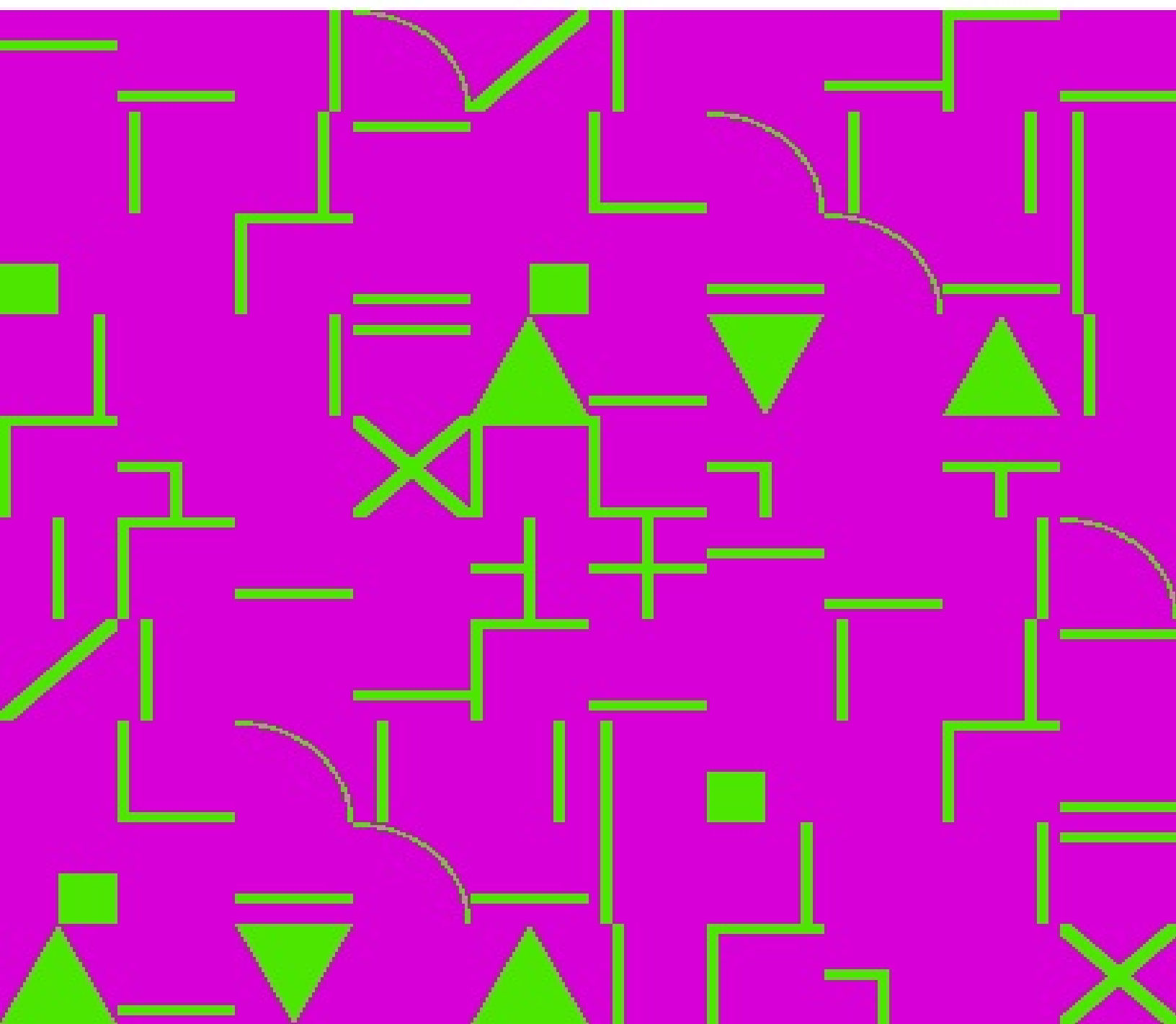


Crying for the Light; Or, Fifty Years Ago. Vol. 2 [of 3]

J. Ewing (James Ewing) Ritchie



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or Fifty Years Ago

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“This is the condition of humanity; we are placed as it were in an intellectual twilight where we discover but few things clearly, and yet we see enough to tempt us with the hope of making better and more discoveries.”—BOLINGBROKE.

Crying for the Light or Fifty Years Ago

J Ewing Ritchie
Author of ‘East Anglia’

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CHAPTER XI.

THE STRUGGLES OF A SOUL.

There comes to us all a time when we seek something for the heart to rely on, to anchor to, when we see the hollowness of the world, the deceitfulness of riches; how fleeting is all earthly pleasure, how great is the need of spiritual strength, how, when the storm comes, we require a shelter that can defy its utmost force. Out of the depths the heart of man ever cries out for the living God. The actress Rose felt this as much amid the glare of life and the triumphs of the stage as the monk in his cloister or the hermit in his desert cell. Like all of us, in whom the brute has not quenched the Divine light which lighteth everyone who cometh into the world, she felt, as Wordsworth writes:

‘The world is too much with us, late and soon;
Getting and spending we lay waste our power.
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away a sordid boon.’

She felt, as we all must feel, that there is something more than this feverish dream we call life—something greater and grander and more enduring beyond. To her the heavens declared the glory of a God, and the firmament showed forth His handiwork. To her day unto day uttered speech, and night unto night showed forth knowledge. She had no wish to shut out Divine speech. Her labour was how best to hear it, and most quickly to obey. The history of humanity testifies to this one all-pervading desire in ages most remote, in countries the most savage. As the great Sir James Mackintosh wrote to Dr. Parr in 1799, after the loss of his wife: ‘Governed by those feelings which have in every age and region of the world actuated the human mind to seek relief, I find it in the soothing hope and consolatory reflection that a benevolent wisdom inflicts the chastisements, as well as bestows the enjoyments of human life; that superintending goodness will one day enlighten the darkness which surrounds our nature and hangs over our prospects; that this dreary and wretched life is not the whole of man; that an animal so sagacious and provident, and capable of such science and virtue, is not like the beasts that perish; that there is a dwelling-place prepared for the spirits of the just, and that the ways of God will yet be vindicated to man.’ Our actress felt the same; she had, she felt, a soul to be saved, a God to be loved, a heaven to be won.

But how? Ah! that was the question. Naturally she turned to the old Church of Christendom, the Church that calls itself Catholic and universal. She went to the priest; he showed her a bleeding Saviour, and a burning, bottomless pit. She trembled as she stood in the old dim cathedral, where no light of heaven ever came, where no voice of mercy ever penetrated, where the whole air of the place was redolent of priestcraft and artifice and sham.

‘You,’ screams the priest, ‘are all unjust, extortioners, adulterers, dead in trespasses and sins. Give me money, and I will make it right with the Almighty. Down on your marrow-bones, eat fish on a Friday, count your beads, confess to me—a man no better than yourself—pay for Masses. In my hand is the key to eternal joy; pay my fees, and the door shall be unlocked, and you shall straightway go to paradise.’

Refuse, and he shows you an angry Jehovah, in His rage destroying a fair world which He Himself had called into being and filled with life, and sweeping millions into torments that never end. The sight is awful. Happily, reason comes to the rescue, and the priest and the cathedral, and the Mass and the music, the incense and wax lights, disappear.

Enter the State Church, not of the Romanist, but the Protestant, where you are told you are made a child of God in baptism, where the cure of souls is sold in the market-place, and where the Bishop, or overseer of the Church, often is put into his high position because he is a relative of a lord, or is a firm supporter of the Minister of the day. There is no room for the anxious inquirer in a Church which rejoices in the Athanasian Creed, and which regards all Free-Church life as schism. With its pomp and wealth and power, with its well-paid clergy, in time past on the side of the rich against the poor, of abuse and privilege against the rights of the people and the progress of the nation, the Church has left the masses whom it was paid to teach and save little better than heathen. You ask, What has it to do with the religion of Jesus of Nazareth, the carpenter's son? What is it but an institution to give an air of respectability to life, to confer a prestige on the church-goer, and to lend an additional charm to a State ceremony? Is it not there emphatically that, as a rule—to which there are splendid exceptions—

‘The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed;’

that is, if they need something more than a musical performance or a conventional observance?

‘Do you mean to say,’ said the actress to a clergyman's wife, ‘that you can follow the psalms of the day, and ask God to crush your enemies and make them perish for ever?’

‘Oh,’ said the lady, ‘I always repeat them all. You know, one does not believe exactly all one says. All you have to do is to give a general assent.’

This was what the actress could not do. Her Bible was a constant difficulty. She could believe it was the Word of God, but not all of it. Its contradictions puzzled and perplexed her. Give it up, said her worldly friends. Be happy in Agnosticism. Leave off thinking about the hereafter and a God. Believe what you see and hear. Life is short; it has not too much of joy in it. Be happy while you may.

In her distress she consulted a clergyman of the class more common now than they were then, who reject the term Protestant, and whose aim is the revival of what they call the Church Primitive and Apostolic.

‘You must be baptized,’ he said.

‘But I have been.’

‘Where?’

‘In a chapel.’

‘A mere form,’ was the reply. ‘Our Church teaches that man is made a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven, in and by holy baptism.’

‘I cannot see that.’

‘Then you are shut out, unless you are baptized, from the sacrament in which the body and blood of Christ are given to every one who receives the sacramental bread and wine.’

‘How do you prove that?’

‘Prove it: I don’t want to prove it. I fear you are in grievous error. Your duty and that of everyone is to obey the Book of God: a book not to be dealt with upon the same rules which are applicable to the works of man.’

And then they parted; he stern and resolved, she sorrowful and sad; he intimating something about it was a pity that people could not remain satisfied with the station of life in which they were born, which did not pour balm into a wounded soul. Happily for herself, however, she could exclaim with Sir Thomas Browne, ‘As for those mazy mysteries in divinity and airy subtleties in religion which have unhinged the minds of many, they have never stretched the *pia mater* of mine.’ But to gain this position was a work of time.

With an aching heart, once more the actress sought a clergyman. He was a Broad Churchman. There were no difficulties for him. In antiquated forms, in vain repetitions, in decaying creeds, there were difficulties, it might be; but one was not to bother one’s self about them. It was true that one had to conform to outward form, but the spirit was greater than the form. The time would come when the Church would burst its bonds, but at present all they had to do was to make the best of a bad situation. It seemed to her such church-worship was a sham. The man in the pulpit, the man in the pew, alike ignored the dead creed, and instead revelled in glib phraseology, in poetical nothings, in much-sounding rhetoric and ecclesiastical show and ritual. The chief things were the music, the millinery, and the show—the white-robed choristers, the dim religious light.

Then she thought of her old training among the Dissenters, and went to a chapel. She was staying at an old country mansion, when one Sunday morning the gentlemen were going to have the usual smoke in the stables, and examine the horses and the hounds, and to make a few bets about a forthcoming race, and there was a smile of perfect horror as she expressed her intention of going to the village meeting-house, while the ladies were inexpressibly shocked. No one went to meeting; it was low. One could not be received in society who was known to go to meeting.

‘I show myself once or twice in a year at church just to keep myself on good terms with society,’ said the gentleman of the mansion.

The actress went to the chapel, as nowadays the meeting-house is termed. It was as Gothic in style as it was possible to be. The singing was good. The preacher was a man of culture, and was dressed as much like a clergyman as was possible. The hearers were of the respectable middle class; the working man was conspicuous by his absence. But, alas! it was known the next Sunday that the quiet lady who had attended the previous Sunday was an actress from town. She found every eye turned towards her. There was quite a crowd to see her arrive and depart, and further attendance was impossible.

When are we to have a rational change in the land? We have had a Reformation that, incomplete as it was, freed us at any rate from the worship of the Mass. When is our religion to be free of Church creeds—of the Assembly Catechism—of the iron fetters of chapel trusts—of the traditions of the elders—of the influence of the fables and traditions and superstitions of the Middle Ages? When is a man to stand up in our midst and honestly utter what he believes, careless of his ecclesiastical superiors, of the frowns of deacons and elders? When are we to get rid of conventional observances and conventional forms? There is no place of worship in which it would be proper for me to enter without the chimney-pot hat, or take a brown-paper parcel in my hand. If I did so, I should be set down as little better than one of the wicked—as wicked as if I were to read the *Weekly Dispatch* on a Sunday, or spend an hour or two in a museum or a picture-gallery. When are we to realize that the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath? Why are Churches to be less tolerant than the Master, who invited all to come, and who

rebuked His ignorant disciples when they would have put obstacles in their way? It is hard to think how many souls have been thus driven away. You are an actress, said the Church to her; you must give up your profession. She felt that was wrong; that on the stage she could be as good a Christian as anywhere else. It was her happiness to believe in a

‘Father of all, in every age,
In every clime, adored—
By saint, by savage, or by sage,
Jehovah, Jove, or Lord.’

Toleration is the great need of our day. But we need more: we need less of prayer that is not worship; of hymnology that makes men utter on their tongues what is rarely, if ever, in their hearts. We want more of honesty in all our public services, to whatever denomination we belong. We have far too much of indifference; too much of dogma; too much of silly sentimentalism; too much mysticism; too much morbid faith. Our missionaries often make converts, who are the worse, and not the better, for the use of their primitive creeds. The shapeless block of wood, hideously carved and fantastically ornamented, that I, in the sunlight, may look upon with scorn, my brother, living in the dark places of the earth, may look upon as the very highest type of his ideal god, and as such he may gaze upon it with reverence, and worship it with awe. And who am I that I may say that he is not the better for so doing? Who am I that I am to laugh as my happy sister prays, or to deprive her of a faith that ‘scorns delights and lives laborious days’? Would the savage be less a savage had he not before him that type of a Divine ideal? Would he be a better man if I were to blot that out of his being? Would that make him less selfish, less cruel; more kindly in act, more ready to do good? Would he be happier in the sunshine, braver in the battle and the storm? Yes, it is more religious toleration that we need, though we have, rather against the grain, ceased to burn heretics. And that comes only as knowledge increases, and the torch of science throws its light over the dark mysteries of Nature and her laws.

The difficulty with the actress was not faith, but the form; not with the Spirit, but with its manifestation in so-called Christian churches and among Christian men; not with the Divine idea, but its human expression. And that is the giant Difficulty of our day. It is impossible for any Church to realize its truest conceptions. It is in vain that finite man seeks to grapple with the problem of the infinite. It is told of St. Augustine, how once upon a time he was perplexed about the doctrine of the Trinity while he was walking on the seashore. All at once he saw a child filling a shell with water, and pouring it out on the sand. ‘What are you doing?’ said the old saint. ‘Putting the sea into this hole,’ was the reply. The child’s answer was not lost on the saint if it made him feel the main essence of Christianity is not a dogma, but a life.

