

Trollope Anthony

Sir Harry Hotspur of Humblethwaite



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Sir Harry Hotspur of Humblethwaite

CHAPTER I

SIR HARRY HOTSPUR

Sir Harry Hotspur of Humblethwaite was a mighty person in Cumberland, and one who well understood of what nature were the duties, and of what sort the magnificence, which his position as a great English commoner required of him. He had twenty thousand a year derived from land. His forefathers had owned the same property in Cumberland for nearly four centuries, and an estate nearly as large in Durham for more than a century and a half. He had married an earl's daughter, and had always lived among men and women not only of high rank, but also of high character. He had kept race-horses when he was young, as noblemen and gentlemen then did keep them, with no view to profit, calculating fairly their cost as a part of his annual outlay, and thinking that it was the proper thing to do for the improvement of horses and for the amusement of the people. He had been in Parliament, but had made no figure there, and had given it up. He still kept his house in Bruton Street, and always spent a month or two in London. But the life that he led was led at Humblethwaite, and there he was a great man, with a great domain around him, – with many tenants, with a world of dependants among whom he spent his wealth freely, saving little, but lavishing nothing that was not his own to lavish, – understanding that his enjoyment was to come from the comfort and respect of others, for whose welfare, as he understood it, the good things of this world had been bestowed upon him. He was a proud man, with but few intimacies, – with a few dear friendships which were the solace of his life, – altogether gracious in his speech, if it were not for an apparent bashfulness among strangers; never assuming aught, deferring much to others outwardly, and showing his pride chiefly by a certain impalpable *noli me tangere*, which just sufficed to make itself felt and obeyed at the first approach of any personal freedom. He was a handsome man, – if an old man near to seventy may be handsome, – with grey hair, and bright, keen eyes, and arched eyebrows, with a well-cut eagle nose, and a small mouth, and a short dimpled chin. He was under the middle height, but nevertheless commanded attention by his appearance. He wore no beard save a slight grey whisker, which was cut away before it reached his chin. He was strongly made, but not stout, and was hale and active for his age.

Such was Sir Harry Hotspur of Humblethwaite. The account of Lady Elizabeth, his wife, may be much shorter. She was known, – where she was known, – simply as Sir Harry's wife. He indeed was one of those men of whom it may be said that everything appertaining to them takes its importance from the fact of its being theirs. Lady Elizabeth was a good woman, a good wife, and a good mother, and was twenty years younger than her husband. He had been forty-five years old when he had married her, and she, even yet, had not forgotten the deference which was due to his age.

Two years before the time at which our story will begin, a great sorrow, an absolutely crushing grief, had fallen upon the House of Humblethwaite. An only son had died just as he had reached his majority. When the day came on which all Humblethwaite and the surrounding villages were to have been told to rejoice and make merry because another man of the Hotspurs was ready to take the reins of the house as soon as his father should have been gathered to his fathers, the poor lad lay a-dying, while his mother ministered by his bedside, and the Baronet was told by the physician – who had been brought from London – that there was no longer for him any hope that he should leave a male heir at Humblethwaite to inherit his name and his honours.

For months it was thought that Lady Elizabeth would follow her boy. Sir Harry bore the blow bravely, though none who do not understand the system well can conceive how the natural grief of the father was increased by the disappointment which had fallen upon the head of the house. But the old man bore it well, making but few audible moans, shedding no tears, altering in very little the habits of life; still spending money, because it was good for others that it should be spent, and only speaking of his son when it was necessary for him to allude to those altered arrangements as to the family property which it was necessary that he should make. But still he was a changed man, as those perceived who watched him closest. Cloudesdale the butler knew well in what he was changed, as did old Hesketh the groom, and Gilsby the gamekeeper. He had never been given to much talk, but was now more silent than of yore. Of horses, dogs, and game there was no longer any mention whatever made by the Baronet. He was still constant with Mr. Lanesby, the steward, because it was his duty to know everything that was done on the property; but even Mr. Lanesby would acknowledge that, as to actual improvements, – the commencement of new work in the hope of future returns, the Baronet was not at all the man he had been. How was it possible that he should be the man he had been when his life was so nearly gone, and that other life had gone also, which was to have been the renewal and continuation of his own?

When the blow fell, it became Sir Harry's imperative duty to make up his mind what he would do with his property. As regarded the two estates, they were now absolutely, every acre of them, at his own disposal. He had one child left him, a daughter, – in whom, it is hoped, the reader may be induced to take some interest, and with her to feel some sympathy, for she will be the person with whom the details of this little story must most be concerned; and he had a male heir, who must needs inherit the title of the family, one George Hotspur, – not a nephew, for Sir Harry had never had a brother, but the son of a first cousin who had not himself been much esteemed at Humblethwaite.

Now Sir Harry was a man who, in such a condition as this in which he was now placed, would mainly be guided by his ideas of duty. For a month or two he said not a word to any one, not even to his own lawyer, though he himself had made a will, a temporary will, duly witnessed by Mr. Lanesby and another, so that the ownership of the property should not be adjusted simply by the chance direction of law in the event of his own sudden demise; but his mind was doubtless much burdened with the subject. How should he discharge this fresh responsibility which now rested on him? While his boy had lived, the responsibility of his property had had nothing for him but charms. All was to go to the young Harry, – all, as a matter of course; and it was only necessary for him to take care that every acre should descend to his heir not only unimpaired by him in value, but also somewhat increased. Provision for his widow and for his girl had already been made before he had ventured on matrimony, – provision sufficient for many girls had Fortune so far favoured him. But that an eldest son should have all the family land, – one, though as many sons should have been given to him as to Priam, – and that that one should have it unencumbered, as he had had it from his father, – this was to him the very law of his being. And he would have taught that son, had already begun to teach him when the great blow came, that all this was to be given to him, not that he might put it into his own belly, or wear it on his own back, or even spend it as he might list himself, but that he might so live as to do his part in maintaining that order of gentleness in England, by which England had become – so thought Sir Harry – the proudest and the greatest and the justest of nations.

But now he had no son, and yet the duty remained to him of maintaining his order. It would perhaps have been better for him, it would certainly have been easier, had some settlement or family entail fixed all things for him. Those who knew him well personally, but did not know the affairs of his family, declared among themselves that Sir Harry would take care that the property went with the title. A marriage might be arranged. There could be nothing to object to a marriage between second cousins. At any rate Sir Harry Hotspur was certainly not the man to separate the property from the title. But they who knew the family, and especially that branch of the family from which George Hotspur came, declared that Sir Harry would never give his daughter to such a one as was this cousin.

And if not his daughter, then neither would he give to such a scapegrace either Humblethwaite in Cumberland or Scarrowby in Durham. There did exist a party who said that Sir Harry would divide the property, but they who held such an opinion certainly knew very little of Sir Harry's social or political tenets. Any such division was the one thing which he surely would not effect.

When twelve months had passed after the death of Sir Harry's son, George Hotspur had been at Humblethwaite and had gone, and Sir Harry's will had been made. He had left everything to his daughter, and had only stipulated that her husband, should she marry, should take the name of Hotspur. He had decided, that should his daughter, as was probable, marry within his lifetime, he could then make what settlements he pleased, even to the changing of the tenor of his will, should he think fit to change it. Should he die and leave her still a spinster, he would trust to her in everything. Not being a man of mystery, he told his wife and his daughter what he had done, – and what he still thought that he possibly might do; and being also a man to whom any suspicion of injustice was odious, he desired his attorney to make known to George Hotspur what had been settled. And in order that this blow to Cousin George might be lightened, – Cousin George having in conversation acknowledged to a few debts, – an immediate present was made to him of four thousand pounds, and double that amount was assured to him at the Baronet's death.

The reader may be sure that the Baronet had heard many things respecting Cousin George which he did not like. To him personally it would have been infinitely preferable that the title and the estates should have gone together, than that his own daughter should be a great heiress. That her outlook into the world was fair and full of promise of prosperity either way, was clear enough. Twenty thousand a year would not be necessary to make her a happy woman. And then it was to him a manifest and a sacred religion that to no man or to no woman were appointed the high pinnacles of fortune simply that that man or that woman might enjoy them. They were to be held as thrones are held, for the benefit of the many. And in the disposition of this throne, the necessity of making which had fallen upon him from the loss of his own darling, he had brought himself to think – not of his daughter's happiness, or to the balance of which, in her possessing or not possessing the property, he could venture on no prophecy, – but of the welfare of all those who might measure their weal or woe from the manner in which the duties of this high place were administered. He would fain that there should still have been a Sir Harry or a Sir George Hotspur of Humblethwaite; but he found that his duty required him to make the other arrangement.

