnor first prohibited and then desired to receive. It hardly mattered:—considering that the Dutch Navy did really, incredible as it seems now, come sailing a good way up the River Thames, into the very main artery of Old England. And what thought the Tower of it? Skepsey looked at the Tower in sympathy, wondering whether the Tower had seen those impudent Dutch a nice people at home, he had heard. Mr. Shaplow's Jarniman might actually be Mr. Radnor's, he inclined to think. At any rate he was now sure of the name.

CHAPTER XI. WHEREIN WE BEHOLD THE COUPLE JUSTIFIED OF LOVE HAVING SIGHT OF THEIR SCOURGE

Fenellan, in a musing exclamation, that was quite spontaneous, had put a picture on the departing Skepsey, as observed from an end of the Lakelands upper terrace-walk.

‘Queer little water-wagtail it is!’ And Lady Grace Halley and Miss Graves and Mrs. Cormyn, snugly silken dry ones, were so taken with the pretty likeness after hearing Victor call the tripping dripping creature the happiest man in England, that they nursed it in their minds for a Bewick tailpiece to the chapter of a pleasant rural day. It imbedded the day in an idea that it had been rural.

We are indebted almost for construction to those who will define us briefly: we are but scattered leaves to the general comprehension of us until such a work of binding and labelling is done. And should the definition be not so correct as brevity pretends to make it at one stroke, we are at least rendered portable; thus we pass into the conceptions of our fellows, into the records, down to posterity. Anecdotes of England’s happiest man were related, outlines of his personal history requested. His nomination in chief among the traditionally very merry Islanders was hardly borne out by the tale of his enchainment with a drunken yokefellow—unless upon the Durance version of the felicity of his countrymen; still, the water-wagtail carried it, Skepsey trotted into memories. Heroes conducted up Fame’s temple-steps by ceremonious historians, who are studious, when the platform is reached, of the art of setting them beneath the flambeau of a final image, before thrusting them inside to be rivetted on their pedestals, have an excellent chance of doing the same, let but the provident narrators direct that image to paint the thing a moth-like humanity desires, in the thing it shrinks from. Miss Priscilla Graves now fastened her meditations upon Skepsey; and it was important to him.

Tobacco withdrew the haunting shadow of the Rev. Septimus Barmby from Nesta. She strolled beside Louise de Seilles, to breathe sweet-sweet in the dear friend’s ear and tell her she loved her. The presence of the German had, without rousing animosity, damped the young Frenchwoman, even to a revulsion when her feelings had been touched by hearing praise of her France, and wounded by the subjects of the praise. She bore the national scar, which is barely skin-clothing of a gash that will not heal since her country was overthrown and dismembered. Colney Durance could excuse the unreasonableness in her, for it had a dignity, and she controlled it, and quietly suffered, trusting to the steady, tireless, concentrated aim of her France. In the Gallic mind of our time, France appears as a prematurely buried Glory, that heaves the mound oppressing breath and cannot cease; and calls hourly, at times keenly, to be remembered, rescued from the pain and the mould-spots of that foul sepulture. Mademoiselle and Colney were friends, partly divided by her speaking once of *revanche*; whereupon he assumed the chair of the Moralist, with its right to lecture, and went over to the enemy; his talk savoured of a German. Our holding of the balance, taking two sides, is incomprehensible to a people quivering with the double wound to body and soul. She was of Breton blood. Cymric enough was in Nesta to catch any thrill from her and join to her mood, if it hung out a colour sad or gay, and was noble, as any mood of this dear Louise would surely be.

Nataly was not so sympathetic. Only the Welsh and pure Irish are quick at the feelings of the Celtic French. Nataly came of a Yorkshire stock; she had the bravery, humaneness and generous temper of our civilized North, and a taste for mademoiselle’s fine breeding, with a distaste for the singular air of superiority in composure which it was granted to mademoiselle to wear with an unassailable reserve when the roughness of the commercial boor was obtrusive. She said of her to Colney, as they watched the couple strolling by the lake below: ‘Nesta brings her out of her frosts. I suppose it’s the presence of Dr. Schlesien. I have known it the same after an evening of Wagner’s music.’