The Church service day by day gets more ornate, more artificial, more of a show, and men and women go to it as a theatre. But, any rate, it is devotional so far as devotion is displayed in form, in the Free Churches, as they are called, or, rather, love to call themselves, for freedom is as much to be found in the Church service as in that of the chapel; the pulpit and the man who fills it play a more important part. The vanity which is in the heart of all of us more or less is gratified more than in the Church service, which has a tendency to sink the man and to exalt the function. The whole tone of the chapel service is personal. The man in the pulpit is the great ‘I am.’ The deacons have more or less the same spirit. Positively it is amusing: you enter before the time of commencing worship. Presently a man ascends the pulpit stairs. Is he the preacher? Oh no, he is only the man to carry up the Bible. Again the vestry door opens, and in the conquering hero comes. A deacon reverently follows. Is he going to assist? Not a bit of it. He merely shuts the pulpit-door, and sinks back into his native insignificance. The sermon over, then comes the

collection. It seems, apparently, that this is the great thing after all. I remember once going into a chapel; the minister had a weak voice, I could not hear a word of the prayer or the sermon. The only thing I did hear, and that was pronounced audibly to be heard all over the place, was, 'The collection will now be made.' Organization is carried to excess, till it becomes weariness and destructive of the spirit. What is wanted is something simpler. Listen to the minister as he announces from the pulpit the engagements and arrangements for the week; and as to the sermon, how often is it a pamphlet, or an essay, or a newspaper leader! One feels also prayer is too long and wearying, and that the personal element is somewhat intrusive. It is there the Church has the advantage; the chapel-goer is disgusted if the minister does not call on him, if the deacon does not shake hands with him, if he himself has not some official standing as a member of some committee or other. The poet tells us,

'God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform.'

Not so says the Evangelical; it is by means of our fussy activity and mechanical organization that His wonders are performed. 'It is,' exclaims the Methodist, 'a penny a week, a shilling a quarter, and justification by faith.' No wonder that there are good Christians who never darken church or chapel doors. 'It conduces much to piety,' said the late Earl Russell to his wife, 'not to go to church sometimes.' And the actress was a Christian, godly, if not according to the godliness of Little Bethel. I don't know that she kept the Sabbath holy; she loved that day to get away from town and the world, and to worship Him whose temple is all space and whose Sabbath all time. In the Roman Catholic or Protestant cathedral alike, she could worship, and from occasional attendances she often returned refreshed, but she could identify herself with no particular body. In the freer Churches of Christendom she would enter, and could leave all the better for the service, even if the preacher had, as preachers often do, proved unequal to her state of mind. Here she listened to an essay logical and profound, which touched on no matter of earthly interest, and was as vain and worthless as questions as to how many angels could stand on the point of a needle, or what were the songs the Syrens sang, or what name Achilles assumed when he hid himself among women. There a raw youth thumped the pulpit, as he complacently dwelt on the doings of a God of whom his very idea was a caricature. Then there were ingenious clerics who spoke upon the 'little horn' in Daniel, and who, while ignorant of Cheapside and the City, could unfold the Book of Revelation, and to whom the prophecies were as easy as A B C. A good deal of what is commonly called good preaching was but to her an idle dream as preachers painfully tried to realise the past, and talked of distant lands, and worthy old patriarchs who had been dead thousands of years, and grand old prophets, who though able forces in their own times and amongst their own people, had little to do with the passions and prejudices of the living present. Even when the preacher was morbidly sentimental, as so many of them were—and that is why the men stop away, or only attend to please their wives—or too prone to take for granted fables which cannot stand a moment's rational investigation, even, though they were more or less common to the mythology of every nation under the sun, poor Rose boldly faced the situation and sat it all out, though for all practical purposes she felt that she might just as well have listened to a lecture on the Digamma. One admits the force in many cases of associated worship, the charm of the living voice, of a good delivery, of a pleasing figure; and yet a man is not to be condemned as one of the wicked because his pew is empty at times, because he reads the Bible and says his prayers alone, because he is distracted by the delivery of stale religious commonplace.

But the Free Churches, are not they the home of free thought? Are they not leaders in religious reform? Alas! they all have their dogmas and creeds to the believer in which they promise eternal life, while to the unbeliever, no matter how honest he may be, or how pure in heart and life, there is anathema maranatha.

If the Church of England apes the Church of Rome, what are we to say of the conventicle, with its antiquated creed and its obsolete theology? Are they not still, in spite of their boasted freedom, under the rule of St. Augustine and the monks? Nor can it well be otherwise. You take a young man, ignorant of the world, unversed in human nature; you shut him up in a college with others as ignorant as himself. You teach him theological conundrums rather than real life. Can such as they minister to a mind diseased? Am I to be saved by listening to such as they? Ah, no!

‘In secret silence of the mind,
My heaven, and there my God, I find.’

It was so with Rose as she wandered drearily from one church door to another, seeking rest and finding none. It was clear to her that there was no room for her in the narrow circle of the Churches.

As long as you are an actress, as long as you get your living by following the stage, said they all, you cannot be a church-member, forgetting that the stage itself was, in a prior age, but the child of the Church.

One day she tried the Quakers, but there the silence was too oppressive—nor did she feel called upon to make herself singular by a display of Quaker dress or Quaker speech.

One Sunday she was in Edinburgh, staying at the house of one of the University professors. She had heard much of Scotch piety, and she wanted to see what it was like. A grand scientific gathering was being held, and the house was full of men of science. In the morning she went to church. Again she was taken to church in the afternoon, very much against the grain; but she was in Rome, and had to do as the Romans did. In the evening there was a dinner-party. As they repaired to the drawing-room, the lady of the house said:

‘It is very questionable whether we shall see any more of the gentlemen to-night. If they rise from the table sober, they will come into the drawing-room. If they take too much, they will go up by the backstairs to bed.’

The lady of the house said this as if it were the most natural thing in the world, but it shocked Rose to find that, in the city where the Sabbath is observed more strictly than anywhere else, this was how the Sabbath night was spent, and, naturally, she had little respect for the piety which could attend church twice a day on the Sunday, and make the Sunday night a convivial carouse.

What was she to do? She went to many a Congregational, or Baptist, or Unitarian, or Episcopalian church in London, where she heard much that was helpful to her spiritual life—much that it did her good to hear.

‘You can’t join my church,’ said a popular divine to her.

‘Why not?’

‘Because you are an actress. My deacons would not hear of such a thing.’

‘Have you ever been to a theatre?’

‘Never!’ was the emphatic reply.

‘How, then, can you condemn that of which you are ignorant?’ asked the actress.

‘Well,’ said the preacher, ‘I can go by popular report. Look at the lives of the professionals. Was not Kean a drunkard? Did not the Duke of So-and-so keep an actress? Did not So-and-so’—naming a

popular actor—‘run off with another man’s wife?’

‘What of that?’ said Rose. ‘I am told your predecessor in your very chapel did the same.’

The preacher did not know what to say, except that there were black sheep in all professions, and that there was a Judas even among the Apostles, and it became them all to judge in charity of one another.

‘That is what I want of you,’ said the actress.

But the preacher did not respond to her appeal, and again she left the church for the world.

Another day she tried the Methodists. Unfortunately, as she stepped in they were singing:

‘And be the business of my life
To cry, “Behold the Lamb!”’

In that church she saw some Wesleyan tradesmen whom she knew. Was that the business of their lives? Of course not. Man comes into the world to get a living and to make the most of it. The secular life is not superseded by the religious life—only adorned and purified by it.

‘You must give up your calling,’ said they all.

Indignantly she asked herself, Why? Her acting was her one talent. Was one to hide it in a napkin? Certainly not, said common-sense, and for once common-sense was right. Was she not doing good in her way, finding people innocent amusement, and teaching them, as she repeated nightly the great words of the great dramatist of our land, something of the wonder and grandeur and pathos and mystery of life? Hers was not an art to be despised. Hers was not a course of life to be abandoned at the command of a bigot, be he Roman monk or Protestant preacher. There was a time when the stage was the teacher of the people; why should it not be so now? she asked herself. It was her resolve that it should be so, as far as it was in her power. For as Tom Campbell wrote:

‘Ill can poetry express
Full many a tone of thought sublime;
And painting, mute and motionless,
Steals but one glance from Time.
But by the mighty Actor brought,
Illusion’s wedded triumphs come;
Verse ceases to be airy thought,
And Sculpture to be dumb.’

‘Ah!’ wrote Wentworth to her, ‘we need not despair of Divine mercy. Christ is bigger and broader than the Church. You in your way, and I in mine, have wandered far in search of such happiness as earth can give, and found it to be of little worth, and the sects look on us as sinners, because we refuse to bow to the image they have set up, or to utter their Shibboleth. I know not that it matters much. I know not that it matters anything at all. How can any man or any set of men pretend to have penetrated the full meaning of Scripture, or that they can bid stand back those as humble and patient in the pursuit of truth as themselves?’

One day when Robert Hall had been having a conversation with Sir James Mackintosh, he told a friend: ‘Sir, it was the Euphrates pouring itself into a teapot.’ If a great orator like Hall could say that of a

fellow-man, what can we say of such Divine revelation as comes to us either by the experiences of actual life or by the world of nature around us, or by the written Word which was and is Life? How can we grasp it? How can we cut it up into dogmas and creeds? How can we say to any brother man, Believe as I believe, or be damned? The Churches have tried to do so and failed, even when they had at their back the terrors of Inquisition or the sword of the Civil Magistrates. They are beginning to understand that it is all up with priestcraft, and that the Church as it exists to-day everywhere is in danger; that they cannot stop the onward march of the people; that they cannot say to the waves of free thought, 'Hitherto shall ye come, but no further, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed.' It is a kindly light that leads on, and we cannot stop. Take all the creeds, pile them one upon the top of another, and there is still a void, for the finite cannot grasp the Infinite, and man cannot by searching find out God. At the best we can but guess; at the best, and may we ever be that, we are but children crying for the light. Here we see through a glass darkly; let us humbly do our duty, and wait the time when all mystery shall be unravelled, when we shall stand face to face, when we shall know even as we are known.

Wentworth and Rose had resolved to become one in life, as they had been in years of struggle and endeavour. As she rose she dragged him upward and onward. God had come to him as his Father and his Friend. He was of no Church. He needed the aid of no priest. He distrusted the emotional sensationalism of what is called religious life. It had done little for him in the past—only helped him to his fall. Church members he had found no better than other men; church life just as worldly as that of the wicked. It needed not that he should enter man's churches to see in all His glory and tenderness and love the Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; Him who had wept over impenitent Jerusalem, and had tears and pity for such frail women as Mary the Magdalene; who had said as He walked the crowded streets of Jerusalem, beneath the proud pillars of the Temple itself: 'Come unto Me all ye that are weary and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest'; the lustre of whose life and the music of whose voice had bettered and brightened all time and space. It was no Agnostic's dream that had made Wentworth a new man, but a great spiritual reality, of which he felt as sure as he did of his own existence, as he wrote:

'O Thou, the God of life and light,
In whom all heaven and earth unite,
Fain would I raise my humble voice
And with all people round rejoice.

'I cannot see Thee as Thou art,
I only know Thee with the heart.
All language fails me when I try
To shadow forth Thy Deity.

'I love, I worship, I adore—
Can man give less, can God ask more?
That love in life I would translate,
And freely trust Thee with my fate.'

CHAPTER XII.

IN LOW COMPANY.

Nothing was blacker than the outlook in this land of ours fifty years ago. The parson droned away on Sunday, preaching a gospel which had not the remotest reference to living men, and good people sighed placidly as the preacher dwelt apparently *con amore*—and without the slightest sign of regret—on the torture and the flame to which the wicked would be eternally condemned. The hearer, if well to do, went home complacently to his Sunday dinner and glass or two of port; while the poor sinner preferred to sleep off the Saturday night's debauch, leaving the missus and the children to go to a place of worship, on the condition that the dinner should not be forgotten. But it was chiefly the small shopkeepers who came to attend what were called the means of grace. I remember a parish clerk who made a point of attending the Wesleyan chapel in the evening. In time the old vicar died and a new one reigned in his stead. In his wisdom he proposed to have evening service in the parish church to hinder the sheep from roving in forbidden pastures.

But said the parish clerk, when his vicar suggested the idea: 'Oh no, sir; that will never do. You will deprive me of the means of grace altogether.'

Surely when Queen Victoria commenced her reign the sun never shone on a darker land than ours. Ignorance, poverty, intemperance, licentiousness ran riot—in spite of the fact that good people were subscribing their tens of thousands to spread the Bible all over the world and to convert the heathen, who many of them lived more decent lives than our own people. Not far from the scene of which I write, a noble lord, who had been a sailor and had a fine gift of swearing, presided over a local meeting of the British and Foreign Bible Society. As a chairman he laboured under many difficulties, but he managed to make a short speech, in which he assured his hearers that the society was a d---d good one and deserved to be d---d well supported. The country life of the gentleman was just what we see it in 'Tom Jones.' In the towns things were little better. Lives were shortened by intemperance and neglect of all sanitary requirements. The employer had no thought for the people he employed. The peasant and the workman had little done for them, the pauper had even less. There were no cheap newspapers to stir up the sleeping intellect of the country. If such a thing as a national conscience existed it was very feeble—eaten up with pride. The Englishman was dead to the needs of the times. The bitter cry of the distressed had not then sounded over the land.

Little children from four to eight years of age, the majority of them orphans, the rest sold by brutal parents, were trained as chimney-sweeps. In order to make their skins tough and not to suffer as they climbed they were rubbed with brine before a hot fire. They were liable to what was called chimney sweeper's cancer. They were often suffocated by soot and died when at work. Often they were stifled by the hot sulphurous air in the flues; often they would stick in the chimney and faint from the effects of terror, exhaustion and foul air. Lighted straw was used to bring them round, and if that failed they were often half killed, and sometimes killed outright, by the efforts to extricate them. Sailors were sent to sea in ships heavily insured—and great was the loss of valuable life—in order that some shipowners might reap a hellish profit. It was reckoned that at that time the preventible mortality of the country was annually

90,000. In 1843 there were 1,500 young persons of fourteen and upwards engaged as milliners and dressmakers in the Metropolis. Their hours were from fifteen to eighteen a day, with only a little interval of rest, and the consequence was that consumption and impaired eyesight were terribly prevalent among them.