And yet he had liked the cousin, who indeed had many gifts to win liking both from men and women. Previously to the visit very little had been known personally of young George Hotspur at Humblethwaite. His father, also a George, had in early life quarrelled with the elder branch of the family, and had gone off with what money belonged to him, and had lived and died in Paris. The younger George had been educated abroad, and then had purchased a commission in a regiment of English cavalry. At the time when young Harry died it was only known of him at Humblethwaite that he had achieved a certain reputation in London, and that he had sold out of the army. He was talked of as a man who shot birds with precision. Pigeons he could shoot with wonderful dexterity, – which art was at Humblethwaite supposed to be much against him. But then he was equally successful with partridges and pheasants; and partly on account of such success, and partly probably because his manner was pleasant, he was known to be a welcome guest at houses in which men congregate to slaughter game. In this way he had a reputation, and one that was not altogether cause for reproach; but it had not previously recommended him to the notice of his cousin.

Just ten months after poor Harry's death he was asked, and went, to Humblethwaite. Probably at that moment the Baronet's mind was still somewhat in doubt. The wish of Lady Elizabeth had been clearly expressed to her husband to the effect that encouragement should be given to the young people to fall in love with each other. To this Sir Harry never assented; though there was a time, – and that time had not yet passed when George Hotspur reached Humblethwaite, – in which the Baronet was not altogether averse to the idea of the marriage. But when George left Humblethwaite the Baronet

had made up his mind. Tidings had reached him, and he was afraid of the cousin. And other tidings had reached him also; or rather perhaps it would be truer to him to say that another idea had come to him. Of all the young men now rising in England there was no young man who more approved himself to Sir Harry's choice than did Lord Alfred Gresley, the second son of his old friend and political leader the Marquis of Milnthorp. Lord Alfred had but scanty fortune of his own, but was in Parliament and in office, and was doing well. All men said all good things of him. Then there was a word or two spoken between the Marquis and the Baronet, and just a word also with Lord Alfred himself. Lord Alfred had no objection to the name of Hotspur. This was in October, while George Hotspur was still declaring that Gilbsy knew nothing of getting up a head of game; and then Lord Alfred promised to come to Humblethwaite at Christmas. It was after this that George owned to a few debts. His confession on that score did him no harm. Sir Harry had made up his mind that day. Sir Harry had at that time learned a good deal of his cousin George's mode of life in London, and had already decided that this young man was not one whom it would be well to set upon the pinnacle.

And yet he had liked the young man, as did everybody. Lady Elizabeth had liked him much, and for a fortnight had gone on hoping that all difficulties might have solved themselves by the young man's marriage with her daughter. It need hardly be said that not a word one way or the other was spoken to Emily Hotspur; but it seemed to the mother that the young people, though there was no love-making, yet liked each other. Sir Harry at this time was up in London for a month or two, hearing tidings, seeing Lord Alfred, who was at his office; and on his return, that solution by family marriage was ordered to be for ever banished from the maternal bosom. Sir Harry said that it would not do.

Nevertheless, he was good to the young cousin, and when the time was drawing nigh for the young man's departure he spoke of a further visit. The coverts at Humblethwaite, such as they were, would always be at his service. This was a week before the cousin went; but by the coming of the day on which the cousin took his departure Sir Harry regretted that he had made that offer of future hospitality.

CHAPTER II

OUR HEROINE

"He has said nothing to her?" asked Sir Harry, anxiously, of his wife.

"I think not," replied Lady Elizabeth.

"Had he said anything that meant anything, she would have told you?"

"Certainly she would," said Lady Elizabeth.

Sir Harry knew his child, and was satisfied that no harm had been done; nevertheless, he wished that that further invitation had not been given. If this Christmas visitor that was to come to Humblethwaite could be successful, all would be right; but it had seemed to Sir Harry, during that last week of Cousin George's sojourn beneath his roof, there had been more of cousinly friendship between the cousins than had been salutary, seeing, as he had seen, that any closer connection was inexpedient. But he thought that he was sure that no great harm had been done. Had any word been spoken to his girl which she herself had taken as a declaration of love, she would certainly have told her mother. Sir Harry would no more doubt his daughter than he would his own honour. There were certain points and lines of duty clearly laid down for a girl so placed as was his daughter; and Sir Harry, though he could not have told whence the knowledge of these points and lines had come to his child, never for a moment doubted but that she knew them, and would obey them. To know and to obey such points of duty were a part of the inheritance of such an one as Emily Hotspur. Nevertheless, it might be possible that her fancy should be touched, and that she herself should know nothing of it, – nothing that she could confide even to a mother. Sir Harry understanding this, and having seen in these last days something as he thought of too close a cousinly friendship, was anxious that Lord Alfred should come and settle everything. If Lord Alfred should be successful, all danger would be at an end, and the cousin might come again and do what he liked with the coverts. Alas, alas! the cousin should never have been allowed to show his handsome, wicked face at Humblethwaite!

Emily Hotspur was a girl whom any father would have trusted; and let the reader understand this of her, that she was one in whom intentional deceit was impossible. Neither to her father nor to any one could she lie either in word or action. And all these lines and points of duty were well known to her, though she knew not, and had never asked herself, whence the lesson had come. Will it be too much to say, that they had formed a part of her breeding, and had been given to her with her blood? She understood well that from her, as heiress of the House of Humblethwaite, a double obedience was due to her father, – the obedience of a child added to that which was now required from her as the future transmitter of honours of the house. And yet no word had been said to her of the honours of the house; nor, indeed, had many words ever been said as to that other obedience. These lessons, when they have been well learned, have ever come without direct teaching.

But she knew more than this, and the knowledge had reached her in the same manner. Though she owed a great duty to her father, there was a limit to that duty, of which, unconsciously, she was well aware. When her mother told her that Lord Alfred was coming, having been instructed to do so by Sir Harry; and hinted, with a caress and a kiss, and a soft whisper, that Lord Alfred was one of whom Sir Harry approved greatly, and that if further approval could be bestowed Sir Harry would not be displeased, Emily as she returned her mother's embrace, felt that she had a possession of her own with which neither father nor mother might be allowed to interfere. It was for them, or rather for him, to say that a hand so weighted as was hers should not be given here or there; but it was not for them, not even for him, to say that her heart was to be given here, or to be given there. Let them put upon her what weight they might of family honours, and of family responsibility, that was her own property; – if not, perhaps, to be bestowed at her own pleasure, because of the pressure of that weight, still her own, and absolutely beyond the bestowal of any other.

Nevertheless, she declared to herself, and whispered to her mother, that she would be glad to welcome Lord Alfred. She had known him well when she was a child of twelve years old and he was already a young man in Parliament. Since those days she had met him more than once in London. She was now turned twenty, and he was something more than ten years her senior; but there was nothing against him, at any rate, on the score of age. Lord Alfred was admitted on every side to be still a young man; and though he had already been a lord of one Board or of another for the last four years, and had earned a reputation for working, he did not look like a man who would be more addicted to sitting at Boards than spending his time with young women. He was handsome, pleasant, good-humoured, and full of talk; had nothing about him of the official foggy; and was regarded by all his friends as a man who was just now fit to marry. "They say that he is such a good son, and such a good brother," said Lady Elizabeth, anxiously.

"Quite a Phoenix!" said Emily, laughing. Then Lady Elizabeth began to fear that she had said too much, and did not mention Lord Alfred's name for two days.

But Miss Hotspur had by that time resolved that Lord Alfred should have a fair chance. If she could teach herself to think that of all men walking the earth Lord Alfred was the best and the most divine, the nearest of all men to a god, how excellent a thing would it be! Her great responsibility as to the family burden would in that case already be acquitted with credit. The wishes of her father, which on such a subject were all but paramount, would be gratified; and she herself would then be placed almost beyond the hand of misfortune to hurt her. At any rate, the great and almost crushing difficulty of her life would so be solved. But the man must have enough in her eyes of that godlike glory to satisfy her that she had found in him one who would be almost a divinity, at any rate to her. Could he speak as that other man spoke? Could he look as that other one looked? Would there be in his eye such a depth of colour, in his voice such a sound of music, in his gait so divine a grace? For that other one, though she had looked into the brightness of the colour, though she had heard the sweetness of the music, though she had watched the elastic spring of the step, she cared nothing as regarded her heart – her heart, which was the one treasure of her own. No; she was sure of that. Of her one own great treasure, she was much too chary to give it away unasked, and too independent, as she told herself, to give it away unauthorized. The field was open to Lord Alfred; and, as her father wished it, Lord Alfred should be received with every favour. If she could find divinity, then she would bow before it readily.