‘Richard Wagner Germanized ridicule of the French when they were down,’ said Colney. ‘She comes of a blood that never forgives.’

“‘Never forgives’ is horrible to think of! I fancied you liked your “Kelts,” as you call them.’

Colney seized on a topic that shelved a less agreeable one that he saw coming. ‘You English won’t descend to understand what does not resemble you. The French are in a state of feverish patriotism. You refuse to treat them for a case of fever. They are lopped of a limb: you tell them to be at rest!’

‘You know I am fond of them.’

‘And the Kelts, as they are called, can’t and won’t forgive injuries; look at Ireland, look at Wales, and the Keltic Scot. Have you heard them talk? It happened in the year 1400: it’s alive to them as if it were yesterday. Old History is as dead to the English as their first father. They beg for the privilege of pulling the forelock to the bearers of the titles of the men who took their lands from them and turn them to the uses of cattle. The Saxon English had, no doubt, a heavier thrashing than any people allowed to subsist ever received: you see it to this day; the crick of the neck at the name of a lord is now concealed and denied, but they have it and betray the effects; and it’s patent in their Journals, all over their literature. Where it’s not seen, another blood’s at work. The Kelt won’t accept the form of slavery. Let him be servile, supple, cunning, treacherous, and to appearance time-serving, he will always remember his day of manly independence and who robbed him: he is the poetic animal of the races of modern men.’

‘You give him Pagan colours.’

‘Natural colours. He does not offer the other cheek or turn his back to be kicked after a knock to the ground. Instead of asking him to forgive, which he cannot do, you must teach him to admire. A mercantile community guided by Political Economy from the ledger to the banquet presided over by its Dagon Capital, finds that difficult. However, there ‘s the secret of him; that I respect in him. His admiration of an enemy or oppressor doing great deeds, wins him entirely. He is an active spirit, not your negative passive letter-of-Scripture Insensible. And his faults, short of ferocity, are amusing.’

‘But the fits of ferocity!’

‘They are inconscient, real fits. They come of a hot nerve. He is manageable, sober too, when his mind is charged. As to the French people, they are the most mixed of any European nation; so they are packed with contrasts: they are full of sentiment, they are sharply logical; free-thinkers, devotees; affectionate, ferocious; frivolous, tenacious; the passion of the season operating like sun or moon on these qualities; and they can reach to ideality out of sensualism. Below your level, they’re above it: a paradox is at home with them!’

‘My friend, you speak seriously—an unusual compliment,’ Nataly said, and ungratefully continued: ‘You know what is occupying me. I want your opinion. I guess it. I want to hear—a mean thirst perhaps, and you would pay me any number of compliments to avoid the subject; but let me hear:—this house!’

Colney shrugged in resignation. ‘Victor works himself out,’ he replied.

‘We are to go through it all again?’

‘If you have not the force to contain him.’

‘How contain him?’

Up went Colney’s shoulders.

‘You may see it all before you,’ he said, ‘straight as the Seine chaussee from the hill of La Roche Guyon.’

He looked for her recollection of the scene.

‘Ah, the happy ramble that year!’ she cried. ‘And my Nesta just seven. We had been six months at Craye. Every day of our life together looks happy to me, looking back, though I know that every day had the same troubles. I don’t think I’m deficient in courage; I think I could meet.... But the false position so cruelly weakens me. I am no woman’s equal when I have to receive or visit. It seems easier

to meet the worst in life—danger, death, anything. Pardon me for talking so. Perhaps we need not have left Craye or Creckholt...?’ she hinted an interrogation. ‘Though I am not sorry; it is not good to be where one tastes poison. Here it may be as deadly, worse. Dear friend, I am so glad you remember La Roche Guyon. He was popular with the dear French people.’

‘In spite of his accent.’

‘It is not so bad?’

‘And that you’ll defend!’

‘Consider: these neighbours we come among; they may have heard...’

‘Act on the assumption.’

‘You forget the principal character. Victor promises; he may have learnt a lesson at Creckholt. But look at this house he has built. How can I—any woman—contain him! He must have society.’

‘Paraitre!’

‘He must be in the front. He has talked of Parliament.’