As late as 1854 a gentleman who commenced a religious service in one of the largest cottages on his estate for the benefit of the dense population around him of miners, had to give up the good work, as he was threatened with a prosecution for the breach of the Conventicle Act. Churchyards in overcrowded districts were allowed to spread disease and death all around. The houses in which the poor were forced to herd were almost destitute of sewage drainage and water supply.

It was found that in the fourteen houses of which Wild Street, Drury Lane, for example, consisted, nearly one thousand persons found shelter, and that the very staircases were crowded nightly with poor wretches, to whom even the pestilential accommodation of the rooms was an unattainable luxury. It was said that more beggars were to be encountered in a walk from Westminster Abbey to Oxford Street than in a tour from London to Switzerland, whether by Paris or the Rhine. There were 80,000 in the common lodging-houses of the City, and no authority to see that decency and proper sanitary conditions were applied to any of them. Nor were the homes of the agricultural peasants much better.

When Lord Ashley became Earl of Shaftesbury, and took possession of the family estate, he writes: 'Inspected a few cottages—filthy, close, indecent, unwholesome.' All England was a whited sepulchre, full of dead men's bones. But the climax of wickedness was only to be seen in a low London lodging-house; let us enter one.

Mint Street, Borough, was better known than trusted some years not very long ago. It was a nasty place to go down of a night, especially if you happened to be the owner of a watch or had a sovereign or two in your pocket, nor did the police much care to explore its mysteries. Somehow or other the place bore a bad name, and has ever done so since the days of Jonathan Wild and his merry men, who at one time are reported to have resided there. In its low lodging-houses were to be found the very scum of the earth—the virtuous and deserving poor, as they would have us believe they are, always in search of employment, which they unfortunately never find—who are dishonest, and lazy, and improvident, and drunken, and dissolute, very much against their own inclination, and to their own intense disgust—the victims of the wicked landlord or wicked capitalist. They live in the lodging-houses of the district, which are generally pretty full, at the rate of fourpence a night, except when the hop-picking is on, when away the inmates tramp by the hundred down to the pleasant hop-gardens of Kent, or Sussex, or Hampshire, carrying with them all the filth and squalor of the town, tainting the air and polluting the fair face of Nature as they pass along. It is true that now the city missionary follows in their steps, otherwise it would be a bad look-out indeed.

Turning down into the street, avoiding the policeman who happened to be on duty at the time, one summer evening might be seen a man and a woman. They were tired and dusty, and had evidently travelled far. On both was the mark of Cain, and they were fleeing from justice to quarters where guilt and shame find convenient repose. They knocked at a door, where, after they had been surveyed through a wicket, they were received on the payment of such small sum as the deputy-keeper was legitimately entitled to charge. It was a big room into which they entered, with a great fire at one end, at which various cooking operations were going on; and on the benches at the side some slept, or smoked, or talked, or read, as the fancy suited them. Behind was a yard, in which one or two were engaged in the process familiarly known as cleaning themselves up.

Neither the place nor the company would have been attractive to a decent working man. There was a foulness in the air and talk of the place which would have revolted him, yet in that crowd of needy and disreputable creatures were men who had been to college and had had the benefit of a University education, and women who had known something of the sunshine of life; alas! all—all were given over to evil, utterly lost and reprobate. It was not ignorance, not misfortune, not a wicked world, that had made them what they were. They had been the architects of their own lives. They had to lie on the beds they had made. Society is much troubled about them. What if society were to leave them alone, and to look better after the really deserving poor, who are always present with us—who are so low down in the world as to be compelled to take wages on which they cannot possibly live—who require and deserve the utmost sympathy from all classes of the community in their sorrow and distress and struggles? These are the weak, whose burdens the strong are bidden, in the Book to which most of us appeal for instruction and guidance, to bear.

‘Why, ye’re soon back again,’ said one of the inmates, engaged in the interesting operation of frying a Yarmouth bloater—‘you’re soon back again; I thought you was down at Sloville.’

‘Lor’ bless you! we han’t been near Sloville for years.’

‘Ah, I remember, I heard you were in the Black Country.’

‘Yes, we was there, but the fact was we had to hook it!’

‘Oh, I see, up to the old trick!’ said he with a smile.

‘Perhaps,’ was the reply.

The fact was that one afternoon the tramp and the woman met with an old farmer coming home from market a little the worse for liquor, and him they had kindly relieved of his watch, as he was far too gone to be able to take proper care of it himself. The old farmer, naturally, was aggrieved, and tried to defend himself. This led to a little compulsory action on the part of his friends, and he was left senseless by the roadside, while they made the best of their way out of the neighbourhood.

Fortune always favours the brave, and our friends were in this respect no exception to the general rule. They had had rather a successful campaign—visiting lonely lanes untrodden by the police, and robbing romantic young ladies fond of the country of what jewellery they might happen to wear. People are always asking us to pity the poor worn-out tramp. I am rather inclined to pity his victim.

‘But where’s the kid?’

‘Oh, we left him behind. But, lor’ bless you, we know where to find him again. He’s safe to be in Parker’s Buildings, or somewhere thereabout.’

‘Got any money about you?’

‘Not much worth speaking of—not quite done for, either,’ continued the tramp. ‘Look here,’ said he, peering cautiously about, and drawing out of his coat-pocket a very dirty and ragged handkerchief, in which was wrapped up a watch—an old-fashioned one, but real silver, nevertheless. Seeing no one was looking on, he proudly exclaimed: ‘What do you say to that?’

‘A beauty, but why didn’t yer spout it at once? Suppose the peeler had collared yer—what a mess ye would have been in.’

‘Lor’ bless ye, I wa’nt such a flat as that. What could I ’ave got for it on the tramp? Now, it is good for a round sum.’

‘Shall I go and spout it?’ said the old acquaintance.

‘Yes, me and missus have walked enough to-day; but ain’t it rather late?’

‘Yes, but there is the shop at the corner. You know they are not particular.’

And that was quite true. The head of that respectable establishment generally contrived to do a good deal of business, in spite of the law and the police, and, if the receiver is as bad as the thief, was a very bad man indeed. In a little while the messenger returned, bearing with him a bottle of gin, a couple of pounds of rump steak, and the other materials for a good supper, and a certain amount of cash, which he handed over to the new-comer, and which seemed perfectly satisfactory. As eagles round the carcase gathered the few casuals that happened to be present. Most of them were old gaol-birds, all of them were the slaves of drink—quarrelsome or good-tempered according to their respective temperaments. They were ready for any feat, or not averse to any crime, if it could be done in a sneaking, underhand manner. Literally their hands were against everyone, and everyone’s hands against them. But now they were all on the best of terms. There was a little drink going on; who knew but what a drop might fall to their share. At any rate they were all glad to see Carrotty Bill as they called him once more in their midst; in the line of life they affected his ruffianism made him a hero.

That night was an extra scene of festivity at the lodging house; one of the inmates had been bagged, and had served his time, and had come back resolved to qualify himself as soon as possible for another term of imprisonment, at the expense of the unfortunate taxpayer. And there was a good deal of sociable enjoyment in accordance with the old saying, that when the wine is in the wit is out.

‘Anybody been in trouble, since I was here?’ asked our friend the tramp.

‘No, nothing particular—drunk and disorderly, that’s all. But we’ve had some narrow shaves, and the sergeant told the guvnor last night that ’e’s got his heye on hus.’

‘His eye be blowed! But who is yon cove?’

‘Oh, a poor banker’s clerk.’

‘And the fellow he’s talking to?’

‘Him with the red nose? Oh, we call him the Professor. He’s from Oxford University he says, and gives himself very high and mighty airs when he’s in his cups. But they’re all right.’

‘I’ll soon let you know who I am,’ said a lad who was listening to the talk.

‘Well, who are you?’

‘I am a thief, and not ashamed to own it.’

Here there was a general cry of ‘Bravo!’

‘I ain’t done a day’s work in my life, and don’t mean to. Wot’s the good on it? A fellow ain’t a bit the better for it at the year’s end. He’s a deal to bear. He’s got to put up with his master’s whims; to put up with his foreman and his mates; to toil from morning to night, never to have a day’s pleasure; to be a poor

slave. No, I know a trick worth two of that.'

Again there were cries of 'Bravo!'

'Why should I work hard for a master to make money by me! Here I can lead a free life. If I am ill, can't I go to the 'ospital? If I ain't got a shot in the locker, can't I nurse up at a soup-kitchen? At the worst I can go into the work'ouse, and get my keep out of the parish. And then when I'm in luck, what a life I can have at the music-halls and with the gals! I heard the chaplain of the gaol preach a sermon about honesty being the best policy. That's all very fine, but somehow or other I did not seem to see it.'

Here there was more applause.

The speaker continued:

'I've done nothing wot's good. I know I'm a bad un.'

'Yes, we all know that.'

'And why?'

'Ah, that's the question!' said the interested group of listeners.

'I'll tell you for why. I han't no father—at any rate, I never knowed one. My mother turned me out o' doors at the age of thirteen. I then stole a pair o' boots, and was sent to prison for one month for it. What could I do when I came out but go back to thievin'? In a little while I was convicted for stealing out of a till, and sent to prison for three months. Arter a little spreein' about, and a few ups and downs, I came to grief again in an attempt to steal a watch, and this time got six months. After I came out I renewed my wicious courses' (here a laugh went round the room), 'and I got four months for stealin' a purse. As soon as I came out I run agin a perliceman, against whom I had a spite, as he was always 'avin' his heye on me, and got fourteen days' imprisonment for assault. The next time I had three months for an attempt to rob a drunken old sailor in the Borough. Then I 'ad six months for stealin' a watch. And the next time—and that I did not like—twelve months for stealin' a purse. However, when I came out I enjoyed my liberty, and did not make a bad use o' my time. Arter that I got a long sentence, and now for good behaviour I am out with a liberty ticket.'

'Well, well, such is life!' said the red-nosed curate, who had been listening attentively. 'I suppose we're all villains of necessity, and fools by a divine thrusting on. What's the odds as long as we're happy? Look at my learning, my abilities, my virtues—where am I the better? Are we not all on the same low level? All, if I may be pardoned the phrase, a little shaky, a little down in the world? Let's liquor up,' said he, bringing out of his side pocket a bottle of rum, and passing it round, often tasting with evident gusto its contents.

In the midst of the excitement a gent came in apparently much excited. I say gent, as he was not a gentleman. He had too red a nose and too sodden an appearance to be taken for anything of the kind. He was a perfect picture of a human wreck as, unwashed and unshaven, with a short pipe in his mouth, he joined the drinking group.

'Hollo, parson,' they all exclaimed, 'wot's the row? Anythink up?'

'Nothing particular, only a highway robbery in the Black Country, and a farmer left for dead.'

'In the Black Country? Where's that?' asked the tramp. 'Whoever heard of such a place?'

‘Why, you just said you’d been down there,’ said one of the party.

‘Well, what if I did? You don’t suppose I had anything to do with the job?’ said the new-comer angrily.

‘Of course not,’ was the universal reply.

Harmony being restored, the bottle of gin was drunk, and another sent for. The fun grew fast and furious. The conviviality was of the choicest character, or rather it degenerated into an orgie. Does the reader recollect that splendid passage of Lord Bacon, in which he tells us, ‘In Orpheus’s theatre all the birds assembled, and forgetting their several appetites—some of prey, some of game, some of quarrel—stood all sociably together, listening to the concert, which no sooner ceased, or was drowned by some louder noise, but every beast returned to his own nature.’ The gin in the low lodging-house had produced a similar effect. While it lasted the partakers for the time being had forgot their several appetites—some of prey, some of game, some of quarrel—and stood or sat all sociably together. No sooner had the supply of liquor ceased than the good-fellowship became changed into hate and discord, as the various natures of the guests reasserted themselves.

The tramp’s female companion became suspicious. She was not so drunk as the rest, and had become conscious that there was a reward of ten pounds offered to anyone who should give such evidence as might lead to the conviction of the perpetrator or perpetrators of the recent outrage. The company she knew comprised more than one individual who was quite ready to earn a ten-pound note in such a way, and she determined, as far as it was in her power, not to give them the chance. Unperceived she slipped out, and fled as fast as she could and as far as she could. All at once there was a cry on the part of the tramp and his friends, ‘Where’s Sal?’

Some searched for her under the table, others investigated the sleeping apartments, others the back premises, which were of the most capacious kind, but no Sal was to be found.

The curate summoned up all his dignity, and, approaching the inebriated tramp, said to him:

‘My friend, I have a painful revelation to make.’

‘A wot?’

‘A painful revelation.’

‘I don’t know wot yer mane; but out with it, old man, and don’t stand there as if you was chokin’.’

‘Your wife has bolted.’

‘Oh, has she? Let her bolt. She’s no wife of mine. There are others as good as she.’

‘You don’t seem much affected by the loss,’ replied the Oxonian. ‘You’re quite a philosopher. You seem perfectly aware how *femina mutabile est*.’

‘Now, don’t come that nonsense with me,’ said the man angrily. ‘When I drinks, I drinks; and I don’t bother my head about anything else. Why should I? As to women, they’re like all the rest of us—here to-day, gone to-morrow.’

‘Ah, I see you’re a man of the world.’

‘I believe yer, my boy,’ said the tramp, who felt flattered at the intended compliment.

‘You don’t think she’s gone to split,’ whispered one of the party in the tramp’s ear.

‘No, I should think not. Let me catch her at it!’

‘Or me,’ added his chum. ‘We’ll be sure to mark her, and serve her d--- well!’

The sentiment being favourably received, more exhilarating liquor was circulated. That which cheers and inebriates at the same time by many is much preferred to that which cheers alone. In that long room and low company it was intoxicating liquor that had done the mischief. Without character, without clothes, without food, without money, filthy and fallen, these poor wretches had given up all for drink. For that the mother was ready to sell her child, or the husband his wife. For that the criminal was ready to give up an accomplice, and to turn King’s evidence, or to commit any deed of shame. In time the drink supply was stopped, and the drinkers staggered upstairs to the crowded bedrooms, redolent of filth and blasphemy.

‘I say,’ said the tramp’s friend, ‘where do you think that woman’s gone?’

‘Gone; how should I know? Perhaps she’s gone back to Sloville.’

‘To Sloville! why?’

‘To look after the boy.’

‘A child of hers?’