Alas for Lord Alfred! We may all know that when she thought of it thus, there was but poor chance of success for Lord Alfred. Let him have what of the godlike he might, she would find but little of it there when she made her calculations and resolutions after such fashion as this. The man who becomes divine in a woman's eyes, has generally achieved his claim to celestial honours by sudden assault. And, alas! the qualities which carry him through it and give the halo to his head may after all be very ungodlike. Some such achievement had already fallen in the way of Cousin George; though had Cousin George and Lord Alfred been weighed in just scales, the divinity of the latter, such as it was, would have been found greatly to prevail. Indeed, it might perhaps have been difficult to lay hold of and bring forward as presentable for such office as that of a lover for such a girl any young man who should be less godlike than Cousin George. But he had gifts of simulation, which are valuable; and poor Emily Hotspur had not yet learned the housewife's trick of passing the web through her fingers, and of finding by the touch whether the fabric were of fine wool, or of shoddy made up with craft to look like wool of the finest.

We say that there was but small chance for Lord Alfred; nevertheless the lady was dutifully minded to give him all the chance that it was in her power to bestow. She did not tell herself that her father's hopes were vain. Of her preference for that other man she never told herself anything. She was not aware that it existed. She knew that he was handsome; she thought that he was clever. She knew that he had talked to her as no man had ever talked before. She was aware that he was her nearest relative beyond her father and mother, and that therefore she might be allowed to love him

as a cousin. She told herself that he was a Hotspur, and that he must be the head of the Hotspurs when her father should be taken from them. She thought that he looked as a man should look who would have to carry such a dignity. But there was nothing more. No word had been said to her on the subject; but she was aware, because no word had been said, that it was not thought fitting that she should be her cousin's bride. She could not but know how great would be the advantage could the estates and the title be kept together. Even though he should inherit no acre of the land, – and she had been told by her father that such was his decision, – this Cousin George must become the head of the House of Hotspur; and to be head of the House of Hotspur was to her a much greater thing than to be the owner of Humblethwaite and Scarrowby. Gifts like the latter might be given to a mere girl, like herself, – were to be so given. But let any man living do what he might, George Hotspur must become the head and chief of the old House of Hotspur. Nevertheless, it was not for her to join the two things together, unless her father should see that it would be good for her to do so.

Emily Hotspur was very like her father, having that peculiar cast of countenance which had always characterized the family. She had the same arch in her eyebrows, indicating an aptitude for authority; the same well-formed nose, though with her the beak of the eagle was less prominent; the same short lip, and small mouth, and delicate dimpled chin. With both of them the lower part of the face was peculiarly short, and finely cut. With both of them the brow was high and broad, and the temples prominent. But the girl's eyes were blue, while those of the old man were brightly green. It was told of him that when a boy his eyes also had been blue. Her hair, which was very plentiful, was light in colour, but by no means flaxen. Her complexion was as clear as the finest porcelain; but there were ever roses in her cheeks, for she was strong by nature, and her health was perfect. She was somewhat short of stature, as were all the Hotspurs, and her feet and hands and ears were small and delicate. But though short, she seemed to lack nothing in symmetry, and certainly lacked nothing in strength. She could ride or walk the whole day, and had no feeling that such vigour of body was a possession of which a young lady should be ashamed. Such as she was, she was the acknowledged beauty of the county; and at Carlisle, where she showed herself at least once a year at the county ball, there was neither man nor woman, young nor old, who was not ready to say that Emily Hotspur was, among maidens, the glory of Cumberland.

Her life hitherto had been very quiet. There was the ball at Carlisle, which she had attended thrice; on the last occasion, because of her brother's death, she had been absent, and the family of the Hotspurs had been represented there only by the venison and game which had been sent from Humblethwaite. Twice also she had spent the months of May and June in London; but it had not hitherto suited the tone of her father's character to send his daughter out into all the racket of a London season. She had gone to balls, and to the opera, and had ridden in the Park, and been seen at flower-shows; but she had not been so common in those places as to be known to the crowd. And, hitherto, neither in town or country, had her name been connected with that of any suitor for her hand. She was now twenty, and the reader will remember that in the twelve months last past, the House of Humblethwaite had been clouded with deep mourning.

The cousin was come and gone, and the Baronet hoped in his heart that there might be an end of him as far as Humblethwaite was concerned; – at any rate till his child should have given herself to a better lover. Tidings had been sent to Sir Harry during the last week of the young man's sojourn beneath his roof, which of all that had reached his ears were the worst. He had before heard of recklessness, of debt, of dissipation, of bad comrades. Now he heard of worse than these. If that which he now heard was true, there had been dishonour. But Sir Harry was a man who wanted ample evidence before he allowed his judgment to actuate his conduct, and in this case the evidence was far from ample. He did not stint his hospitality to the future baronet, but he failed to repeat that promise of a future welcome which had already been given, and which had been thankfully accepted. But a man knows that such an offer of renewed hospitality should be repeated at the moment of departure,

and George Hotspur, as he was taken away to the nearest station in his cousin's carriage, was quite aware that Sir Harry did not then desire that the visit should be repeated.

Lord Alfred was to be at Humblethwaite on Christmas-eve. The emergencies of the Board at which he sat would not allow of an earlier absence from London. He was a man who shirked no official duty, and was afraid of no amount of work; and though he knew how great was the prize before him, he refused to leave his Board before the day had come at which his Board must necessarily dispense with his services. Between him and his father there had been no reticence, and it was clearly understood by him that he was to go down and win twenty thousand a year and the prettiest girl in Cumberland, if his own capacity that way, joined to all the favour of the girl's father and mother, would enable him to attain success. To Emily not a word more had been said on the subject than those which have been already narrated as having been spoken by the mother to the daughter. With all his authority, with all his love for his only remaining child, with all his consciousness of the terrible importance of the matter at issue, Sir Harry could not bring himself to suggest to his daughter that it would be well for her to fall in love with the guest who was coming to them. But to Lady Elizabeth he said very much. He had quite made up his mind that the thing would be good, and, having done so, he was very anxious that the arrangement should be made. It was natural that this girl of his should learn to love some youth; and how terrible was the danger of her loving amiss, when so much depended on her loving wisely! The whole fate of the House of Hotspur was in her hands, – to do with it as she thought fit! Sir Harry trembled as he reflected what would be the result were she to come to him some day and ask his favour for a suitor wholly unfitted to bear the name of Hotspur, and to sit on the throne of Humblethwaite and Scarrowby.

"Is she pleased that he is coming?" he said to his wife, the evening before the arrival of their guest.

"Certainly she is pleased. She knows that we both like him."

"I remember when she used to talk about him – often," said Sir Harry.

"That was when she was a child."

"But a year or two ago," said Sir Harry.

"Three or four years, perhaps; and with her that is a long time. It is not likely that she should talk much of him now. Of course she knows what it is that we wish."

"Does she think about her cousin at all?" he said some hours afterwards.

"Yes, she thinks of him. That is only natural, you know."

"It would be unnatural that she should think of him much."

"I do not see that," said the mother, keen to defend her daughter from what might seem to be an implied reproach. "George Hotspur is a man who will make himself thought of wherever he goes. He is clever, and very amusing; – there is no denying that. And then he has the Hotspur look all over."

"I wish he had never set his foot within the house," said the father.

"My dear, there is no such danger as you think," said Lady Elizabeth. "Emily is not a girl prone to fall in love at a moment's notice because a man is good-looking and amusing; – and certainly not with the conviction which she must have that her doing so would greatly grieve you." Sir Harry believed in his daughter, and said no more; but he thoroughly wished that Lord Alfred's wedding-day was fixed.

"Mamma," said Emily, on the following day, "won't Lord Alfred be very dull?"

"I hope not, my dear."

"What is he to do, with nobody else here to amuse him?"

"The Crutchleys are coming on the 27th."

Now Mr. and Mrs. Crutchley were, as Emily thought, very ordinary people, and quite unlikely to afford amusement to Lord Alfred. Mr. Crutchley was an old gentleman of county standing, and with property in the county, living in a large dull red house in Penrith, of whom Sir Harry thought a good deal, because he was a gentleman who happened to have had great-grandfathers and great-

grandmothers. But he was quite as old as Sir Harry, and Mrs. Crutchley was a great deal older than Lady Elizabeth.

"What will Lord Alfred have to say to Mrs. Crutchley, mamma?"

"What do people in society always have to say to each other? And the Lathebys are coming here to dine to-morrow, and will come again, I don't doubt, on the 27th."

Mr. Latheby was the young Vicar of Humblethwaite, and Mrs. Latheby was a very pretty young bride whom he had just married.

"And then Lord Alfred shoots," continued Lady Elizabeth.

"Cousin George said that the shooting wasn't worth going after," said Emily, smiling. "Mamma, I fear it will be a failure." This made Lady Elizabeth unhappy, as she thought that more was meant than was really said. But she did not confide her fears to her husband.