Colney’s liver took the thrust of a skewer through it. He spoke as in meditative encomium: ‘His entry into Parliament would promote himself and family to a station of eminence naked over the Clock Tower of the House.’

She moaned. ‘At the vilest, I cannot regret my conduct—bear what I may. I can bear real pain: what kills me is, the suspicion. And I feel it like a guilty wretch! And I do not feel the guilt! I should do the same again, on reflection. I do believe it saved him. I do; oh! I do, I do. I cannot expect my family to see with my eyes. You know them—my brother and sisters think I have disgraced them; they put no value on my saving him. It sounds childish; it is true. He had fallen into a terrible black mood.’

‘He had an hour of gloom.’

‘An hour!’

‘But an hour, with him! It means a good deal.’

‘Ah, friend, I take your words. He sinks terribly when he sinks at all.—Spare us a little while.—We have to judge of what is good in the circumstances: I hear your reply! But the principal for me to study is Victor. You have accused me of being the voice of the enamoured woman. I follow him, I know; I try to advise; I find it is wisdom to submit. My people regard my behaviour as a wickedness or a madness. I did save him. I joined my fate with his. I am his mate, to help, and I cannot oppose him, to distract him. I do my utmost for privacy. He must entertain. Believe me, I feel for them—sisters and brother. And now that my sisters are married... My brother has a man’s hardness.’

‘Colonel Dreighton did not speak harshly, at our last meeting.’

‘He spoke of me?’

‘He spoke in the tone of a brother.’

‘Victor promises—I won’t repeat it. Yes, I see the house! There appears to be a prospect, a hope—I cannot allude to it. Craye and Creckholt may have been some lesson to him. Selwyn spoke of me kindly? Ah, yes, it is the way with my people to pretend that Victor has been the ruin of me, that they may come round to family sentiments. In the same way, his relatives, the Duvidney ladies, have their picture of the woman misleading him. Imagine me the naughty adventuress!’—Nataly falsified the thought insurgent at her heart, in adding: ‘I do not say I am blameless.’ It was a concession to the circumambient enemy, of whom even a good friend was apart, and not better than a respectful emissary. The dearest of her friends belonged to that hostile world. Only Victor, no other, stood with her against the world. Her child, yes; the love of her child she had; but the child’s destiny was an alien phantom, looking at her with harder eyes than she had vision of in her family. She did not say she was blameless, did not affect the thought. She would have wished to say, for small encouragement she would have said, that her case could be pleaded.

Colney’s features were not inviting, though the expression was not repellent. She sighed deeply; and to count on something helpful by mentioning it, reverted to the ‘prospect’ which there appeared to be. ‘Victor speaks of the certainty of his release.’

His release! Her language pricked a satirist's gallbladder. Colney refrained from speaking to wound, and enjoyed a silence that did it.

'Do you see any possibility?—you knew her,' she said coldly.

'Counting the number of times he has been expecting the release, he is bound to believe it near at hand.'

'You don't?' she asked: her bosom was up in a crisis of expectation for the answer: and on a pause of half-a-minute, she could have uttered the answer herself.

He perceived the insane eagerness through her mask, and despised it, pitying the woman. 'And you don't,' he said. 'You catch at delusions, to excuse the steps you consent to take. Or you want me to wear the blinkers, the better to hoodwink your own eyes. You see it as well as I: If you enter that house, you have to go through the same as at Creckholt:—and he'll be the first to take fright.'

'He finds you in tears: he is immensely devoted; he flings up all to protect "his Nataly."'

'No: you are unjust to him. He would fling up all:—'

'But his Nataly prefers to be dragged through fire? As you please!'

She bowed to her chastisement. One motive in her consultation with him came of the knowledge of his capacity to inflict it and his honesty in the act, and a thirst she had to hear the truth loud-tongued from him; together with a feeling that he was excessive and satiric, not to be read by the letter of his words: and in consequence, she could bear the lash from him, and tell her soul that he overdid it, and have an unjustly-treated self to cherish.—But in very truth she was a woman who loved to hear the truth; she was formed to love the truth her position reduced her to violate; she esteemed the hearing it as medical to her; she selected for counsellor him who would apply it: so far she went on the straight way; and the desire for a sustaining deception from the mouth of a trustworthy man set her hanging on his utterances with an anxious hope of the reverse of what was to come and what she herself apprehended, such as checked her pulses and iced her feet and fingers. The reason being, not that she was craven or absurd or paradoxical, but that, living at an intenser strain upon her nature than she or any around her knew, her strength snapped, she broke down by chance there where Colney was rendered spiteful in beholding the display of her inconsequent if not puling sex.