‘What do you want to know for?’ said the tramp angrily. ‘You’re too inquisitive by half,’ said he, in a drunken tone, and in the next moment he sank into a drunken sleep. And the questioner—he, too, in a moment was in the Land of Nod, dreaming of the days of innocence, when he was a bright, happy boy, guarded with a mother’s love and father’s care, in a well-appointed home, with gardens where grew fruits and flowers, and musical with the song of birds; where the sun shone bright and the air was balmy; in a home where care and filth and sorrow and disease and want and woe seemed almost unknown. His pals carried him off to bed. Suddenly he woke up and asked himself where he was. Presently he lifted himself up in bed and looked around. At the far end a dim gas-light helped him to realize the horrors of his situation. He was in a long, filthy, evil smelling, low room, with thirty beds in a row, side by side, packed as close together as sardines in a box. Every bed was occupied. And as he gazed on the sad faces near him he gave a scream which drew down on him many a curse.

‘Hush! why can’t you be quiet?’ said the deputy keeper, ever fearful of the police.

But the scream was renewed.

‘Why, I’m blessed,’ said one, ‘if he ain’t got the D.T.!’

Could anything be more horrible, as the angry keepers mocked and jeered and maddened him? Struggling and shrieking, he was borne off by men stronger than himself to the nearest hospital, and for awhile there was peace.

CHAPTER XIII.

CONCERNING SAL.

And where had the woman gone? Westward, we are told by the poet, the course of empire takes its way. She had gone west, and very naturally; not at first, she was too artful for that—her old man, as she called him (she did not know his proper name), might be after her, and she had had enough of him, and wanted to be free. In this case she had not two strings to her bow. She was not thinking of accepting a new keeper in the case of the one cashiered. She simply wanted to be free—at any rate for awhile. As to the child left behind, she had no thought of that. Somebody would give it a crust and a night's lodging. Then it would roam into the streets to be picked up by the police, and supported by the British taxpayer.

We are a very humane people. The more people neglect their offspring, the more ready are we to look after them. If Sal, as she was called, had been a true and tender-hearted woman, she would have dragged the little fellow out with her into the cold, raw night away from Sloville. He might have caught his death o' cold, and then and there ceased to be a blessing to her or anybody else. As a waif off the streets he had a better chance of being clothed, and fed, and educated, and cared for, and planted out in life. It is thus we reward our rascals. It is thus we relieve fathers and mothers of their responsibility, do our duty, ease our consciences, and offer a premium to vice.

Finding the way clear, our Sal emerged from her hiding-place, and made her way, as much hidden as possible by the dark shades of lofty walls, towards Waterloo Bridge. She was a remarkable woman, was our Sal. Her father was an agricultural labourer, earning his ten or twelve shillings a week, and bringing up a numerous family on that exceedingly limited sum. At the National school she had learned, in a very imperfect way, to read and write, to do a little needlework, and to curtsy to her betters.

As she grew up, she displayed alike her good looks and good manners. As to morals, they were not to be expected of a girl who lived in a cottage with but one sleeping room for the entire family, and whose good looks exposed her to the bucolic amativeness of the Bœotians of the district. All her ambition was to go to London in service in a superior family. She had known girls leave that district and come back real ladies, though they were as low down in the world as herself. One of the girls, a little older than herself, had gone to London, and turned gay; and what was the result? That she was living with the son of a lord, and she and all the other girls, who soon learned the story, were quite eager to be off to win, if possible, a similar prize.

Surely that was better than hard work, or remaining satisfied with the station in which God had placed them, as they were told every Sunday they ought to be—if that only meant marriage with Hodge, and the workhouse when she and Hodge would be past work. It was all very well to be called a good girl by the Rector's wife, to be confirmed, whatever that might mean, as a matter of course, by the Bishop, to sing in the parochial choir, and once a year to be admitted to the privileges of the Sunday-school treat; but that did not buy her a new bonnet, or prevent her wearing her old clothes, or save her from doing a lot of drudgery at times when she preferred romping in the hayfields with Farmer Giles's sons, strapping young fellows, just as rustic and as ignorant as herself.

A time came when she went out to service at a country house just by. A London lady of fashion saw her, was attracted by her appearance, and got her to come to town. The illustrious aristocrat she married was taken with the kitchen wench, as her ladyship indignantly termed her, and then there was a row, and the poor girl was ignominiously discharged to hide her head where she could, and to give birth to an illegitimate child. That aristocratic admirer was Sir Watkin Strahan.

Everyone heard the story of Sal's disgrace in her native village, and she dared not return thither. She had to hide herself in London where she could, and to live as best she could, all the while cherishing a fearful revenge against the gay Baronet.

Her aristocratic seducer sent her fifty pounds, with an intimation that in that quarter she was to look for no more, and that she must do the best she could for herself. With that money, later on, she married a Sloville inhabitant, who soon died and left her destitute.

Naturally, in her fallen state, she took to drink, and she drank till her good looks were gone—till she was a bundle of filthy rags, till she had lost alike all decency and sense of shame. It was nothing new to her to prowl about London by night when honesty and respectability had gone to bed. She rather liked the excitement of that kind of life.

On she went beneath the lamps and the stars, past gin palaces, where fair young girls were learning to fall as completely and rapidly as herself; past cadgers and tramps, like herself on the look-out for what chance might send in their way; past old criminals, training young ones in the same dreary and joyless round. She saw what we all of us see if we walk out of a night, the drunken harlot run in by the police, who stand in admiration as her more fortunate and equally sinning sister drives by in her brougham. She saw ragged, distress, imperiously bidden to be off, whilst wealthy rascality, in pomp and majesty, was drawn in a carriage and pair with fine flunkies behind. She peered into club windows, where rich sinners quaff rich wine in warmth and comfort, while their victims walk the streets in sorrow and despair.

She stood on Waterloo Bridge—that bridge of sighs—where many a poor girl has leaped

‘Mad with life’s history,
Glad to death’s mystery,
Swift to be hurled
Anywhere—anywhere
Out of the world.’

And she felt half inclined to climb over and do the same herself, only the water looked so black and cold, and she put off her half-formed purpose for another day. Perhaps, also, she was too old for that sort of thing. She should have taken the false leap when she was gay and good-looking. Then the papers would have made London ring with her story, and the low pictorial pennies would have made her the subject of a sensational sketch.

As she was, alas! prematurely old, and wrinkled, and gray, no one would take any notice of her; it was hardly worth while attempting to drown herself, she thought. She might as well live on, she could not well be worse off; and then she sat herself down in the arch and fell asleep, dreaming of— But who can tell the grotesque misery of a tramp's dream?

Suddenly she was awoken by the policeman's grasp.

‘Well, old ’oman,’ said he, ‘you’ve been having a nice time of it here.’

‘And why not?’ said she, waking up to a sense of her condition. ‘Why not? What’s the harm of sleeping out here? I arn’t kicking up a row—I arn’t creating a disturbance—I arn’t screaming “Perlice!” am I? I arn’t in no ways disrespectful or aggravatin’—why can’t you let me be?’

‘‘Cause it is agin the perlice regulations,’ was the reply.

‘The perlice regulations, what are they?’

‘Why, that you must not stop here, and it is as much as my place is worth to let you.’

‘Oh, p’liceman, don’t be hard on a poor old woman that’s enjoying the hevening hair!’

‘No, I can’t,’ said he. ‘I am going over the bridge. When I come back, don’t let me find you here. You’ve had a nice little nap. You must be as fresh as a daisy now.’

‘Perhaps I am, and perhaps I am not,’ said the poor woman, as she renewed her aimless walk.

In a few minutes she was in the Strand, just as the theatres were emptied of admiring crowds. Of course the poor woman knew all about such matters. Many a time in the pride of youth had she spent an evening in the pit. Many a time, at a later period, she had sold lucifer matches at the pit doors, and many were the coppers she had earned thereby.

She liked to see the bright lamps, and the swells, and the women, as well as anyone else. The sight, she said, did her old eyes good. That night the crowd had been unusually large. The last theatrical star, as she learned from the bills, Miss Kate Howard, had been performing, and all the world and his wife had come there to see.

‘Lor’ bless me!’ said Sal to herself, ‘I’ll go to the stage-door at the back. I’ve seen a good many of these women in my time. I’d like to see what this one is like. I suppose she is like all the rest of ’em, as fine as paint and fine feathers can make ’em, but not of much account, neither. Many of ’em ain’t much better than me, after all.’

She turned up a side-street, hurried down another, and soon was at the stage-door.

A brougham was drawn up before it; on the box a page was seated. As she looked, her first impulse was to scream out his name. It was her Sloville boy, looking clean and respectable.

‘Wait a bit, Sally,’ she said to herself. ‘This is a serious business. It ought to be made to pay. Oh, my fine young gentleman belongs to the popular actress. Ah, if I can come the broken-hearted mother dodge it ought to bring me a fiver.’

Presently there was a rustle under the stage-door, and a pressure of the crowd without. The actress appeared wrapped up and well attended. As she leaped into the brougham she told the driver to make the best of his way home.

‘Gad! I know that voice,’ said a gentleman in the crowd. ‘It is that girl Rose; good heavens! where’s her home? Oh, there you are, Harry,’ said he, speaking to the manager as he stood at the door watching the brougham as it drove away. ‘You’ve done it to-night, you have! Where on earth does that woman live?’

‘Well, Sir Watkin, I can tell you, but it is no good. She lives with her mother.’

‘And is married?’ he eagerly exclaimed.

‘Yes, to be sure. No, not married, but just about to be so.’

‘Then, I am after her!’ he exclaimed. ‘Faint heart never won fair lady.’

‘It is a wild goose-chase, Sir Watkin;’ but Sir Watkin was off in a hansom, nevertheless, not before, however, our Sal had made an effort to secure him, which effort he impatiently evaded, bidding her ‘go to the d----’ and not bother him.

‘You nearly had him then, old girl,’ said a ragged bystander, in a voice perfectly familiar to her ear. It was the tramp’s chum from Mint Street.

‘You here?’ said she, in a tone which did not express delight. ‘I thought yer was as tight as my old man.’

‘Not exactly; as soon as I missed you I thought I’d see that you did not come to harm.’

‘Thank you for nothin’,’ said the woman angrily.

‘Now, don’t be angry,’ he said, with a good-natured smile, ‘now I’ve come. I wants to do yer a good turn. That old tramp will be cotched to-morrow as sure as eggs is eggs, and I thought I’d better tell ye to keep out of the way.’

‘Out of the way; wot do you mean? Do you think I’ve been up to anything?’

‘No, of course not,’ said the chum in a mocking tone; ‘but appearances ain’t promising, and that is all I’ve got to say. You’d better work yer way along with me to-night.’

‘Where to?’

‘Down Drury Lane way; it ain’t safe to be in the Boro’.’

‘But lor, bless me, how you’ve altered!’ said Sal. ‘You had a couple of arms; wot have you done with one?’

‘Oh, it is buttoned down by my side.’

‘And your boots, where are they?’

‘Hid away in my clothes. Ain’t it a capital dodge? I gets lots of coppers when I thus go out cadging. I was goin’ to perform on the bridge, when I saw you walk past, and then I followed. I ain’t made much money to-night. Perhaps we’d better go home.’

‘You’re very kind, but I think I shall stop here.’

‘No you won’t,’ said the man.

He had watched the woman, and he had come to the conclusion that something was up. He had seen how she gazed at the lad on the box; how her face betrayed emotion at the sight of the actress; how she had endeavoured to speak to a swell as he was talking to the manager at the stage-door, and he had rapidly formed a conclusion in his own mind that Sal somehow or other had connections which might, in due time, be made subservient to his own interest. He was a sneak and a cur, but he had a plausible way of talking and a certain amount of cunning which he had always turned to excellent account. It was with gratification, then, that he found the woman was half persuaded to listen to his proposals. Alas! there’s many a slip between the cup and the lip. As they stood arguing the matter, a cab dashed up against them,

and when he came to his senses he found his Sal, as he called her, had been taken to the accident ward of the nearest hospital.

‘That’s just like my ill-luck,’ said he, with an angry oath, as he turned away in search of cheap lodgings for what was left of the night.

Happily it did not much matter to him if he went to bed late. He was under no necessity to rise early the next morning. The tramp in old times led a merry life. In London, at the present time, he certainly leads an idle one.

Let us follow our Sal to the hospital, one of those noble institutions which are the glory and pride of London, the money to support which had been left long ago by pious founders, and which have been the means of saving many a life, of setting many a broken limb, and of curing many a foul disease. Under its august wall and in its studious cloisters many generations of medical students had been trained up for a profession which has done much to make life worth living, to stay the advance of disease, to battle with grim death. Gibbon tells us the world is more ready to honour its destroyers than its saviours. The taunt is too true. When it ceases to be that, the medical profession will receive its due homage and reward. The courage of the medical man is quite equal to that of the hero on the battle-field. His ardour in the pursuit of his vocation is greater, and the good he does, what tongue can adequately tell? in generosity, in readiness to relieve human suffering, where is the equal of the medical man? The more illustrious he is, the more ready he is to give of his time and money to the poor. There is no truer Samaritan than a medical man.

The hospital was over London Bridge, as the tourist who rushes to Brighton is well aware. It stands a lasting monument to the charitable London publisher known as Guy. It covers a considerable extent of ground, and consists of several buildings more or less detached. Little of the original building remains, as, like the British Constitution, it has grown considerably beyond the general design.

Thomas Guy, Alderman of the City of London, and M.P. for Taunton, who made his fortune by a printing contract, by buying sailors’ tickets, and by South Sea speculations, was little aware of what London would become in the Victorian era, or of the enormous amount of suffering and disease that would be reached and alleviated by the hospital of which he was the original founder.

As you enter you have little idea of its extent. On each side are the residences of officers and medical men. Then you go under a porch, where students have their letters addressed them, and look into a spacious quadrangle, lined with wards, which were part of the original building. Further on are newer buildings and museums, fitted up for the use of students, and in every way skilfully planned for the accommodation of patients. On one side is a theatre for surgical operations, a dead-house for post-mortem examinations, and a little green, on which in fine weather patients are permitted to take a little exercise, and to congratulate each other on the fact that this time they have given the old gentleman, who is always drawn with a scythe and an hour-glass, the slip. Further beyond are the gates which admit the enormous mass of out-patients, who, alas! most of them require what not even Guy’s can give them—fresh air, good food, and a little more cash than they can manage to secure by their daily labour. It is rather a melancholy place to visit. Looking up at the long windows all round you, you can’t help thinking what human suffering lies concealed behind them, and misery defying alike the aid of doctor or nurse or chaplain. Science may do, and does do, all it can to make the place healthful. Thoughtful consideration may line the walls with pictures, and make the old wards gay with summer flowers, and the nurse may be the kindest and tenderest of her sex to whom we instinctively turn when in pain, and suffering for relief; but, nevertheless, you feel in a hospital as if you were in a city of the dying and the dead.