CHAPTER III

LORD ALFRED'S COURTSHIP

The Hall, as the great house at Humblethwaite was called, consisted in truth of various edifices added one to another at various periods; but the result was this, that no more picturesque mansion could be found in any part of England than the Hall at Humblethwaite. The oldest portion of it was said to be of the time of Henry VII.; but it may perhaps be doubted whether the set of rooms with lattice windows looking out on to the bowling-green, each window from beneath its own gable, was so old as the date assigned to it. It is strange how little authority can usually be found in family records to verify such statements. It was known that Humblethwaite and the surrounding manors had been given to, or in some fashion purchased by, a certain Harry Hotspur, who also in his day had been a knight, when Church lands were changing hands under Henry VIII. And there was authority to prove that that Sir Harry had done something towards making a home for himself on the spot; but whether those very gables were a portion of the building which the monks of St. Humble had raised for themselves in the preceding reign, may probably be doubted. That there were fragments of masonry, and parts of old timber, remaining from the monastery was probably true enough. The great body of the old house, as it now stood, had been built in the time of Charles II., and there was the date in the brickwork still conspicuous on the wall looking into the court. The hall and front door as it now stood, very prominent but quite at the end of the house, had been erected in the reign of Queen Anne, and the modern drawing-rooms with the best bedrooms over them, projecting far out into the modern gardens, had been added by the present baronet's father. The house was entirely of brick, and the old windows, – not the very oldest, the reader will understand, but those of the Caroline age, – were built with strong stone mullions, and were longer than they were deep, beauty of architecture having in those days been more regarded than light. Who does not know such windows, and has not declared to himself often how sad a thing it is that sanitary or scientific calculations should have banished the like of them from our houses? Two large oriel windows coming almost to the ground, and going up almost to the ceilings, adorned the dining-room and the library. From the drawing-rooms modern windows, opening on to a terrace, led into the garden.

You entered the mansion by a court that was enclosed on two sides altogether, and on the two others partially. Facing you, as you drove in, was the body of the building, with the huge porch projecting on the right so as to give the appearance of a portion of the house standing out on that side. On the left was that old mythic Tudor remnant of the monastery, of which the back wall seen from the court was pierced only with a small window here and there, and was covered with ivy. Those lattice windows, from which Emily Hotspur loved to think that the monks of old had looked into their trim gardens, now looked on to a bowling-green which was kept very trim in honour of the holy personages who were supposed to have played there four centuries ago. Then, at the end of this old building, there had been erected kitchens, servants' offices, and various rooms, which turned the corner of the court in front, so that only one corner had, as it were, been left for ingress and egress. But the court itself was large, and in the middle of it there stood an old stone ornamental structure, usually called the fountain, but quite ignorant of water, loaded with griffins and satyrs and mermaids with ample busts, all overgrown with a green damp growth, which was scraped off by the joint efforts of the gardener and mason once perhaps in every five years.

It often seems that the beauty of architecture is accidental. A great man goes to work with great means on a great pile, and makes a great failure. The world perceives that grace and beauty have escaped him, and that even magnificence has been hardly achieved. Then there grows up beneath various unknown hands a complication of stones and brick to the arrangement of which no great thought seems to have been given; and, lo, there is a thing so perfect in its glory that he who looks

at it declares that nothing could be taken away and nothing added without injury and sacrilege and disgrace. So it had been, or rather so it was now, with the Hall at Humblethwaite. No rule ever made for the guidance of an artist had been kept. The parts were out of proportion. No two parts seemed to fit each other. Put it all on paper, and it was an absurdity. The huge hall and porch added on by the builder of Queen Anne's time, at the very extremity of the house, were almost a monstrosity. The passages and staircases, and internal arrangements, were simply ridiculous. But there was not a portion of the whole interior that did not charm; nor was there a corner of the exterior, nor a yard of an outside wall, that was not in itself eminently beautiful.

Lord Alfred Gresley, as he was driven into the court in the early dusk of a winter evening, having passed through a mile and a half of such park scenery as only Cumberland and Westmoreland can show, was fully alive to the glories of the place. Humblethwaite did not lie among the lakes, – was, indeed, full ten miles to the north of Keswick; but it was so placed that it enjoyed the beauty and the luxury of mountains and rivers, without the roughness of unmanageable rocks, or the sterility and dampness of moorland. Of rocky fragments, indeed, peeping out through the close turf, and here and there coming forth boldly so as to break the park into little depths, with now and again a real ravine, there were plenty. And there ran right across the park, passing so near the Hall as to require a stone bridge in the very flower-garden, the Caldbeck, as bright and swift a stream as ever took away the water from neighbouring mountains. And to the south of Humblethwaite there stood the huge Skiddaw, and Saddleback with its long gaunt ridge; while to the west, Brockleband Fell seemed to encircle the domain. Lord Alfred, as he was driven up through the old trees, and saw the deer peering at him from the knolls and broken fragments of stone, felt that he need not envy his elder brother if only his lines might fall to him in this very pleasant place.

He had known Humblethwaite before; and, irrespective of all its beauties, and of the wealth of the Hotspurs, was quite willing to fall in love with Emily Hotspur. That a man with such dainties offered to him should not become greedy, that there should be no touch of avarice when such wealth was shown to him, is almost more than we may dare to assert. But Lord Alfred was a man not specially given to covetousness. He had recognized it as his duty as a man not to seek for these things unless he could in truth love the woman who held them in her hands to give. But as he looked round him through the gloaming of the evening, he thought that he remembered that Emily Hotspur was all that was loveable.

But, reader, we must not linger long over Lord Alfred's love. A few words as to the father, a few as to the daughter, and a few also as to the old house where they dwelt together, it has been necessary to say; but this little love story of Lord Alfred's, – if it ever was a love story, – must be told very shortly.

He remained five weeks at Humblethwaite, and showed himself willing to receive amusement from old Mrs. Crutchley and from young Mrs. Latheby. The shooting was quite good enough for him, and he won golden opinions from every one about the place. He made himself acquainted with the whole history of the house, and was prepared to prove to demonstration that Henry VII.'s monks had looked out of those very windows, and had played at bowls on that very green. Emily became fond of him after a fashion, but he failed to assume any aspect of divinity in her eyes.

Of the thing to be done, neither father nor mother said a word to the girl; and she, though she knew so well that the doing of it was intended, said not a word to her mother. Had Lady Elizabeth known how to speak, had she dared to be free with her own child, Emily would soon have told her that there was no chance for Lord Alfred. And Lady Elizabeth would have believed her. Nay, Lady Elizabeth, though she could not speak, had the woman's instinct, which almost assured her that the match would never be made. Sir Harry, on the other side, thought that things went prosperously; and his wife did not dare to undeceive him. He saw the young people together, and thought that he saw that Emily was kind. He did not know that this frank kindness was incompatible with love in such a maiden's ways. As for Emily herself, she knew that it must come. She knew that she could not prevent

it. A slight hint or two she did give, or thought she gave, but they were too fine, too impalpable to be of avail.

Lord Alfred spoke nothing of love till he made his offer in form. At last he was not hopeful himself. He had found it impossible to speak to this girl of love. She had been gracious with him, and almost intimate, and yet it had been impossible. He thought of himself that he was dull, stupid, lethargic, and miserably undemonstrative. But the truth was that there was nothing for him to demonstrate. He had come there to do a stroke of business, and he could not throw into this business a spark of that fire which would have been kindled by such sympathy had it existed. There are men who can raise such sparks, the pretence of fire, where there is no heat at all; – false, fraudulent men; but he was not such an one. Nevertheless he went on with his business.

"Miss Hotspur," he said to her one morning between breakfast and lunch, when, as usual, opportunity had been given him to be alone with her, "I have something to say to you, which I hope at any rate it will not make you angry to hear."

"I am sure you will say nothing to make me angry," she replied.

"I have already spoken to your father, and I have his permission. I may say more. He assures me that he hopes I may succeed." He paused a moment, but she remained quite tranquil. He watched her, and could see that the delicate pink on her cheek was a little heightened, and that a streak of colour showed itself on her fair brow; but there was nothing in her manner to give him either promise of success or assurance of failure. "You will know what I mean?"

"Yes, I know," she said, almost in a whisper.

"And may I hope? To say that I love you dearly seems to be saying what must be a matter of course."

"I do not see that at all," she replied with spirit.

"I do love you very dearly. If I may be allowed to think that you will be my wife, I shall be the happiest man in England. I know how great is the honour which I seek, how immense in every way is the gift which I ask you to give me. Can you love me?"

"No," she said, again dropping her voice to a whisper.

"Is that all the answer, Miss Hotspur?"

"What should I say? How ought I to answer you? If I could say it without seeming to be unkind, indeed, indeed, I would do so."

"Perhaps I have been abrupt."

"It is not that. When you ask me – to – to – love you, of course I know what you mean. Should I not speak the truth at once?"

"Must this be for always?"

"For always," she replied. And then it was over.

He did not himself press his suit further, though he remained at Humblethwaite for three days after this interview.