She might have sought his counsel on another subject, if a paralyzing chill of her frame in the foreview of it had allowed her to speak: she felt grave alarms in one direction, where Nesta stood in the eye of her father; besides an unformed dread that the simplicity in generosity of Victor's nature was doomed to show signs of dross ultimately, under the necessity he imposed upon himself to run out his forecasts, and scheme, and defensively compel the world to serve his ends, for the protection of those dear to him.

At night he was particularly urgent with her for the harmonious duet in praise of Lakelands; and plied her with questions all round and about it, to bring out the dulcet accord. He dwelt on his choice of costly marbles, his fireplace and mantelpiece designs, the great hall, and suggestions for imposing and beautiful furniture; concordantly enough, for the large, the lofty and rich of colour won her enthusiasm; but overwhelmingly to any mood of resistance; and strangely in a man who had of late been adopting, as if his own, a modern tone, or the social and literary hints of it, relating to the right uses of wealth, and the duty as well as the delight of living simply.

'Freda was pleased.'

'Yes, she was, dear.'

'She is our girl, my love. "I could live and die here!" Live, she may. There's room enough.'

Nataly saw the door of a covert communication pointed at in that remark. She gathered herself for an effort to do battle.

'She's quite a child, Victor.'

'The time begins to run. We have to look forward now:—I declare, it's I who seem the provident mother for Freda!'

‘Let our girl wait; don’t hurry her mind to... She is happy with her father and mother. She is in the happiest time of her life, before those feelings distract.’

‘If we see good fortune for her, we can’t let it pass her.’

A pang of the resolution now to debate the case with Victor, which would be of necessity to do the avoided thing and roll up the forbidden curtain opening on their whole history past and prospective, was met in Nataly’s bosom by the more bitter immediate confession that she was not his match. To speak would be to succumb; and shamefully after the effort; and hopelessly after being overborne by him. There was not the anticipation of a set contest to animate the woman’s naturally valiant heart; he was too strong; and his vividness in urgency overcame her in advance, fascinated her sensibility through recollection; he fanned an inclination, lighted it to make it a passion, a frenzied resolve—she remembered how and when. She had quivering cause to remember the fateful day of her step, in a letter received that morning from a married sister, containing no word of endearment or proposal for a meeting. An unregretted day, if Victor would think of the dues to others; that is, would take station with the world to see his reflected position, instead of seeing it through their self-justifying knowledge of the honourable truth of their love, and pressing to claim and snatch at whatsoever the world bestows on its orderly subjects.

They had done evil to no one as yet. Nataly thought that; notwithstanding the outcry of the ancient and withered woman who bore Victor Radnor’s name: for whom, in consequence of the rod the woman had used, this tenderest of hearts could summon no emotion. If she had it, the thing was not to be hauled up to consciousness. Her feeling was, that she forgave the wrinkled Malignity: pity and contrition dissolving in the effort to produce the placable forgiveness. She was frigid because she knew rightly of herself, that she in the place of power would never have struck so meanly. But the mainspring of the feeling in an almost remorseless bosom drew from certain chance expressions of retrospective physical distaste on Victor’s part;—hard to keep from a short utterance between the nuptial two, of whom the unshamed exuberant male has found the sweet reverse in his mate, a haven of heavenliness, to delight in:—these conjoined with a woman’s unspoken pleading ideas of her own, on her own behalf, had armed her jealously in vindication of Nature.