Our Sal was at once carried to the accident ward, and taken care of by tender nurses and watchful surgeons. No bones were broken, but she was very much bruised, and the recovery, if she did recover, it was clear would be long and tedious. The chances were very much against her. Drink and evil living had wrecked her stamina in spite of the fine constitution which she had received from her parents and her early country life. Fever set in, and it seemed as if the poor woman would have sunk. She was often delirious, and her mind wandered.

‘There’s something that keeps her back,’ said her attendant guardian. ‘She has either committed some crime she wants to confess, or she has some secret of which she would fain get rid,’ and the physician was right.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN ENCOUNTER.

One morning, shortly after the events described in the previous chapter, all England was startled by the intelligence that the Ministry had been beaten, that the leader of the Liberal Party had resigned, and that the free and independent were to be called on to exercise their privileges by returning members to Parliament likely to serve them well, and to promote the honour of the country, and the best interests of the community at large. I write this last sentence with peculiar pleasure. It sounds nice and pleasant. The fact is, I fear, the free and independent electors, as a rule, take little interest in politics. The working man is, as he has every right to be, suspicious of both parties alike, and especially of his oratorical brother of his own class, who comes to him with a pocket well lined as the result of his professional talk.

Liberal and Conservative clubs and newspapers were much excited. According to them never had there been such tremendous interests at stake. They, the enlightened, were to rally round the altar and the throne, both in danger, said the latter, while the former called on the intelligent manhood of the country to take one more step in the paths of progress and reform, and by that step to secure for ever the triumphs our forefathers had won for us with their blood.

Never were there such tremendous gatherings at Sloville. The Liberal leaders had held an open air meeting, which was the grandest thing of the kind ever known, but it was surpassed by an artfully got up demonstration by the Tories, accompanied by popular sports and cakes and ale. The one drawback to the success of the Liberal Party was that they had been in office for half a dozen years, and had disgusted all their friends, and had given the enemy occasion to blaspheme by their utter inability to pass any good measures, by their irresolute policy on foreign matters, by their extravagant expenditure at home, by their complete abandonment of their old battle-cry of 'peace, retrenchment, and reform.' Trade also was bad, and that did not mend matters. People are always discontented when times are bad. That is always the fault of the Government for the time being. It is generally assumed also that they are, to a certain extent, responsible for the weather. There had been a great deal of wet, and that the farmers attributed to the Radical element.

Farmers are naturally averse to Radicals. The Radical naturally thinks the farmers fools, because they are averse to change, and prefer to vote for their landlords to strangers sent down to agitate the country, who did not own an acre of land in it, who resided chiefly in our great cities, and who had little sympathy with agriculturists or agriculture in any shape.

The farmers are not quite such fools as the town radicals are apt to fancy. Most of them had good landlords, and few of them were averse to the Church, and it was pretty clear to the agricultural mind that whilst the big loaf, like the celebrated Pickwick pen, was a boon and a blessing to men, it was a grievous loss to themselves; much more so than was anticipated by the learned, who assured the farmers that it was impossible to flood the market with American wheat under fifty shillings the quarter. At Sloville also the brewers were afraid of the Liberal Party, who seemed much inclined to shut up the public-houses or, at any rate, to worry the trade. They struck up an alliance with the Church, and that alliance between the friends of the Bible and beer threatened serious danger to Liberals at Sloville as well as elsewhere.

It was clear that the battle to be fought was a very severe one; that a good deal of money would have to be spent on both sides; a great many windy orations made, and a good deal of the trickery usual at election time would have to be resorted to. The theory of representative institutions is beautiful. Nothing sounds finer than an appeal to the country. It is a grand thing for the rulers of the people to have to come to them at times, and ask for a renewal of their confidence, and a new lease of political power. It presumes that the public take an interest in public questions, that they are educated and intelligent; that they know their duty, and are prepared to discharge it; that they are above all paltry and personal considerations; that they only care for the public good. It assumes also that the candidates are men of intelligence and patriotism—not merely wealthy nobodies anxious for the social distinction of a seat in Parliament; or barristers in search of office; or aristocratic hangers-on, hoping, by means of Parliamentary influence, to secure an honourable position in one or other of the services: diplomatic, or naval, or military.

For a long time Sloville had rejoiced in an independent Radical as a representative, and yet Sloville was hard up. It is true that he had feathered his own nest by securing for his son a good Government appointment, but that had been no benefit to Sloville. He had also offended his constituents by the paltry way in which he subscribed to the local charities and local amusements. He was believed to be niggardly. It was known that he dealt at the Civil Service Stores. It was clear that no Sloville tradesman would vote for him. He had declined to pay the expenses of local Liberals, and in disgust they had hawked about the borough to anyone who would come down handsomely on their behalf. The managers of the party were in despair. Happily Sir Watkin Strahan offered them his services. He had property in the borough. His family were always good to the poor, and as a racing and betting man he was popular with the sporting fraternity. Sir Watkin was accepted as a matter of course.

A day or two after the dissolution of Parliament had been announced, as Wentworth was breakfasting in his solitary chambers in Clifford's Inn, slowly reading the morning papers, and meditating out of what material he could make best a leader, he heard a rap at the door. Opening it, a stranger met his view—tall, aristocratic, well dressed, in the prime of life, with the air and appearance of a gentleman.

‘You're Mr. Wentworth, I believe,’ he said.

‘That's my name, sir.’

‘I am Sir Watkin Strahan,’ was the reply, as he handed his card to Wentworth.

‘Pray walk in, Sir Watkin.’

Sir Watkin complied with the request.

Taking a chair, and lighting a cigar offered him by Wentworth, who did the same, the stranger continued:

‘I am commissioned to call on you by Mr. Blank,’ naming the proprietor of a morning journal with which Mr. Wentworth was connected. ‘The fact is, we are on the eve of a General Election.’

‘I am perfectly aware of that,’ said Wentworth, smiling.

‘Undoubtedly; and I come to solicit your aid.’

‘How can I help you?’

‘Why, the fact is, I am anxious for a seat in Parliament.’

‘For what purpose: public or private?’

‘Why, Mr. Wentworth, how can you ask? I am a Liberal.’

‘And, then, are all Liberals public spirited, and not averse to feathering their own nest when they have a chance?’

‘Well, you know,’ replied the Baronet, ‘our party always aim at the public good.’

‘Yes; but professions and practice don’t always harmonize. Sometimes private interest draws one way, and public duty points another.’

Sir Watkin coloured. He had consented to fight Sloville in the Liberal interest, but he had made a bargain on the subject with his party, and Wentworth’s casual remark had gone home.

Wentworth continued:

‘In what way can I help you, Sir Watkin?’

‘Mr. Blank tells me that you know something of Sloville.’

‘Very little, indeed. I was there a short while some years ago. That is all. I doubt whether I can do you any good there.’

‘Oh yes, you can. I recollect hearing you speak on the night of the Chartist meeting, and upon my word you spoke out well. There are many who still remember that speech.’

‘Yes; but it did not gain me many friends.’

‘Well, it was talked about for a good while after.’

‘Do you want me to repeat it?’

‘Not exactly, but I am not much of a speaker myself, and I want a clever man like yourself to be by my side, and speak now and then on my behalf. Of course I should be prepared to pay handsomely for such assistance.’

‘I am much obliged for the offer. Of course I feel complimented by it,’ said Wentworth; ‘but I fear that sort of thing is not much in my line. Indeed, I hear so much oratory that I am sick of it, and have come to regard an orator as a personal enemy, who really desires to do me wrong. In the heat of the moment an orator is apt to forget himself, to fling charges against his opponents which he cannot justify, and make promises to the people which he cannot perform. I fear a good deal of humbug goes on when there is much oratory, and that a man who gets into a habit of public speaking later on becomes a humbug himself. At any rate, I know this is true of some of our London popular orators. You may be better in the country. It is to be hoped you are.’

‘As to oratory, we are very badly off. And that is the real reason,’ said Sir Watkin, ‘why I came to you. I am not, as I have said, much of a speaker myself. Whereas my Conservative opponent is a clever barrister, with a tremendous gift of gab.’

‘Yes, that is it. You ought to go to a barrister and take him down with you. So long as a barrister is well paid he is ready to speak on any side.’

‘But there are difficulties which I fear will prevent my doing that. I want a novelty—a newspaper man, in fact. Lawyers have such a professional style of talking. They deceive no one; no one believes them. If a

lawyer ever does by accident make a good speech it carries no weight with it. It is expected as a matter of course. If a lawyer can't talk we don't think much of him or his law, and then there is another reason.'

'What is that?' said Wentworth, lazily puffing his cigar.

'Lawyers ain't popular at Sloville with the Radicals. They say that our present law is a disgrace to the country, and that as long as we fill the House with lawyers, we shall never get a proper measure of law reform. In our town the people are very much opposed to lawyers and parsons.'

'Very wrong of them,' said Wentworth ironically.

'Very wrong, indeed,' replied the Baronet; 'but we must take people as we find them, and act accordingly. It is no use sending down a lawyer to fight for me. The people would not go to hear him. Their last representative won by the aid of a lawyer, and they won't stand another.'

'But, then, in London there are no end of men who pass themselves off as working-men politicians, though it is precious little work they do. I believe they are to be had at a very moderate figure, and they can do the roaring part of the business first-rate. They are always trotted out when the Liberals want to get up a grand demonstration, more especially when the Conservatives are in place and power. Had not you better take one or two of them down with you? They'll be sure to fetch the rest.'

'Alas, I've tried them,' said the Baronet, 'and I found they were of no use. As soon as they had fingered a fiver or two they began to give themselves such airs. I could not get on with them at all, and after all,' said the speaker, looking down complacently at his well-dressed figure, 'people prefer a gentleman.'

'Perhaps so; but real gentlemen are scarce nowadays,' said Wentworth. 'Where is the real gentleman now, brave, truthful, unsullied, with hands and heart clean, without fear or reproach? In political life, at any rate, he seems to me almost as extinct as the dodo.'

Wentworth was getting on dangerous ground. He had a faint suspicion that his visitor was not one of this class. The visitor felt it himself, and was getting rather uncomfortable in consequence. He had come on business to hire a speaker, and to pay him for his services, and to be helped in other ways. Fellows who wrote in newspapers had, he knew, many ways of obliging a friend. It was important to him to get into Parliament. If he carried Sloville he conferred a favour on Ministers, who would reward him in due time with a comfortable office, where the pay was heavy and the burden light, and just at that time money was an object to our Baronet, who as a gambler and man of the world managed to get rid of a good deal of it in the course of a year. At any rate he rather liked the look of M.P. after his name, and M.P. he was determined to be. All his life he had lived in excitement, and now he had reached an age when the excitement of politics in lieu of wine or women or horse-racing or gambling had special charms.

'You see,' he remarked, 'we are an old family in the neighbourhood, and we have a certain amount of legitimate influence which will certainly be in my favour.'

He might have added that in the day of rotten boroughs it was as proprietor of Sloville, and as in that capacity a useful servant of the Government, that the first baronet of the family had been adorned with his hereditary rank. A Royal Duke had been guilty of gross misconduct—a slight indiscretion it was termed by his friends. The matter was brought before Parliament, and a vote by no means complimentary to H.R.H.—either as regards morals, or manners, or understanding—would have been carried, had not the Strahan of that day saved the Government by his casting vote. Government was grateful, and so was Strahan—in the sense of further favours to come.

‘Well, that is something,’ said Wentworth; ‘birth and connection are of some account in politics.’

‘I should think so,’ said the Baronet.

‘And the borough is Liberal?’

‘Most decidedly.’

‘And you have a good chance of success?’

‘Yes; if it were not for the publicans, who have great influence, and are bitterly opposed to the Liberals.’

‘Naturally; their craft is in danger. Well, I might run down to one or two of your meetings.’

‘Thanks; I’m much obliged. I thought about having a public meeting next week. There is no time to lose. It is a great thing to be first in the field.’

Just as Wentworth was about to reply, the door opened, and the actress rushed in. Suddenly perceiving that Wentworth had company, she exclaimed:

‘I beg pardon. I thought you were alone.’

‘Never mind, madam,’ said the Baronet; ‘we have just finished what we had to say,’ turning to address the last comer. All at once he faltered, and turned all the colours of the rainbow. Could it be? Yes, it was the poor girl he had brought up to London, and then deserted—left, as he coolly supposed, to perish on the streets, and whom, to his surprise, he had seen radiant on the stage.

A stony and contemptuous stare was the actress’s only reply.

‘Dear me,’ said the Baronet, recovering his self-possession. ‘’Pon my honour, this is an unexpected pleasure;’ but before he had finished his sentence Rose had gone.

‘You’ll excuse me, I am sure,’ said the Baronet, turning round to Wentworth; ‘I believe that young lady and I are old friends. I had lost sight of her for a long while, and to my intense astonishment and gratification I found her acting at Drury Lane. I followed her the other night in a cab in order to overtake her and explain everything; but her coachman was quicker than mine, and I was obliged to give up the chase.’

‘I am sorry you should have had so much trouble, Sir Watkin. That young lady needs no attention from you, nor will she require any explanation.’

‘Well, I am sure I congratulate you, Mr. Wentworth, to have such an acquaintance,’ returned the Baronet ungraciously. ‘Her beauty as a girl quite overcame me, and I was very much tempted to act in a foolish manner to her. We men of the world are apt to do silly things.’

‘Instead,’ said Wentworth, with increasing anger, ‘you preferred to make a fool of her. I found her when you had thrown her off, and abandoned her to the cruel mercies of the world. I saw her in her bitter agony and despair. I saved her from dishonour. For all you cared she might have been on the streets in infamy and rags. She has little to thank you for. I know how she had been deceived. Weeping, she told me the story of her life; but I never knew who was the wrong-doer until this moment. I have an account to settle with him,’ he added angrily.

‘And you find him penitent,’ said the Baronet.

‘Penitent or not, I vowed I would call him to account.’