Before lunch on that day the story had been told by Emily to her mother, and by Lord Alfred to Sir Harry. Lady Elizabeth knew well enough that the story would never have to be told in another way. Sir Harry by no means so easily gave up his enterprise. He proposed to Lord Alfred that Emily should be asked to reconsider her verdict. With his wife he was very round, saying that an answer given so curtly should go for nothing, and that the girl must be taught her duty. With Emily herself he was less urgent, less authoritative, and indeed at last somewhat suppliant. He explained to her how excellent would be the marriage; how it would settle this terrible responsibility which now lay on his shoulders with so heavy a weight; how glorious would be her position; and how the Hotspurs would still live as a great family could she bring herself to be obedient. And he said very much in praise of Lord Alfred, pointing out how good a man he was, how moral, how diligent, how safe, how clever, – how sure, with the assistance of the means which she would give him, to be one of the notable men of the country. But she never yielded an inch. She said very little, – answered him hardly a word, standing

close to him, holding by his arm and his hand. There was the fact, that she would not have the man, would not have the man now or ever, certainly would not have him; and Sir Harry, let him struggle as he might, and talk his best, could not keep himself from giving absolute credit to her assurance.

The visit was prolonged for three days, and then Lord Alfred left Humblethwaite Hall, with less appreciation of all its beauties than he had felt as he was first being driven up to the Hall doors. When he went, Sir Harry could only bid God bless him, and assure him that, should he ever choose to try his fortune again, he should have all the aid which a father could give him.

"It would be useless," said Lord Alfred; "she knows her own mind too well."

And so he went his way.

CHAPTER IV

VACILLATION

When the spring-time came, Sir Harry Hotspur with his wife and daughter, went up to London. During the last season the house in Bruton Street had been empty. He and his wife were then mourning their lost son, and there was no place for the gaiety of London in their lives. Sir Harry was still thinking of his great loss. He was always thinking of the boy who was gone, who had been the apple of his eye, his one great treasure, the only human being in the world whose superior importance to his own he had been ready, in his heart of hearts, to admit; but it was needful that the outer signs of sorrow should be laid aside, and Emily Hotspur was taken up to London, in order that she might be suited with a husband. That, in truth, was the reason of their going. Neither Sir Harry nor Lady Elizabeth would have cared to leave Cumberland had there been no such cause. They would have been altogether content to remain at home had Emily been obedient enough in the winter to accept the hand of the suitor proposed for her.

The house was opened in Bruton Street, and Lord Alfred came to see them. So also did Cousin George. There was no reason why Cousin George should not come. Indeed, had he not done so, he must have been the most ungracious of cousins. He came, and found Lady Elizabeth and Emily at home. Emily told him that they were always there to receive visitors on Sundays after morning church, and then he came again. She had made no such communication to Lord Alfred, but then perhaps it would have been hardly natural that she should have done so. Lady Elizabeth, in a note which she had occasion to write to Lord Alfred, did tell him of her custom on a Sunday afternoon; but Lord Alfred took no such immediate advantage of the offer as did Cousin George.

As regarded the outward appearance of their life, the Hotspurs were gayer this May than they had been heretofore when living in London. There were dinner-parties, whereas in previous times there had only been dinners at which a few friends might join them; – and there was to be a ball. There was a box at the Opera, and there were horses for the Park, and there was an understanding that the dealings with Madame Milvodi, the milliner, were to be as unlimited as the occasion demanded. It was perceived by every one that Miss Hotspur was to be settled in life. Not a few knew the story of Lord Alfred. Every one knew the facts of the property and Emily's position as heiress, though every one probably did not know that it was still in Sir Harry's power to leave every acre of the property to whom he pleased. Emily understood it all herself. There lay upon her that terrible responsibility of doing her best with the Hotspur interests. To her the death of her brother had at the time been the blackest of misfortunes, and it was not the less so now as she thought of her own position. She had been steady enough as to the refusal of Lord Alfred, knowing well enough that she cared nothing for him. But there had since come upon her moments almost of regret that she should have been unable to accept him. It would have been so easy a way of escape from all her troubles without the assistance of Madame Milvodi, and the opera-box, and the Park horses! At the time she had her own ideas about another man, but her ideas were not such as to make her think that any further work with Madame Milvodi and the opera-box would be unnecessary.

Then came the question of asking Cousin George to the house. He had already been told to come on Sundays, and on the very next Sunday had been there. He had given no cause of offence at Humblethwaite, and Lady Elizabeth was of opinion that he should be asked to dinner. If he were not asked, the very omission would show that they were afraid of him. Lady Elizabeth did not exactly explain this to her husband, – did not accurately know that such was her fear; but Sir Harry understood her feelings, and yielded. Let Cousin George be asked to dinner.

Sir Harry at this time was vacillating with more of weakness than would have been expected from a man who had generally been so firm in the affairs of his life. He had been quite clear about

George Hotspur, when those inquiries of his were first made, and when his mind had first accepted the notion of Lord Alfred as his chosen son-in-law. But now he was again at sea. He was so conscious of the importance of his daughter's case, that he could not bring himself to be at ease, and to allow himself to expect that the girl would, in the ordinary course of nature, dispose of her young heart not to her own injury, as might reasonably be hoped from her temperament, her character, and her education. He could not protect himself from daily and hourly thought about it. Her marriage was not as the marriage of other girls. The house of Hotspur, which had lived and prospered for so many centuries, was to live and prosper through her; or rather mainly through the man whom she should choose as her husband. The girl was all-important now, but when she should have once disposed of herself her importance would be almost at an end. Sir Harry had in the recess of his mind almost a conviction that, although the thing was of such utmost moment, it would be better for him, better for them all, better for the Hotspurs, that the matter should be allowed to arrange itself than that there should be any special judgment used in selection. He almost believed that his girl should be left to herself, as are other girls. But the thing was of such moment that he could not save himself from having it always before his eyes.

And yet he knew not what to do; nor was there any aid forthcoming from Lady Elizabeth. He had tried his hand at the choice of a proper husband, and his daughter would have none of the man so chosen. So he had brought her up to London, and thrown her as it were upon the market. Let Madame Milvodi and the opera-box and the Park horses do what they could for her. Of course a watch should be kept on her; – not from doubt of her excellence, but because the thing to be disposed of was so all-important, and the girl's mode of disposing of it might, without disgrace or fault on her part, be so vitally prejudicial to the family!

For, let it be remembered, no curled darling of an eldest son would suit the exigencies of the case, unless such eldest son were willing altogether to merge the claims of his own family, and to make himself by name and purpose a Hotspur. Were his child to present to him as his son-in-law some heir to a noble house, some future earl, say even a duke in embryo, all that would be as nothing to Sir Harry. It was not his ambition to see his daughter a duchess. He wanted no name, or place, or dominion for any Hotspur greater or higher or more noble than those which the Hotspurs claimed and could maintain for themselves. To have Humblethwaite and Scarrowby lost amidst the vast appanages and domains of some titled family, whose gorgeous glories were new and paltry in comparison with the mellow honours of his own house, would to him have been a ruin to all his hopes. There might, indeed, be some arrangement as to the second son proceeding from such a marriage, – as to a future chance Hotspur; but the claims of the Hotspurs were, he thought, too high and too holy for such future chance; and in such case, for one generation at least, the Hotspurs would be in abeyance. No: it was not that which he desired. That would not suffice for him. The son-in-law that he desired should be well born, a perfect gentleman, with belongings of whom he and his child might be proud; but he should be one who should be content to rest his claims to material prosperity and personal position on the name and wealth that he would obtain with his wife. Lord Alfred had been the very man; but then his girl would have none of Lord Alfred! Eldest sons there might be in plenty ready to take such a bride; and were some eldest son to come to him and ask for his daughter's hand, some eldest son who would do so almost with a right to claim it if the girl's consent were gained, how could he refuse? And yet to leave a Hotspur behind him living at Humblethwaite, and Hotspurs who should follow that Hotspur, was all in all to him.

Might he venture to think once again of Cousin George? Cousin George was there, coming to the house, and his wife was telling him that it was incumbent on them to ask the young man to dinner. It was incumbent on them, unless they meant to let him know that he was to be regarded absolutely as a stranger, – as one whom they had taken up for a while, and now chose to drop again. A very ugly story had reached Sir Harry's ears about Cousin George. It was said that he had twice borrowed money from the money-lenders on his commission, passing some document for security of its value which

was no security, and that he had barely escaped detection, the two Jews knowing that the commission would be forfeited altogether if the fraud were brought to light. The commission had been sold, and the proceeds divided between the Jews, with certain remaining claims to them on Cousin George's personal estate. Such had been the story which in a vague way had reached Sir Harry's ears. It is not easily that such a man as Sir Harry can learn the details of a disreputable cousin's life. Among all his old friends he had none more dear to him than Lord Milnthorp; and among his younger friends none more intimate than Lord Burton, the eldest son of Lord Milnthorp, Lord Alfred's brother. Lord Burton had told him the story, telling him at the same time that he could not vouch for its truth. "Upon my word, I don't know," said Lord Burton, when interrogated again. "I think if I were you I would regard it as though I had never heard it. Of course, he was in debt."