Now, as long as they did no palpable wrong about them, Nataly could argue her case in her conscience—deep down and out of hearing, where women under scourge of the laws they have not helped decree may and do deliver their minds. She stood in that subterranean recess for Nature against the Institutions of Man: a woman little adapted for the post of rebel; but to this, by the agency of circumstances, it had come; she who was designed by nature to be an ornament of those Institutions opposed them and when thinking of the rights and the conduct of the decrepit Legitimate—virulent in a heathen vindictiveness declaring itself holy—she had Nature’s logic, Nature’s voice, for self-defence. It was eloquent with her, to the deafening of other voices in herself, even to the convincing of herself, when she was wrought by the fires within to feel elementally. The other voices within her issued of the acknowledged dues to her family and to the world—the civilization protecting women: sentences thereanent in modern books and Journals. But the remembrance of moods of fiery exaltation, when the Nature she called by name of Love raised the chorus within to stop all outer buzzing, was, in a perpetual struggle with a whirlpool, a constant support while she and Victor were one at heart. The sense of her standing alone made her sway; and a thought of differences with him caused frightful apprehensions of the abyss.

Luxuriously she applied to his public life for witness that he had governed wisely as well as affectionately so long; and he might therefore, with the chorussing of the world of public men, expect a woman blindfold to follow his lead. But no; we may be rebels against our time and its Laws: if we are really for Nature, we are not lawless. Nataly’s untutored scruples, which came side by side with her ability to plead for her acts, restrained her from complicity in the ensnaring of a young man of social rank to espouse the daughter of a couple socially insurgent-stained, to common thinking, should denunciation come. The Nature upholding her fled at a vision of a stranger entangled. Pitiable

to reflect, that he was not one of the adventurer-lords of prey who hunt and run down shadowed heiresses and are congratulated on their luck in a tolerating country! How was the young man to be warned? How, under the happiest of suppositions, propitiate his family! And such a family, if consenting with knowledge, would consent only for the love of money. It was angling with as vile a bait as the rascal lord's. Humiliation hung on the scheme; it struck to scorching in the contemplation of it. And it darkened her reading of Victor's character.

She did not ask for the specification of a 'good fortune that might pass'; wishing to save him from his wonted twists of elusiveness, and herself with him from the dread discussion it involved upon one point.

'The day was pleasant to all, except perhaps poor mademoiselle,' she said.

'Peridon should have come?'

'Present or absent, his chances are not brilliant, I fear.'

'And Pempton and Priscy!'

'They are growing cooler!'

'With their grotesque objections to one another's habits at table!'

'Can we ever hope to get them over it?'

'When Priscy drinks Port and Pempton munches beef, Colney says.'

'I should say, when they feel warmly enough to think little of their differences.'

'Fire smoothes the creases, yes; and fire is what they're both wanting in. Though Priscy has Concert-pathos in her voice:—couldn't act a bit! And Pempton's 'cello tones now and then have gone through me—simply from his fiddle-bow, I believe. Don't talk to me of feeling in a couple, within reach of one another and sniffing objections.—Good, then, for a successful day to-day so far?'

He neared her, wooing her; and she assented, with a franker smile than she had worn through the day.

The common burden on their hearts—the simple discussion to come of the task of communicating dire actualities to their innocent Nesta—was laid aside.

CHAPTER XII. TREATS OF THE DUMBNESS POSSIBLE WITH MEMBERS OF A HOUSEHOLD HAVING ONE HEART

Two that live together in union are supposed to be intimate on every leaf. Particularly when they love one another and the cause they have at heart is common to them in equal measure, the uses of a cordial familiarity forbid reserves upon important matters between them, as we think; not thinking of an imposed secretiveness, beneath the false external of submissiveness, which comes of an experience of repeated inefficiency to maintain a case in opposition, on the part of the loquently weaker of the pair. In Constitutional Kingdoms a powerful Government needs not to be tyrannical to lean oppressively; it is more serviceable to party than agreeable to country; and where the alliance of men and women binds a loving couple, of whom one is a torrent of persuasion, their differings are likely to make the other resemble a log of the torrent. It is borne along; it dreams of a distant corner of the way for a determined stand; it consents to its whirling in anticipation of an undated hour when it will no longer be neutral.

There may be, moreover, while each has the key of the fellow breast, a mutually sensitive nerve to protest against intrusion of light or sound. The cloud over the name of their girl could now strike Nataly and Victor dumb in their taking of counsel. She divined that his hint had encouraged him to bring the crisis nearer, and he that her comprehension had become tremblingly awake. They shrank, each of them, the more from an end drawing closely into view. All subjects glooming off or darkening up to it were shunned by them verbally, and if they found themselves entering beneath that shadow, conversation passed to an involuntary gesture, more explicit with him, significant of the prohibited, though not acknowledging it.