‘My good sir,’ said the Baronet, ‘how was I to know that the lady was in any danger? I was not even in England at the time. I felt she would soon forget me, as indeed she seems to have done,’ added the speaker sarcastically. ‘Now I come to think of it,’ he continued, ‘I think it is I, indeed, who have reason to complain. You see with what scorn she treated me as she came into the room.’

‘Surely, Sir Watkin cannot wonder at that.’

‘On the contrary, I think it rather hard, after the money I spent on her.’

‘That won’t do, Sir Watkin! You, and such as you, are a disgrace to your class; cruel as wild beasts you spend your lives in pursuit of victims whom you ruin with fair words and foul lies and for foul ends. A time must come when England will no longer tolerate such men in her midst. English women will come to the rescue of their tempted sisters. Society will demand that wealth should not thus be iniquitously squandered in pursuit of vice and selfish gratifications. There is no greater crime a rich man can commit, and yet there is no punishment can reach him. The rich man can always get off, or take himself off. He leaves the seduced to perish of want and infamy, while he is honoured and admired.’

‘Upon my word, Mr. Wentworth, you are using language which I am quite unaccustomed to.’

‘I dare say you are, Sir Watkin; but it is the language of truth and soberness, nevertheless.’

‘Why, one would fancy you were a parson, and availing yourself of the privileges of the cloth,’ said the Baronet with sneer.

‘I was very near being one,’ said Wentworth; ‘and now I recollect that it was then you and I met for the first time. I remember you nearly ran over a poor old woman who was coming to hear me preach.’

‘Upon my word you have a good memory. I’d forgotten all about it.’

‘So good a memory,’ said Wentworth, ‘that for the future I recommend you to keep out of my way.’

‘By all means,’ replied the Baronet; ‘but you ought to hear what I have to say in my defence. I own my conduct was shabby.’

‘It was infamous.’

‘But recollect what a mess I was in.’

‘I will not hear another word,’ said Wentworth. ‘Leave this room, or—’

But there was no occasion to say what he meant to say. Putting on his hat and gathering up his gloves, the Baronet retreated as quickly as he could, looking very different to the finished and self-satisfied appearance of respectability he presented when he first knocked at the door.

‘The scoundrel!’ said Wentworth to himself when alone. ‘He will hear from me further. I have not done with him yet. I’ll meet him at Philippi. I’ll take care that he does not get in for Sloville after all.’

And he kept his word.

CHAPTER XV.

ELECTIONEERING.

The writ for Sloville would be out in a few days. The defeated Liberals were winding up business in Parliament as quickly as possible, in order at once to appeal to the country. The Tadpoles and Tapers were at their wits' ends for a good cry. Wentworth rushed down to Sloville, invited the electors to hear him, advertised in the local papers, and covered the walls with his posters. He was for the extension of the Franchise to all men of age of sound mind, untainted by crime, and to all women who paid rates and taxes. He advocated the separation of Church and State, arbitration instead of war, reduction of national expenditure, a reform of the House of Lords, free trade in land, and free secular education. He was ready even to give Ireland as much Home Rule as he would give to England or Scotland. At that time the great Liberal leader had not dreamed of anything of the kind.

'I like that,' said the Tory candidate to his agent; 'all the respectable people will vote for me.'

'Confound the fellow!' said Sir Watkin, in a rage. 'I shall have hard work to beat that, and if I did the people would never believe I meant it. I am of an old Whig family, and it is hard to give up one's principles.'

'We shall have to *finesse* a bit,' said Sir Watkin's agent and confidential man. 'Suppose you placard yourself as the working-man's friend.'

'Capital!' said Sir Watkin delightedly.

'Suppose we send agents to break up all his meetings, so that he can't be heard.'

'A capital idea!'

'Suppose we get the Rev. George Windbag, the leading Dissenting minister in the town, to make a grand speech at our first meeting, to talk of the need of unity and the danger of splitting up the Liberal Party. We can secure the man at once, Sir Watkin, if you will but ask him to dinner at the Hall. There is not a bigger tuft-hunter in the county, and he has immense weight with the respectable shop-keeping class.'

'Capital!' repeated the Baronet.

'And suppose we get one or two Chartists from town. They will be sure to come. Pay them well, and feed them well, and you can do anything with them.'

'Right you are,' said the Baronet.

'And we might get a Socialist or Republican down.'

'What for?'

'To divide the Rads.'

‘But I hate them like poison,’ said the Baronet.

‘Never mind,’ said the agent. ‘You need not appear in the matter. Leave them to me. I know how to secure them. This ain’t the first time I’ve been electioneering.’

‘So it seems,’ said the Baronet. ‘All I say is, keep me out of a scrape.’

‘That is not quite so easy as it was. Yet the thing can be done; Parliament, naturally being in favour of returning rich men to Parliament, is never much in earnest in attempting to put down bribery and corruption.’

‘Ah! my father had never much difficulty in securing his seat,’ said the Baronet in a tone of regret.

‘Yes; but he spent a good deal of money, as I have heard.’

‘That was true; but he got it all back again.’

‘Yes, he had an easy life of it. I was looking over Oldmixon, and he thus describes the borough as it was in the good old times. You recollect the town sent two members till the Reform Bill of 1831 robbed us of one?’

‘I have heard my father say so; but read what Oldmixon says.’

“‘SLOVILLE.—This is a large town, containing more than a thousand houses, where the right of election is confined to a corporation of twenty-four individuals, who elect each other. The inhabitants have no share in choosing the members or magistrates, and as all these corporations—possessing exclusive rights of electing Members of Parliament—have some powerful nobleman or opulent commoner who finds it his interest to take the lead and management of their political influence, the election of the members is directed by this patron. The Earl of Fee-Fum, who has a seat at Marbourne, within seven miles of the town, and Watkin Strahan, Esq., of Elm Hall, whose residence and estate are also in the neighbourhood, have first command of this corporation.” At that time the number of votes, according to Oldmixon, was twenty-four.’

‘And now there are a thousand electors on the register. It is a pity we ever had Parliamentary reform.’

‘Sir Watkin, you are a Whig, are you not?’ said the agent.

‘Oh yes, of course I am. That was only my fun.’

‘It would not be fun if the people heard it.’

‘No, perhaps not. But we are talking privately and confidentially.’

‘Of course we are.’

‘But to business. How do matters stand?’

‘It is impossible to be better, or, rather, it would have been impossible. I’ve been nursing the borough a long while, but now the appearance of another Liberal candidate will give the Conservative a chance such as he otherwise would not have had.’

‘Yes, that is pretty clear. But how can we get rid of this Wentworth?’

‘Leave that to me. We can make it pretty hot for him. Just at this time the town is unusually full of roughs, and I know where to lay my hand on them. Brown, the Conservative agent, told me yesterday that he could always get a bigger lot of roughs than the Liberals. “I ain’t quite sure of that,” said I to myself, “as I think this Mr. Wentworth will find out before we are done with him.” Of course, he has got no money?’

‘Well, I don’t suppose he has,’ said Sir Watkin; ‘he is only a newspaper writer. Just like the impudence of his class. They talk about the fourth estate, and think themselves equals to Kings, Lords and Commons. However, we are right as far as the press is concerned. We have only one paper here, and that is ours. The proprietor is hard up. He owes me a lot of money, and he knows on which side his bread is buttered.’

The next day Wentworth came down to hold the first public meeting, and that same day every voter had a bill—and a good many who were not besides—as follows:

TO THE
RADICAL AND LIBERAL ELECTORS
OF THE

BOROUGH OF SLOVILLE.

ATTEND THE
MEETING AT THE TOWN HALL,

ON THURSDAY EVENING,
At 7.45 sharp,
To prevent the Election of the Tory Candidate.

The placard was not in vain. The good seed had been sown on fruitful soil. The chairman, an old gentleman with whom Wentworth was familiar when he was a student, was quite unequal to the occasion, and he gave in at the first sign of a squall.

Let me recommend all Parliamentary candidates, when there is a contested election, to be very particular as to their chairman. An immense deal depends upon him. He ought to have a personal knowledge of all the individuals in the meeting, and an imperturbable good nature. He ought to have an enthusiastic prepossession in favour of his candidate. He ought to have a voice that could be heard above the roaring of any storm. He should have an intuitive faculty at feeling the pulse of the meeting. He should be a master of making an adversary look ridiculous. He should have the physical power to sit out any time in the midst of any row, no matter how noisy the crowd, and how heated the atmosphere. His tact should be great. He should have immense personal influence in the place. Above all, he should never lose his temper or have recourse to threats, unless he has an overwhelming majority on his side.

When Wentworth appeared upon the scene he saw at a glance that his enemies were far more numerous than his friends. His chairman, for instance, had taken no trouble about the meeting. He had not even brought a friend with him, and he and Wentworth had the platform almost entirely to themselves. This was an initial mistake. Learn of me, O candidate, and never attend a public meeting unless you can fill the platform with out-and-out adherents; men who will applaud in season and out; men whose solid front will impose on the ignorant and thoughtless; men whose countenances will express the utmost rapture at your stalest jokes or feeblest witticisms, who will seem absorbed and riveted by your dreariest display of statistics, and who will cheer the louder the more you stumble and get confused. Canning understood how

useful aid of that sort was to a speaker when he wrote:

‘Cheer him when his audience flag,
Brother Riley, Brother Bragg;
Cheer him when he hobbles vilely,
Brother Bragg and Brother Riley.’

Again, another secret in the way of successful public meetings is to have beside the chairman, and in front of the audience, a jolly looking fellow always ready to laugh. We English are an imitative people. One laughter on the platform will make many laugh below. Laughter is contagious. One man laughs because he sees another doing so, and in nine cases out of ten at a public meeting if you ask him he can give no better reason. Ladies are all very well in front, if the meeting is harmonious, and they are well dressed and good-looking; but if they are well bred they do not roar out, and if they clap their hands it is in such a graceful feminine manner as to produce no effect like your red-faced jolly fellow, always ready with the loud laugh that speaks the vacant mind.

A few Radicals, delighted at Mr. Wentworth’s programme, were in the hall at the far end. Unfortunately between them and the platform were the enemy, who had rallied round in consequence of the lying hand-bill, and they were led by a full-necked gamekeeper, who roared like a bull of Bashan all the time Mr. Wentworth was speaking, or rather, attempting to speak. Sir Watkin Strahan’s agent was also present, to watch with complacency the result of his trick. The roughs had an idea that the more noise they made the better, and their number was increased by some of the Free and Independent, who had met the Gent from London, as they termed him, at the railway station, and who had been immensely disgusted, that in reply to their hints as to his ordering a supply of beer, he had intimated that so far as he could judge they had had enough already. That was adding insult to injury, and they resented it accordingly.

At all times the Free and Independent are a thirsty race, particularly at election times. In every beer-shop in the borough Wentworth had thus raised up a host of enemies. In many a borough the election has been fought and won by beer alone; there is no other product of man’s industry, unfortunately, such a power, and the publican is not such a fool as he looks.

‘Who do you vote for?’ said I to one of them at the time of an election contest.

‘For them as I gets the most by,’ was his reply.

Frightened at the aspect of affairs, the aged chairman, with a feeble, trembling voice, told his fellow-townsmen that he had the pleasure of introducing to them Mr. Wentworth, a clever journalist from London, whom some of them knew when he was formerly a preacher in that town, and whom he hoped they would listen to that evening with all the respect and attention the occasion demanded. It was with difficulty and not a little interruption that the chairman could say as much, and then he collapsed, wishing that he had stayed at home in the bosom of his family. The London candidate then came forward, to be assailed with a howl of derision from his foes closely packed in the front, while but a faint cheer from the far end was now and then perceptible as the roar was slightly lulled.

‘Gentlemen, pray give Mr. Wentworth a fair hearing,’ cried the chairman, and again the storm grew and the confusion increased. ‘Order! order!’ said the chairman, screaming at the top of his voice. He might just as well have spoken to the winds or waves. Then he grew angry and began to threaten, and that only made matters worse. Wentworth, erect as a statue and with folded arms, calmly surveyed the scene. It was not a pleasant sight; it suggests to one the truth of the Darwinian origin of the human race. In a crowd

men act like monkeys. I remember as a boy sneaking into an election crowd and calling a decent, respectable, white-haired old baronet, who had been the Tory representative of the county for a quarter of a century, and whom every decent body respected, the old Benacre Bull (Benacre being the name of the village in which he lived); and everyone repeated the nickname till the old gentleman had to stop speaking, and I have been ashamed of the thing ever since. Had the individual members of that howling mob met the Baronet in the street as he rode by on his favourite chestnut mare, there was not one of them but would have treated him with every appearance of courtesy and respect. There is something very cowardly in an election mob.

Long did the storm roar and rage as Wentworth stood up, the true friend and earnest champion of his rough and unmannerly audience. The chairman in vain appealed for fair play. That was the last thing to be expected at such a time; in vain he addressed them as gentlemen, or friends, or electors, still the storm raged. However, Wentworth was not a man to be put down, and he resolutely maintained his ground.

‘I am come,’ he said, ‘to put you on your guard, to ask you not to be led away by clap-trap, to tell you that all my life I have been fighting on behalf of the people, to lift up my voice on behalf of Peace, Retrenchment and Reform. You have a serious duty to discharge: to send a member to Parliament to help the good old cause of liberty and freedom and human progress.’ Again his voice was lost in an uproar. ‘You have,’ he continued, ‘rights to be won, a victory to achieve.’ Again there was an uproar. ‘You have three candidates before you, one of them a Tory. What, I ask, have Tories done for you and yours?’—more insane clamour. ‘You know better than I do, they are not the friends but the foes of the people, that it is only as you have triumphed over them that you have become free, that the history of Toryism is a record of resistance to popular rights—’ ‘And precious freedom,’ said a socialist, who darted up from the mob, amidst cheers on every side. ‘You Liberals give us liberty to work and slave and starve. What with the landlords who have robbed us of the land which belongs to the people, and what with the millowners who grind us in their mills, and your priests who make earth a hell, and then bid us think of a better land, what have we to thank our leaders, be they Whig, Tory or Radical, for? We are nothing to society, whose laws are framed for the purpose of securing the wealth of the world to the haristocrat or the rich snob, thereby depriving the larger portion of manhood of its rights and chances.’