"That is altogether another thing," said Sir Harry.

"Altogether! I think that probably he did pawn his commission. That is bad, but it isn't so very bad. As for the other charge against him, I doubt it." So said Lord Burton, and Sir Harry determined that the accusation should go for nothing.

But his own child, his only child, the transmitter of all the great things that fortune had given to him; she, in whose hands were to lie the glories of Humblethwaite and Scarrowby; she, who had the giving away of the honour of their ancient family, – could she be trusted to one of whom it must be admitted that all his early life had been disreputable, even if the world's lenient judgment in such matters should fail to stigmatize it as dishonourable? In other respects, however, he was so manifestly the man to whom his daughter ought to be given in marriage! By such arrangement would the title and the property be kept together, – and by no other which Sir Harry could now make, for his word had been given to his daughter that she was to be his heiress. Let him make what arrangements he might, this Cousin George, at his death, would be the head of the family. Every "Peerage" that was printed would tell the old story to all the world. By certain courtesies of the law of descent his future heirs would be Hotspurs were his daughter married to Lord Alfred or the like; but the children of such a marriage would not be Hotspurs in very truth, nor by any courtesy of law, or even by any kindness of the Minister or Sovereign, could the child of such a union become the baronet, the Sir Harry of the day, the head of the family. The position was one which no Sovereign and no Minister could achieve, or touch, or bestow. It was his, beyond the power of any earthly potentate to deprive him of it, and would have been transmitted by him to a son with as absolute security. But – alas! alas!

Sir Harry gave no indication that he thought it expedient to change his mind on the subject. When Lady Elizabeth proposed that Cousin George should be asked to dinner, he frowned and looked black as he acceded; but, in truth, he vacillated. The allurements on that side were so great that he could not altogether force upon himself the duty of throwing them from him. He knew that Cousin George was no fitting husband for his girl, that he was a man to whom he would not have thought of giving her, had her happiness been his only object. And he did not think of so bestowing her now. He became uneasy when he remembered the danger. He was unhappy as he remembered how amusing, how handsome, how attractive was Cousin George. He feared that Emily might like him! – by no means hoped it. And yet he vacillated, and allowed Cousin George to come to the house, only because Cousin George must become, on his death, the head of the Hotspurs.

Cousin George came on one Sunday, came on another Sunday, dined at the house, and was of course asked to the ball. But Lady Elizabeth had so arranged her little affairs that when Cousin George left Bruton Street on the evening of the dinner party he and Emily had never been for two minutes alone together since the family had come up to London. Lady Elizabeth herself liked Cousin George, and, had an edict to that effect been pronounced by her husband, would have left them alone together with great maternal satisfaction. But she had been told that it was not to be so, and therefore the young people had never been allowed to have opportunities. Lady Elizabeth in her very quiet way knew how to do the work of the world that was allotted to her. There had been other balls, and there had been ridings in the Park, and all the chances of life which young men, and sometimes young

women also, know so well how to use; but hitherto Cousin George had kept, or had been constrained to keep, his distance.

"I want to know, Mamma," said Emily Hotspur, the day before the ball, "whether Cousin George is a black sheep or a white sheep?"

"What do you mean, my dear, by asking such a question as that?"

"I don't like black sheep. I don't see why young men are to be allowed to be black sheep; but yet you know they are."

"How can it be helped?"

"People should not notice them, Mamma."

"My dear, it is a most difficult question, – quite beyond me, and I am sure beyond you. A sheep needn't be black always because he has not always been quite white; and then you know the black lambs are just as dear to their mother as the white."

"Dearer, I think."

"I quite agree with you, Emily, that in general society black sheep should be avoided."

"Then they shouldn't be allowed to come in," said Emily. Lady Elizabeth knew from this that there was danger, but the danger was not of a kind which enabled her specially to consult Sir Harry.

CHAPTER V

GEORGE HOTSPUR

A little must now be told to the reader of Cousin George and the ways of his life. As Lady Elizabeth had said to her daughter, that question of admitting black sheep into society, or of refusing them admittance, is very difficult. In the first place, whose eyes are good enough to know whether in truth a sheep be black or not? And then is it not the fact that some little amount of shade in the fleece of male sheep is considered, if not absolutely desirable, at any rate quite pardonable? A male sheep with a fleece as white as that of a ewe-lamb, – is he not considered to be, among muttons, somewhat insipid? It was of this taste which Pope was conscious when he declared that every woman was at heart a rake. And so it comes to pass that very black sheep indeed are admitted into society, till at last anxious fathers and more anxious mothers begin to be aware that their young ones are turned out to graze among ravenous wolves. This, however, must be admitted, that lambs when so treated acquire a courage which tends to enable them to hold their own, even amidst wolfish dangers.

Cousin George, if not a ravenous wolf, was at any rate a very black sheep indeed. In our anxiety to know the truth of him it must not be said that he was absolutely a wolf, – not as yet, – because in his career he had not as yet made premeditated attempts to devour prey. But in the process of delivering himself up to be devoured by others, he had done things which if known of any sheep should prevent that sheep from being received into a decent flock. There had been that little trouble about his commission, in which, although he had not intended to cheat either Jew, he had done that which the world would have called cheating had the world known it. As for getting goods from tradesmen without any hope or thought of paying for them, that with him was so much a thing of custom, – as indeed it was also with them, – that he was almost to be excused for considering it the normal condition of life for a man in his position. To gamble and lose money had come to him quite naturally at a very early age. There had now come upon him an idea that he might turn the tables, that in all gambling transactions some one must win, and that as he had lost much, so possibly might he now win more. He had not quite yet reached that point in his education at which the gambler learns that the ready way to win much is to win unfairly; – not quite yet, but he was near it. The wolfhood was coming on him, unless some good fortune might save him. There might, however, be such good fortune in store for him. As Lady Elizabeth had said, a sheep that was very dark in colour might become white again. If it be not so, what is all this doctrine of repentance in which we believe?

Blackness in a male sheep in regard to the other sin is venial blackness. Whether the teller of such a tale as this should say so outright, may be matter of dispute; but, unless he say so, the teller of this tale does not know how to tell his tale truly. Blackness such as that will be all condoned, and the sheep received into almost any flock, on condition, not of repentance or humiliation or confession, but simply of change of practice. The change of practice in certain circumstances and at a certain period becomes expedient; and if it be made, as regards tints in the wool of that nature, the sheep becomes as white as he is needed to be. In this respect our sheep had been as black as any sheep, and at this present period of his life had need of much change before he would be fit for any decent social herding.

And then there are the shades of black which come from conviviality, – which we may call table blackness, – as to which there is an opinion constantly disseminated by the moral newspapers of the day, that there has come to be altogether an end of any such blackness among sheep who are gentlemen. To make up for this, indeed, there has been expressed by the piquant newspapers of the day an opinion that ladies are taking up the game which gentlemen no longer care to play. It may be doubted whether either expression has in it much of truth. We do not see ladies drunk, certainly, and we do not see gentlemen tumbling about as they used to do, because their fashion of drinking is not

that of their grandfathers. But the love of wine has not gone out from among men; and men now are as prone as ever to indulge their loves. Our black sheep was very fond of wine, – and also of brandy, though he was wolf enough to hide his taste when occasion required it.

Very early in life he had come from France to live in England, and had been placed in a cavalry regiment, which had, unfortunately for him, been quartered either in London or its vicinity. And, perhaps equally unfortunate for him, he had in his own possession a small fortune of some £500 a year. This had not come to him from his father; and when his father had died in Paris, about two years before the date of our story, he had received no accession of regular income. Some couple of thousand of pounds had reached his hands from his father's effects, which had helped him through some of the immediately pressing difficulties of the day, – for his own income at that time had been altogether dissipated. And now he had received a much larger sum from his cousin, with an assurance, however, that the family property would not become his when he succeeded to the family title. He was so penniless at the time, so prone to live from hand to mouth, so little given to consideration of the future, that it may be doubted whether the sum given to him was not compensation in full for all that was to be withheld from him.

Still there was his chance with the heiress! In regarding this chance, he had very soon determined that he would marry his cousin if it might be within his power to do so. He knew, and fully appreciated, his own advantages. He was a handsome man, – tall for a Hotspur, but with the Hotspur fair hair and blue eyes, and well-cut features. There lacked, however, to him, that peculiar aspect of firmness about the temples which so strongly marked the countenance of Sir Harry and his daughter; and there had come upon him a *blasé* look, and certain outer signs of a bad life, which, however, did not mar his beauty, nor were they always apparent. The eye was not always bloodshot, nor was the hand constantly seen to shake. It may be said of him, both as to his moral and physical position, that he was on the edge of the precipice of degradation, but that there was yet a possibility of salvation.