All the stronger was it Victor's purpose, leaping in his fashion to the cover of action as an escape from perplexity, to burn and scheme for the wedding of their girl—the safe wedding of that dearest, to have her protected, secure, with the world warm about her. And he well knew why his Nataly had her look of a closed vault (threatening, if opened, to thunder upon Life) when he dropped his further hints. He chose to call it feminine inconsistency, in a woman who walked abroad with a basket of marriage-ties for the market on her arm. He knew that she would soon have to speak the dark words to their girl; and the idea of any doing of it, caught at his throat. Reasonably she dreaded the mother's task; pardonably indeed. But it is for the mother to do, with a girl. He deputed it lightly to the mother because he could see himself stating the facts to a son. 'And, my dear boy, you will from this day draw your five thousand a year, and we double it on the day of your marriage, living at Lakelands or where you will.'

His desire for his girl's protection by the name of one of our great Families, urged him to bind Nataly to the fact, with the argument, that it was preferable for the girl to hear their story during her green early youth, while she reposed her beautiful blind faith in the discretion of her parents, and as an immediate step to the placing of her hand in a husband's. He feared that her mother required schooling to tell the story vindicatingly and proudly, in a manner to distinguish instead of degrading or temporarily seeming to accept degradation.

The world would weigh on her confession of the weight of the world on her child; she would want inciting and strengthening, if one judged of her capacity to meet the trial by her recent bearing; and how was he to do it! He could not imagine himself encountering the startled, tremulous, nascent intelligence in those pure brown darklashed eyes of Nesta; he pitied the poor mother. Fancifully directing her to say this and that to the girl, his tongue ran till it was cut from his heart and left to wag dead colourless words.

The prospect of a similar business of exposition, certainly devolving upon the father in treaty with the fortunate youth, gripped at his vitals a minute, so intense was his pride in appearing woundless and scarless, a shining surface, like pure health's, in the sight of men. Nevertheless he skimmed the story, much as a lecturer strikes his wand on the prominent places of a map, that is to show us how he arrived at the principal point, which we are all agreed to find chiefly interesting. This with Victor was the naming of Nesta's bridal endowment. He rushed to it. 'My girl will have ten thousand a year settled on her the day of her marriage.' Choice of living at Lakelands was offered.

It helped him over the unpleasant part of that interview. At the same time, it moved him to a curious contempt of the youth. He had to conjure-up an image of the young man in person, to correct the sentiment:—and it remained as a kind of bruise only half cured.

Mr. Dudley Sowerby was not one of the youths whose presence would rectify such an abstract estimate of the genus pursuer. He now came frequently of an evening, to practise a duet for flutes with Victor;—a Mercadante, honeyed and flowing; too honeyed to suit a style that, as Fenellan characterized it to Nataly, went through the music somewhat like an inquisitive tourist in a foreign town, conscientious to get to the end of the work of pleasure; until the notes had become familiar, when it rather resembled a constable's walk along the midnight streets into collision with a garlanded roysterer; and the man of order and the man of passion, true to the measure though they were, seeming to dissent, almost to wrangle, in their different ways of winding out the melody, on to the last movement; which was plainly a question between home to the strayed reveller's quarters or off to the lockup. Victor was altogether the younger of the two. But his vehement accompaniment was a tutorship; Mr. Sowerby improved; it was admitted by Nesta and mademoiselle that he gained a show of feeling; he had learnt that feeling was wanted. Passion, he had not a notion of: otherwise he would not be delaying; the interview, dramatized by the father of the young bud of womanhood, would be taking place, and the entry into Lakelands calculable, for Nataly's comfort, as under the aegis of the Cantor earldom. Gossip flies to a wider circle round the members of a great titled family, is inaudible; or no longer the diptherian whisper the commonalty hear of the commonalty: and so we see the social uses of our aristocracy survive. We do not want the shield of any family; it is the situation that wants it; Nataly ought to be awake to the fact. One blow and we have silenced our enemy: Nesta's wedding-day has relieved her parents.

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