This was a new doctrine for Sloville, and it was resented accordingly, and the socialist orator was pulled and hustled out of the hall, amidst increasing cries of order and police. The poor frightened chairman bolted out of the chair, much to the delight of the Tory roughs, and then one of the biggest of them moved a resolution to the effect that Mr. Wentworth was not a fit and proper person to represent the borough, and that he be requested to retire, and without calling for a show of hands, or putting the contrary, declared the resolution carried. At length Mr. Wentworth succeeded in getting him to do so, and the motion was lost. However, it was felt to be a farce to attempt to do any sane business that night, and Mr. Wentworth, as he left the hall, was heard loudly asserting that they would hear from him again, whilst from the far end of the hall there came many who claimed to be his supporters, and who assured him that he had but to continue his meetings and he would be sure to win.

He knew better, he knew that the chief agent in elections was money, that the candidate with longest purse generally wins, and money he was not prepared to spend. So it has ever been, and so it will according to present appearances ever be, and must be so, till paid canvassing be put down by Act of Parliament, and election agents’ fees reduced. There is little likelihood of Parliament doing that. Wealthy men like to get into the House, it confers upon them prestige, a seat in Parliament helps the lawyer to a place, a seat in Parliament gives a naval or a military officer another chance of dipping his hand in John Bull’s purse, or it enables a wealthy ignoramus who has managed either by the blessing of God upon his labours, or with

the aid of the devil, to become a millionaire, to obtain admission for his sons and daughters into circles in which they would otherwise have no claim. Everybody who is a somebody is anxious to see only men of wealth in Parliament. You may call it the people's House if you will, it is only the House of the rich people after all. Now and then one of the people finds his way there as a working man, but he is the exception, not the rule, and too often is but the paid agent of the rich man who defrays his expenses, and expects him, with all his show of independence, to support the party, right or wrong. Nor is he much more independent if he is paid by the working men themselves.

'What impudence! Serve the fellow right,' said Sir Watkin Strahan, the swell Liberal candidate, as he talked over the matter with his brother swell, the Tory candidate, in the club-room of Sloville next day. 'What impudence for a London newspaper man to come down here and upset the town! Things have come to a pretty pass, when such fellows are permitted to interfere into our local matters. At any rate, we may agree to get rid of him as a common enemy.'

And for that purpose they entered into an alliance offensive and defensive. Sloville was to be made too hot for Mr. Wentworth—that was understood in every public-house; there was no need to hint any more.

Once upon a time Sir Godfrey Kneller overheard a British working man devoting, as was the wont of British workmen in his day (they don't do it now, they know better), the various members of his body to perdition. The courtly painter was shocked and scandalized. 'What!' said he, 'do you think that God Almighty will take the trouble to damn a poor wretch like you? The idea is absurd; it is lords and fine gentlemen he will damn, I assure you.'

So it has been with the British public in the choice of a member of Parliament. It is only lords and fine gentlemen, or at any rate rich ones, who have been held to be worthy of being sent by the people to the House of the people. A time will come when the electors will think differently; when they will feel that a newspaper man is more likely to serve them faithfully; more likely to decide rightly in political matters; more likely to study the best interests of the nation than a fine gentleman, who thinks politics a bore, and who only consents to fight the battle of party on the understanding that, whether he wins or loses, he shall not go without his reward.

CHAPTER XVI.

ELECTIONEERING AGAIN.

Elections fifty years ago, if partly a farce, were at any rate picturesque. For a while, everyone seemed insane—the publican, who reaped a golden harvest; the local drapers, who sold the ribbons which formed the colours of the respective parties; the lively stable-keeper; the crowd of idle loafers who were hired to do little more than cheer one candidate and hoot down the other. The town rolled in wealth, which poured in on all sides, and a good deal of it made its way to the electors' wives and children. The out-voter from the most distant quarter was hunted up and sent down in coaches chartered for the purpose and paid for by the happy candidate or his friends, and every night there was a row and a fight, and a good deal of bad language. All the while there was a perpetual canvass, and the elector was in danger of bursting, as a feeling of his temporary importance grew and swelled within him.

Some refused to vote, as they flattered themselves, vainly, that they should thus offend neither party. The clergy were specially active; nor were their dissenting brethren—with the exception of the Methodists, at that time very cautious in political matters—much behind.

The nomination day was one of great display, and the day of polling was one of still greater, as hourly there was published a state of the poll, and the rival candidates drove from one polling-place to another to cheer the hearts of their supporters, who were many of them so drunk as scarcely to know for whom they were going to vote.

It was often dangerous work taking up the men to the poll through a crowd of heated roughs, who were placed round the booth to increase the difficulties of the intending electors. Meanwhile, all the town was holiday-making and enjoying the sport. Ladies looked down from the first-floors of every house in the neighbourhood to encourage one party and to cheer on its supporters and friends. Voters came in masses, headed by bands playing and with colours flying. Surely there was excitement enough, and folly enough, displayed on the occasion.

Sloville was agitated from top to bottom. Yet some people are never satisfied. They regretted that the harvest was so brief; that it was all over in a day, and did not last, as it did in the good old times, a fortnight; that there was not so much of locking up doubtful voters as of old, and keeping them stowed away drunk till the election was over.

‘There ain’t a voter in the town but what I can account for,’ said Sir Watkin’s agent to his principal. ‘I have got all their names down in black and white. By-the-bye, Sir Watkin, can you let me have another cheque?’

‘I am sorry to hear that. How much do you want?’

‘Another thousand will do it.’

‘Why, you have had one thousand already.’

‘Never mind,’ said the election agent. ‘What’s the good of having money if you don’t spend it. You’ll be sure to get it all back again. Nobody is so popular as a man who spends his money freely.’

‘That may be; but money is hard to get.’

‘Oh, leave that to me,’ said the agent.

‘Well, I suppose I must. But,’ added the Baronet, ‘at any rate you might send up to London and see what the Reform Club will do.’

‘Of course, we must apply to them. A stranger came down from town last night. He has not shown his face, but I’ve pumped the boots at the “Old Swan,” and I find that he is from the Carlton, and has brought a trunk full of sovereigns with him. The voters must have got an inkling of it, and are in ecstasies, and are now keeping off till the last moment. I believe I spotted the fellow in the disguise of an old woman working in the slums this morning’. I could not see his face because he put up his handkerchief; but I do believe it was no other than Shrouder.’

‘Oh, no: it can’t be him. I am told he is at Birmingham.’

‘You may depend upon it, Sir Watkin, he is here, and we shall have the devil to pay.’

‘Devil take him,’ said the Baronet angrily.

‘I must say that Shrouder is a bit of a scamp, and that he is the man for a dirty job. But I am quite a match for him,’ said the agent proudly. ‘At any rate, I am up to his little games. I am really quite delighted to have him as an opponent, and think it complimentary to the borough that he is come here to work it. The Carlton would not have sent him here had they not felt that they were in a desperate state indeed. Ah,’ continued he excitedly, ‘there is nothing like a well-contested election. I am of the opinion of a noble duke. “After all,” said he, “what greater enjoyment can there be in life than to stand a contested election for Yorkshire, and to win it by one?”’

‘Yes; but I ain’t a duke, and have not got a duke’s wealth.’

‘Never mind,’ said the agent; ‘elections don’t happen every day, and when it is over you can economize.’

‘For the first time in my life. That will be hard work.’

In the meanwhile the Baronet continued his canvass, and his carriage with the family arms, and the servants in the family liveries, were incessantly to be seen. He appealed to the Churchmen as one of themselves, to the Dissenters as their friend and ally in the cause of religious freedom. As a landowner he reminded the farmers that they were all in the same boat, and that legislation that was beneficial to the landlord was equally to the advantage of the tenant and the farm-labourer as well. No one was such an ardent admirer of the manufacturing system which had made us a nation of shopkeepers, and he won the hearts of the manufacturers as he told them that to him they seemed as the very pillars of the State. Somehow or other he seemed in a fair way of success, and when he got into a mess his agent was there to pull him out. Thus, one day he happened to call on a humble shopkeeper, who regarded him with natural distrust.

‘Oh, Sir Watkin,’ said he, ‘I am sure I respect you and your family very much; but before I promise you my vote I’d like to hear what are your principles.’

Sir Watkin was about to give the usual and evasive reply, when his agent pulled him back and opened a

broadside:

‘His *principles*. You ask a gentleman like Sir Watkin his principles; go along with you! Things have come to a pretty pass when a gentleman like Sir Watkin must stop in the road to tell you his principles. Come along, Sir Watkin, don’t be losing precious time here.’ And the small shopkeeper felt that he had done wrong, and promised him his vote accordingly.

‘That was a clever trick of yours,’ said Sir Watkin, laughing; ‘but it would not do a second time.’

‘I don’t know, Sir Watkin; it is well to ride the high horse now and then.’

In another case the Baronet did not get off quite so well. Said an operative at one of his meetings:

‘Why are the mothers and sisters of peers, who have done nothing for the public, to be maintained in luxury and at the public expense, while we are obliged to support our poor relatives from our hard-earned wages or see them sent to the workhouse?’

Happily the Baronet’s supporters made such a noise that the reply was unheard.

But there was a stronger influence at work.

‘What is the chief recommendation of Sir Watkin?’ asked one of Mr. Wentworth’s supporters of a friend of the Baronet’s.

‘Money, to be sure. He’s got it here,’ said the Baronet’s supporter, significantly slapping his pocket.

But the Conservative candidate had money as well. The question was, which had the longest purse.

‘And, then, look at the requisition presented to him,’ continued the Baronet’s friend.

‘Got up by his agent, as a matter of course, who was well paid for his work.’

‘Then look at his committee.’

‘All men who are his tradespeople, or tenants and dependents, or flunkies who want to be invited to the Hall. There has been no independent action in the matter.’

‘You are very green if you expect that in Sloville,’ continued the Baronet’s supporter. ‘If you ask nine men out of ten in the borough who they will vote for, the answer will be, “For them as I gets the most by.”’

It was too true. The Sloville people were as selfish as their representatives. They were like the voters of St. Albans, who, when the traffic on the great North Road was ruined by the railway, lamented that they had nothing to sell but their votes; or like the voters of Stafford, who requested Sheridan to vote against reform, as it was by the sale of votes that they chiefly got their money. They in this resembled the illustrious Samuel Johnson, who, upon his friend Thrale demurring to the expense of a contested election for Southwark, remarked: ‘The expense, if it were more, I should wish him to despise. Money is made for such purposes as this.’

It was an Irish M.P. who, when reproached with selling his country, thanked God that he had got a Government to sell. There were many of the Sloville electors who were of the Irishman’s way of thinking.

‘I suppose there is little chance for me,’ said Wentworth, as he walked home with the Unitarian minister—

who had a large chapel, generally empty, but which had been crowded to suffocation to hear him utter his political programme. Wentworth, as the papers say, had received quite an ovation. He had come amongst them as a stranger; he had made them all friends; he was an effective speaker, and his audience were of his side in politics. Unfortunately, it consisted largely of excitable young people who had no votes. They had been told to do their duty: to support neither a half-hearted Liberal nor a thorough-going old Tory, but to rally round the gentleman from London. The Unitarian brother heartily endorsed that appeal. He had known Wentworth when he came to preach as a sapling from college. He had sympathized a good deal with him in his view. He had the Christian charity not to judge too harshly of a man who, it seemed to him, had in a sense gone wrong, but who was a man and a brother still.

‘My dear fellow,’ said he to his guest, as they were seated in his sanctum, ornamented with portraits and darkened with the quartos of the old divines, ‘I fear in politics, as in religion, people do much as they please, lecture them as you will. To listen is one thing, to practise what you hear is another. You are for the separation of Church and State, and I support you; but the respected minister who preaches in your old chapel will preach about Christ’s kingdom being not of this world, and then will go and vote for the Whig Baronet because he belongs to such a respectable family, and all the respectable Dissenters in the town will do the same, and when Christmas comes will receive their reward. Their deacons are very good men, but they will never vote to offend their rich customers. I could get a thousand people to come and hear you, to applaud all your hits, to see all your arguments, to endorse all your opinions, but I could not get ten of them to vote for you—that’s quite another thing. It is all very well to applaud Radical sentiments, so long as business is not interfered with.’

‘But the poorer voters—there are a good many of them in the borough, are there not?’

‘Well, they will do as their betters, and you can’t wonder at it. The Tories and the Liberals give away coal and beef and blankets at Christmas. There are lots of Radicals in the town, but they will not vote for a Radical, however much they may cheer a Radical speech. Their wives wouldn’t let them.’

‘I fear Sloville is in a bad way,’ said Wentworth.

‘Well, it is a fair sample of an English borough. I often grieve over it, nevertheless.’

‘Why not make it better?’

‘Ay, that’s the question. I can see no other road to improvement but to go on talking. Liberal ideas spread and light does come, however slowly. Sometimes I almost feel inclined to ask for a drastic reform.’

‘What is that?’

‘To get the borough disfranchised. It would be very easy to get up a petition for bribery and corruption; it would be easier still to prove it.’

‘And then?’

‘The result would be that I should lose my congregation, and be the most unpopular man in the town.’

‘Why not “dare to be a Daniel”?’

‘Because I am poor and have a large family to keep; because I love peace and quietness; because I am a little older than you, know a little more of country life, and feel inclined to make the best of it what little time I have to live. If we are bound to run amuck at all we disapprove of, life, I fear, would be a burden

too heavy to be borne. I may be slow, but, at any rate, I am sure.'

'So you are, old fellow. You were talking just the same way when I came here to preach—it seems to me ages ago—and a good deal has happened since then.'

'Just what I was going to say,' said the clerical brother. 'Politically we have made great progress. We are on the eve of extension of the franchise and vote by ballot, and whoever we return at Sloville—they are safe. I could have got up a petition against bribery and corruption in the place. I ought, perhaps, you say, to have done so. Well, I should have had to spend hundreds of pounds, which I have not got; and if I had succeeded and got the borough disfranchised, I should never have been able to show my face in the town again.'

'But you would have had another call,' said Wentworth, with a touch of sarcasm.

'Not at my time of life. But that is a digression. You London newspaper men may write about bribery and corruption, and you can do good in that way, more even than if you get into Parliament.'

'I am of the same opinion,' said Wentworth; 'but, tell me, is the borough so very bad?'

'That it is. I can point you to no end of people who take money and are not ashamed. There are gangs of them who meet in public-houses, with whom each party negotiates, and who turn the scale. To-day they are Liberal, to-morrow they will be Conservative. The men are notorious, but they are useful to both parties. The only remedy for that is extension of the suffrage so as to include all householders, and to make bribery impossible by the increase of the number to be bribed.'