He was living in a bachelor's set of rooms, at this time, in St. James's Street, for which, it must be presumed, that ready money was required. During the last winter he had horses in Northamptonshire, for the hire of which, it must be feared, that his prospects as heir to Humblethwaite had in some degree been pawned. At the present time he had a horse for Park riding, and he looked upon a good dinner, with good wine, as being due to him every day, as thoroughly as though he earned it. That he had never attempted to earn a shilling since the day on which he had ceased to be a soldier, now four years since, the reader will hardly require to be informed.

In spite of all his faults, this man enjoyed a certain social popularity for which many a rich man would have given a third of his income. Dukes and duchesses were fond of him; and certain persons, standing very high in the world, did not think certain parties were perfect without him. He knew how to talk enough, and yet not to talk too much. No one could say of him that he was witty, well-read, or given to much thinking; but he knew just what was wanted at this point of time or at that, and could give it. He could put himself forward, and could keep himself in the background. He could shoot well without wanting to shoot best. He could fetch and carry, but still do it always with an air of manly independence. He could subserve without an air of cringing. And then he looked like a gentleman.

Of all his well-to-do friends, perhaps he who really liked him best was the Earl of Altringham. George Hotspur was at this time something under thirty years of age, and the Earl was four years his senior. The Earl was a married man, with a family, a wife who also liked poor George, an enormous income, and a place in Scotland at which George always spent the three first weeks of grouse-shooting. The Earl was a kindly, good-humoured, liberal, but yet hard man of the world. He knew George Hotspur well, and would on no account lend him a shilling. He would not have given his friend money to extricate him from any difficulty. But he forgave the sinner all his sins, opened Castle Corry to him every year, provided him with the best of everything, and let him come and dine at Altringham House, in Carlton Gardens, as often almost as he chose during the London season. The Earl was very

good to George, though he knew more about him than perhaps did any other man; but he would not bet with George, nor would he in any way allow George to make money out of him.

"Do you suppose that I want to win money of you?" he once said to our friend, in answer to a little proposition that was made to him at Newmarket. "I don't suppose you do," George had answered. "Then you may be sure that I don't want to lose any," the Earl had replied. And so the matter was ended, and George made no more propositions of the kind.

The two men were together at Tattersall's, looking at some horses which the Earl had sent up to be sold the day after the dinner in Bruton Street. "Sir Harry seems to be taking to you very kindly," said the Earl.

"Well, – yes; in a half-and-half sort of way."

"It isn't everybody that would give you £5,000, you know."

"I am not everybody's heir," said George.

"No; and you ain't his, – worse luck."

"I am, – in regard to the title."

"What good will that do you?"

"When he's gone, I shall be the head of the family. As far as I can understand these matters, he hasn't a right to leave the estates away from me."

"Power is right, my boy. Legal power is undoubtedly right."

"He should at any rate divide them. There are two distinct properties, and either of them would make me a rich man. I don't feel so very much obliged to him for his money, – though of course it was convenient."

"Very convenient, I should say, George. How do you get on with your cousin?"

"They watch me like a cat watches a mouse."

"Say a rat, rather, George. Don't you know they are right? Would not I do the same if she were my girl, knowing you as I do?"

"She might do worse, my Lord."

"I'll tell you what it is. He thinks that he might do worse. I don't doubt about that. All this matter of the family and the title, and the name, would make him ready to fling her to you, – if only you were a shade less dark a horse than you are."

"I don't know that I'm darker than others."

"Look here, old fellow; I don't often trouble you with advice, but I will now. If you'll set yourself steadily to work to live decently, if you'll tell Sir Harry the whole truth about your money matters, and really get into harness, I believe you may have her. Such a one as you never had such a chance before. But there's one thing you must do."

"What is the one thing?"

"Wash your hands altogether of Mrs. Morton. You'll have a difficulty, I know, and perhaps it will want more pluck than you've got. You haven't got pluck of that kind."

"You mean that I don't like to break a woman's heart?"

"Fiddlestick! Do you see that mare, there?"

"I was just looking at her. Why should you part with her?"

"She was the best animal in my stables, but she's given to eating the stable-boys; old Badger told me flat, that he wouldn't have her in the stables any longer. I pity the fellow who will buy her, – or rather his fellow. She killed a lad once in Brookborough's stables."

"Why don't you shoot her?"

"I can't afford to shoot horses, Captain Hotspur. I had my chance in buying her, and somebody else must have his chance now. That's the lot of them; one or two good ones, and the rest what I call rags. Do you think of what I've said; and be sure of this: Mrs. Morton and your cousin can't go on together. Ta, Ta! – I'm going across to my mother's."

George Hotspur, when he was left alone, did think a great deal about it. He was not a man prone to assure himself of a lady's favour without cause; and yet he did think that his cousin liked him. As to that terrible difficulty to which Lord Altringham had alluded, he knew that something must be done; but there were cruel embarrassments on that side of which even Altringham knew nothing. And then why should he do that which his friend had indicated to him, before he knew whether it would be necessary? As to taking Sir Harry altogether into his confidence about his money matters, that was clearly impossible. Heaven and earth! How could the one man speak such truths, or the other man listen to them? When money difficulties come of such nature as those which weighted the shoulders of poor George Hotspur, it is quite impossible that there should be any such confidence with any one. The sufferer cannot even make a confidant of himself, cannot even bring himself to look at his own troubles massed together. It was not the amount of his debts, but the nature of them, and the characters of the men with whom he had dealings, that were so terrible. Fifteen thousand pounds – less than one year's income from Sir Harry's property – would clear him of everything, as far as he could judge; but there could be no such clearing, otherwise than by money disbursed by himself, without a disclosure of dirt which he certainly would not dare to make to Sir Harry before his marriage.

But yet the prize to be won was so great, and there were so many reasons for thinking that it might possibly be within his grasp! If, after all, he might live to be Sir George Hotspur of Humblethwaite and Scarrowby! After thinking of it as well as he could, he determined that he would make the attempt; but as to those preliminaries to which Lord Altringham had referred, he would for the present leave them to chance.

Lord Altringham had been quite right when he told George Hotspur that he was deficient in a certain kind of pluck.

CHAPTER VI

THE BALL IN BRUTON STREET

Sir Harry vacillated, Lady Elizabeth doubted, and Cousin George was allowed to come to the ball. At this time, in the common understanding of such phrase, Emily Hotspur was heart-whole in regard to her cousin. Had she been made to know that he had gone away for ever, – been banished to some antipodes from which he never could return, – there would have been no lasting sorrow on her part, though there might have been some feeling which would have given her an ache for the moment. She had thought about him, as girls will think of men as to whom they own to themselves that it is possible that they may be in love with them some day; – and she liked him much. She also liked Lord Alfred, but the liking had been altogether of a different kind. In regard to Lord Alfred she had been quite sure, from the first days of her intercourse with him, that she could never be in love with him. He was to her no more than old Mr. Crutchley or young Mr. Latheby, – a man, and a good sort of man, but no more than a man. To worship Lord Alfred must be impossible to her. She had already conceived that it would be quite possible for her to worship her Cousin George in the teeth of all the hard things that she had heard of him. The reader may be sure that such a thought had passed through her mind when she asked her mother whether Cousin George was to be accepted as a black sheep or a white one?

The ball was a very grand affair, and Emily Hotspur was a very great lady. It had come to be understood that the successful suitor for her hand would be the future lord of Humblethwaite, and the power with which she was thus vested gave her a prestige and standing which can hardly be attained by mere wit and beauty, even when most perfectly combined. It was not that all who worshipped, either at a distance or with passing homage, knew the fact of the heiress-ship, or had ever heard of the £20,000 a year; but, given the status, and the worshippers will come. The word had gone forth in some mysterious way, and it was acknowledged that Emily Hotspur was a great young lady. Other young ladies, who were not great, allowed themselves to be postponed to her almost without jealousy, and young gentlemen without pretensions regarded her as one to whom they did not dare to ask to be introduced. Emily saw it all, and partly liked it, and partly despised it. But, even when despising it, she took advantage of it. The young gentlemen without pretensions were no more to her than the chairs and tables; and the young ladies who submitted to her and adored her, – were allowed to be submissive, and to adore. But of this she was quite sure, – that her Cousin George must some day be the head of her own family. He was a man whom she was bound to treat with attentive regard, if they who had the custody of her chose to place her in his company at all.

At this ball there were some very distinguished people indeed, – persons whom it would hardly be improper to call illustrious. There were two royal duchesses, one of whom was English, and no less than three princes. The Russian and French ambassadors were both there. There was the editor of the most influential newspaper of the day, – for a few minutes only; and the Prime Minister passed through the room in the course of the evening. Dukes and duchesses below the royal degree were common; and as for earls and countesses, and their daughters, they formed the ruck of the crowd. The Poet-laureate didn't come indeed, but was expected; and three Chinese mandarins of the first quality entered the room at eleven, and did not leave till one. Poor Lady Elizabeth suffered a great deal with those mandarins. From all this it will be seen that the ball was quite a success.

George Hotspur dined that day with Lord and Lady Altringham, and went with them to the ball in the evening. Lord Altringham, though his manner was airy and almost indifferent, was in truth most anxious that his friend should be put upon his feet by the marriage; and the Countess was so keen about it, that there was nothing in the way of innocent intrigue which she would not have done to accomplish it. She knew that George Hotspur was a rake, was a gambler, was in debt, was hampered

by other difficulties, and all the rest of it; but she liked the man, and was therefore willing to believe that a rich marriage would put it all right. Emily Hotspur was nothing to her, nor was Sir Harry; but George had often made her own house pleasant to her, and therefore, to her thinking, deserved a wife with £20,000 a year. And then, if there might have been scruples under other circumstances, that fact of the baronetcy overcame them. It could not be wrong in one placed as was Lady Altringham to assist in preventing any separation of the title and the property. Of course George might probably squander all that he could squander; but that might be made right by settlements and entails. Lady Altringham was much more energetic than her husband, and had made out quite a plan of the manner in which George should proceed. She discussed the matter with him at great length. The one difficulty she was, indeed, obliged to slur over; but even that was not altogether omitted in her scheme. "Whatever incumbrances there may be, free yourself from them at once," she had advised.

"That is so very easy to say, Lady Altringham, but so difficult to do."

"As to debts, of course they can't be paid without money. Sir Harry will find it worth his while to settle any debts. But if there is anything else, stop it at once." Of course there was something else, and of course Lady Altringham knew what that something else was. She demanded, in accordance with her scheme, that George should lose no time. This was in May. It was known that Sir Harry intended to leave town early in June. "Of course you will take him at his word, and go to Humblethwaite when you leave us," she had said.

"No time has been named."

"Then you can name your own without difficulty. You will write from Castle Corry and say you are coming. That is, if it's not all settled by that time. Of course, it cannot be done in a minute, because Sir Harry must consent; but I should begin at once, – only, Captain Hotspur, leave nothing for them to find out afterwards. What is past they will forgive." Such had been Lady Altringham's advice, and no doubt she understood the matter which she had been discussing.

When George Hotspur entered the room, his cousin was dancing with a prince. He could see her as he stood speaking a few words to Lady Elizabeth. And in talking to Lady Elizabeth he did not talk as a stranger would, or a common guest. He had quite understood all that he might gain by assuming the intimacy of cousinhood, and he had assumed it. Lady Elizabeth was less weary than before when he stood by her, and accepted from his hand some little trifle of help, which was agreeable to her. And he showed himself in no hurry, and told her some little story that pleased her. What a pity it was that Cousin George should be a scamp, she thought, as he went on to greet Sir Harry.

And with Sir Harry he remained a minute or two. On such an occasion as this Sir Harry was all smiles, and quite willing to hear a little town gossip. "Come with the Altringhams, have you? I'm told Altringham has just sold all his horses. What's the meaning of that?"

"The old story, Sir Harry. He has weeded his stable, and got the buyers to think that they were getting the cream. There isn't a man in England knows better what he's about than Altringham."

Sir Harry smiled his sweetest, and answered with some good-humoured remark, but he said in his heart that "birds of a feather flock together," and that his cousin was – not a man of honour.

There are some things that no rogue can do. He can understand what it is to condemn roguery, to avoid it, to dislike it, to disbelieve in it; – but he cannot understand what it is to hate it. Cousin George had probably exaggerated the transaction of which he had spoken, but he had little thought that in doing so he had helped to imbue Sir Harry with a true idea of his own character.

George passed on, and saw his cousin, who was now standing up with a foreign ambassador. He just spoke to her as he passed her, calling her by her Christian name as he did so. She gave him her hand ever so graciously; and he, when he had gone on, returned and asked her to name a dance.

"But I don't think I've one left that I mean to dance," she said.

"Then give me one that you don't mean to dance," he answered. And of course she gave it to him.

It was an hour afterwards that he came to claim her promise, and she put her arm through his and stood up with him. There was no talk then of her not dancing, and she went whirling round the room with him in great bliss. Cousin George waltzed well. All such men do. It is a part of their stock-in-trade. On this evening Emily Hotspur thought that he waltzed better than any one else, and told him so. "Another turn? Of course I will with you, because you know what you're about."

"I'd blush if I'd time," said he.

"A great many gentlemen ought to blush, I know. That prince, whose name I always forget, and you, are the only men in the room who dance well, according to my ideas."

Then off they went again, and Emily was very happy. He could at least dance well, and there could be no reason why she should not enjoy his dancing well since he had been considered to be white enough to be asked to the ball.

But with George there was present at every turn and twist of the dance an idea that he was there for other work than that. He was tracking a head of game after which there would be many hunters. He had his advantages, and so would they have theirs. One of his was this, – that he had her there with him now, and he must use it. She would not fall into his mouth merely by being whirled round the room pleasantly. At last she was still, and consented to take a walk with him out of the room, somewhere out amidst the crowd, on the staircase if possible, so as to get a breath of fresh air. Of course he soon had her jammed into a corner out of which there was no immediate mode of escape.

"We shall never get away again," she said, laughing. Had she wanted to get away her tone and manner would have been very different.

"I wonder whether you feel yourself to be the same sort of person here that you are at Humblethwaite," he said.

"Exactly the same."

"To me you seem to be so different."

"In what way?"

"I don't think you are half so nice."

"How very unkind!"

Of course she was flattered. Of all flattery praise is the coarsest and least efficacious. When you would flatter a man, talk to him about himself, and criticise him, pulling him to pieces by comparison of some small present fault with his past conduct; – and the rule holds the same with a woman. To tell her that she looks well is feeble work; but complain to her wofully that there is something wanting at the present moment, something lacking from the usual high standard, some temporary loss of beauty, and your solicitude will prevail with her.

"And in what am I not nice? I am sure I'm trying to be as nice as I know how."

"Down at Humblethwaite you are simply yourself, – Emily Hotspur."

"And what am I here?"

"That formidable thing, – a success. Don't you feel yourself that you are lifted a little off your legs?"

"Not a bit; – not an inch. Why should I?"

"I fail to make you understand quite what I mean. Don't you feel that with all these princes and potentates you are forced to be something else than your natural self? Don't you know that you have to put on a special manner, and to talk in a special way? Does not the champagne fly to your head, more or less?"

"Of course, the princes and potentates are not the same as old Mrs. Crutchley, if you mean that."

"I am not blaming you, you know, only I cannot help being very anxious; and I found you so perfect at Humblethwaite that I cannot say that I like any change. You know I am to come to Humblethwaite again?"

"Of course you are."

"You go down next month, I believe?"

"Papa talks of going to Scarrowby for a few weeks. He always does every year, and it is so dull. Did you ever see Scarrowby?"

"Never."

"You ought to come there some day. You know one branch of the Hotspurs did live there for ever so long."

"Is it a good house?"

"Very bad indeed; but there are enormous woods, and the country is very wild, and everything is at sixes and sevens. However, of course you would not come, because it is in the middle of your London season. There would be ever so many things to keep you. You are a man who, I suppose, never was out of London in June in your life, unless some race meeting was going on."

"Do you really take me for such as that, Emily?"

"Yes, I do. That is what they tell me you are. Is it not true? Don't you go to races?"

"I should be quite willing to undertake never to put my foot on a racecourse again this minute. I will do so now if you will only ask it of me."

She paused a moment, half thinking that she would ask it, but at last she determined against it.

"No," she said; "if you think it proper to stay away, you can do so without my asking it. I have no right to make such a request. If you think races are bad, why don't you stay away of your own accord?"

"They are bad," he said.

"Then why do you go to them?"

"They are bad, and I do go to them. They are very bad, and I go to them very often. But I will stay away and never put my foot on another racecourse if you, my cousin, will ask me."

"That is nonsense."

"Try me. It shall not be nonsense. If you care enough about me to wish to save me from what is evil, you can do it. I care enough about you to give up the pursuit at your bidding."

As he said this he looked down into her eyes, and she knew that the full weight of his gaze was upon her. She knew that his words and his looks together were intended to impress her with some feeling of his love for her. She knew at the moment, too, that they gratified her. And she remembered also in the same moment that her Cousin George was a black sheep.

"If you cannot refrain from what is bad without my asking you," she said, "your refraining will do no good."

He was making her some answer, when she insisted on being taken away. "I must get into the dancing-room; I must indeed, George. I have already thrown over some poor wretch. No, not yet, I see, however. I was not engaged for the quadrille; but I must go back and look after the people."

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