'I would go a step further,' said Wentworth. 'In our great cities few of our working classes have that qualification. This raises a demand for a lodger franchise—that is, a fancy franchise—that will give a great opening for ingenuity and fraud, and will only work well for the lawyers, to whom such a state of things will bring plenty of business. No, we must fall back on manhood suffrage. It is the only real and direct qualification. Give the working man a vote, let him feel that he is part and parcel of the community, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh—not a pariah politically, but a brother man—and he will use his vote for his own advantage, and for that of the rest of the community. 'But, now I think of it, there is a better plan.'

'What is that?' said the parson.

'A money qualification. I was in Jersey last summer, and I found there were a large number of men who voluntarily paid a certain tax in order that they might get a vote. After all, what is Government but a limited liability company for the governing of the nation? In all limited liabilities every man has a vote, but the man who has a larger share than the others has more votes. I would give the vote to every man who cared enough about it to pay for it, and I think that a revenue might be thus raised for the relief of taxation.'

'Your scheme is excellent, but it will never take.'

'I fear so, and that is why I fall back on manhood suffrage.'

'Yes, I quite believe that, but he must have the ballot.'

'I fear so, though with the ballot we shall still have a good deal of intimidation and bullying. The rich employer, unless he be more Liberal than many of them, will try still to carry his friend or himself, as the

case may be. It seems very degrading, however, for a man to vote by ballot, as if he were ashamed of his opinions. I always think of what the great American statesman said when he was in England on that subject.’

‘And what was that? I never heard of it.’

‘When asked at a dinner-party in London whether the ballot prevailed in his State of Virginia, he replied:

“‘I can scarcely believe in all Virginia we have such a fool as to mention even the vote by ballot, and I do not hesitate to say that the adoption of the ballot would make a nation a set of scoundrels if it did not find them so.’”

‘Rather hard, that, on the ballot, seeing that we shall have it very shortly.’

‘Yes, the demand is a popular one with the Liberals, and they will carry it. There is one measure I should like to see, but I fear there is no chance of its coming yet.’

‘What is that?’

‘Annual Parliaments.’

‘Oh,’ exclaimed the parson, ‘that will never do! As it is, the amount of mischief an election does in a borough like ours in the way of creating drunkenness, and bad feeling, and lying, and swearing, is incalculable.’

‘Yes, but if we had an election once a year it would be quite different. In the first place, an election would be a tamer and much more commonplace affair than it is now. A man would not care to spend much money on elections if his seat was only good for a year, and all that time he would be on his good behaviour—attending in his place, helping on needful reforms.’

‘Why not triennial Parliaments?’

‘Why, then things would be no better than they are now. There would be the same excitement and bitterness. The new M.P. would be remiss in his attendance the first or second year, while in the last session his only aim would be to gain the goodwill of the electors of his district. Again,’ added Mr. Wentworth, ‘as a rule the people are indifferent to politics. You only move them from their torpor at the time of a General Election. When that is over they become indifferent and apathetic again. With an election once a year you would have the people anxiously discussing political questions. It would be an education for them. It would ensure all the advantages without the disadvantages of the present system.’

‘Upon my word,’ said the parson, ‘there is a good deal in what you say, though I never thought of it before. An election would then be a very commonplace affair.’

‘And then,’ said Wentworth, ‘under such an arrangement the people would be better educated. As it is, it is hard work to get them to the poll at all. Practically, England never gives a verdict—never expresses her political opinions. And I mean by England, Scotland, where the people are better educated than they are here, and Wales, where the people are far more religious. We have a Tory or a Liberal Government in office in consequence of the support of the Irish M.P.’s returned by illiterate voters under the rule of the Roman Catholic priest—who hates England, because it is a prosperous and Protestant nation. The Irish “praste,” as his people call him, creates all the bad blood that has done so much mischief in Ireland. If the Tories are in power, they can only maintain their position by pandering to the Irish members, and if the

Liberals are in power they have to do just the same. This difficulty arises from the fact that, whether as regards property or population, Ireland is over-represented. If Sir Robert Peel had had his way, and been able to pension the Irish priests, we should have had no such wretched state of affairs. The “praste” would have taken jolly good care that the Irish M.P. was loyal to the Government that granted him an independent income.’

‘But Peel could not have done so had he wished. You forget the English Evangelicals, with their hatred of Popery in any shape, and the Scotch Presbyterians, and the English Dissenters, who object on principle to any State support of religion.’

‘Alas! I know it too well,’ replied Wentworth; ‘yet had Peel or Pitt had their way, we should have had no Irish difficulty. As it is, Ireland has her revenge. It is she who decides the fate of parties, the rise and fall of ministries, the policy of our great empire, with its conflicting interests in every corner of the globe. Oh that the Green Isle were a thousand miles away! The difficulty would be removed if Ireland had only her fair share of representation, but that is an impossible reform.’

A curious character was that old parson; professedly a Presbyterian, and calling himself such, he and his people were Unitarians. He lived on an endowment left by Lady Hewlett, whose charities were such a bitter bone of contention between the Unitarians and the orthodox Dissenters; but Parliament interfered, and a Bill was carried to render all further litigation impossible. He preached in a grand old red-brick chapel in the busiest part of the town. He had an old-fashioned pulpit with an old-fashioned sounding-board above, and in front of him were great square pews lined with green baize; while behind, in the little red-brick vestry, there were quaint portraits of old divines, of whom no one knew anything. Now, in his meeting-house, with its memorial tablets of departed workers, the worshippers were few and far between. Once there had been life there, but that was a long time ago; and now his hearers were chiefly old, gray-headed men and women, whose fathers and mothers had taken them there in early childhood, and whose talk, when they did talk, which was but rarely, was of Drs. Price and Priestley, and Mr. Belsham, and of Mrs. Barbauld and other ornaments of their expiring creed. It was hard work to preach to such; nevertheless the little parson was a happy man, as he thought of the God of love, of whom once a week he loved to speak. No one interfered with him. To no religious gathering in the town was he ever invited. Churchmen and Dissenters alike gave him the cold shoulder. But he upheld the standard of a Church with no creeds; was content to receive such as could not subscribe to other dogmas, and to believe in a Christian charity which was to cover a multitude of sins. He damned nobody, he frightened nobody, he was nobody’s enemy. His was a voice crying in the wilderness. Once a year he went to the assembly of his denomination in Essex Street Chapel, London, and heard how the cause with which he was connected was advancing, and the day-dawn of a national Christianity was at hand, and then he came back to Sloville to vegetate for another year, while sensational preachers filled the other chapels.

He had his garden, and that was a constant source of happiness, and as he was a vegetarian and his garden supplied all his needs, it mattered little that his salary was a scanty pittance, such as a respectable working mechanic would turn up his nose at. His wife was a lady who did not hesitate to do all the household work herself. Modern life in its rush and roar has left such people far behind. But one loves to remember them, and their peaceful ways, their cheerful solitude, their plain living and high thinking.

CHAPTER XVII.

QUIET TALKS.

On the day of the public meeting, just as Wentworth had retired to his head-quarters at the Red Lion, one of the few old-fashioned public-houses which survive to tell us how truly Shenstone wrote when he told us that the warmest welcome he found was at an inn—and how wise were men of the Johnson era in recognising that fact—he heard a tap at the door, after he had taken off his boots and had lit his cigar.

‘Come in,’ he cried.

The new visitor availed himself of the invitation. He was a tremendous fellow to look at, with something of an animal expression, with a loud voice, and a little bloated about the face, as if he took rather more beer than was good for him. His hands were rather grimy, his clothes were the worse for wear, and he had a short pipe in his mouth, which he was about to put out, but did not, as he saw Wentworth was smoking himself.

‘Your name, sir?’ said Wentworth.

‘My name—you know me well enough. My name is Johnson—I was at your meeting to-night, and you and I have met before.’

‘Yes, you were there, as you say—one of my noisiest opponents, I believe—and now I think of it, when I was at Sloville, you were one of the Chartists who tried to put me down.’

‘You’re right, Mr. Wentworth.’

‘Happy to renew the acquaintance. To what am I indebted for the honour of this visit?’

‘Well, you see, we are in now for an election, and I flatter myself the winning candidate will be the man for whom I vote.’

‘Is that so?’

‘True as the Gospel.’

‘Well, you did not seem very favourable to-night.’

‘No, and that’s why I am here. My party won’t think much of me unless I act an independent part, and there’s a good many of us; we wish to have a bit of a literary man. It is my belief, as I tells ’em, that there is nothing like eddication and the gift of the gab.’

‘Upon my word, you’re right, Mr. Johnson, though when one looks at Ireland and England, too, one is inclined to feel that we may have too much of a good thing, and that we should be all the better if we had a little less talk and a little more work.’

‘Capital! that’s the very thing for Sloville, only you must pitch it a little stronger, and fire away at the lazy

parsons and the 'aughty haristocracy, and say something about the blood-sucking manufacturers who leave us—who make all their wealth—to starve and die. We're agin 'em all, me and my pals.'

'Well, we will talk of that presently. If I get into Parliament, how am I to live?'

'Well, we must have paid members of Parliament; you'll be all right then.'

'Are you fond of professional parsons, Mr. Johnson?'

'No, I hate 'em like p'ison.'

'And yet you would have professional politicians. They are as odious to me as professional parsons. A man may mean well when he first sets out, but directly his political career becomes to him his bread-and-butter, he will cease to be an honest man. If he is paid by the people, he will be their slave, and not their representative. If he is paid by the State, he will so shape his conduct that he may secure his re-election. He cannot act honestly. By the necessity of his position he is bound to keep his place, because he needs his salary. It is as bad and infamous for a man to make politics his livelihood as religion. In America they have a class of men known as professional politicians, and what is the result? that respectable Americans rarely enter public life.'

'Well, you do surprise me!' said Johnson, smoking his pipe uneasily. 'I knew you were a little crotchety when you came to our Chartist meeting, but I thought you went the whole hog.'

'Well, we've secured a good deal more for the people than you or I expected at that time.'

'Maybe,' said Johnson doggedly.

'But what do you want?'

Johnson's face brightened as he said:

'That's coming to the point—we do not want any more Whigs or Tories.'

'But if a Tory comes to Sloville and offers to give the people land—we can't say restore it, for we Anglo-Saxons never had an inch of the soil of England. If, further, he tell them that they have not had their fair share of the profits of capital—if he says he will get every one a fair day's wages for a fair day's work—that the working men shall have decent homes built for them by Government—that every one shall have his three acres and a cow—that the parent shall be relieved of all responsibility as regards his children—that, in short, he will bring the millennium—don't you think he will get returned whether he calls himself Whig or Tory?'

'I believe you,' said Johnson excitedly, giving the table an emphatic thump. 'Leastways, I knows many as will vote for him, and this I knows, that no one opposed to him would have much chance. There's none on 'em dare turn me out of a meetin', and there's none of 'em can drown my voice.'

'Yes, I had a good proof of that to-night. But don't you know that any man coming with such a programme is an impostor?'

'No, hang me if I do! I say he is the man for me and the United Buffaloes, of which I am the president, and who will vote as I do. I repeat, he is the man for Sloville.'

'Of course,' said Wentworth sarcastically, 'he is, and he is quite safe, because he knows he promises

what he can never perform.’

‘How do you make that?’

‘Let us take the question of the working man not getting his fair share of the profits. You know Lancashire?’

‘Well, I should think I do.’

‘Well, so do I, and it seems to me that the workmen are pretty well employed, and pretty well off. They get their weekly wages.’

‘Yes, in course they do.’

‘But is it not a fact that not a brass farthing of profit is being made in the cotton trades, and that consequently at this time the workman has quite his fair share of the capital? Look at our great companies, our railways, our ships, most of them earning no dividends or but small ones, but who employ millions of men at fair wages. You call the capitalist a bloodsucker, a vampire.’

‘And so he is.’

‘Well, get rid of his tyranny.’

‘How?’

‘Become a capitalist yourself. As a rule the capitalist is a working man who has lifted himself out of his class by superior self-denial, or tact, or skill, or perseverance. Last night when I went to the Town Hall I saw the name of Brown over a grand shop. When I knew Sloville, Brown’s father was one of the poorest men in the place, and there was no boy worse off than poor Brown. I went in and said to him: “I am glad to see you so flourishing.” “Yes,” said he, “I’ve much to be thankful for.” “How is it you’ve got on so?” I said. “By minding my own business, and by not going to the public-house,” he replied.’

‘Yes,’ said Johnson, ‘Brown was allus a pushing boy.’

‘So have all of us to be nowadays. You don’t think we are to sit still, and open our mouths and shut our eyes, and see what Heaven will give us; do you?’

‘Yes, but—’

‘But what? It is in ourselves that lies the secret of success. Look at Ireland: for ages the people have come to the English Government for aid to fish, to farm, to manufacture, and what is the result? That now there are no people so badly off.’

‘Ireland, sir,’ said Johnson angrily, ‘is ruined by the injustice of England.’

‘Not quite so much as you think. Though Ireland has been shamefully treated, as much by Irishmen as Englishmen, however, I admit. But to return to the question of capital, why cannot a workman become an employer? You can run a cotton-mill if you like to co-operate and put by your savings. There is no need to ask Parliament to interfere. You want the landlords abolished. Take to farming yourselves. Land is cheap enough, and farms are to be had almost for the asking. Don’t ask Government to take the land and employ all who live in the country on it, whether they are worth their salt or not. This is a free country, and any men who have sufficient confidence in each other, and self-reliance, can become their own

employers, as farmers or manufacturers, if they will join their savings for that purpose. There are no better workmen than the English, and I want to see them better off.'

'I am glad to hear that,' said Johnson; 'it seemed to me that you were rather against the working man.'

'I am against some of his ways,' said Wentworth. 'I am against improvident marriages. In the middle circles of society we can't marry till we have a chance of keeping a wife. But almost directly poor lads or girls—especially in our great cities—are of age, and often before, they are married, and have families that they can't keep, and then the taxpayer, often little better off than themselves, has to pay for their support. Is that fair?'

'Well, it do seem rather hard.'

'As long as that is the case wages must be low, for the supply will be in excess of the demand. Suppose you get Parliament to come to the aid of such. The result is you will have more improvident marriages. Then you tax still more heavily the middle and the upper classes, and the middle classes become paupers themselves. I see a remedy for this. We shall have the children of the working classes better educated, and then they will not think of marrying till they can live in a decent manner. They will shrink from inflicting hardships on innocent children, as they do now.'

'Well, they have to wait a long time.'

'I fear so. But how is trade at Sloville?'

'Why, just now very bad.'

'Shall I tell you one reason?'

'Just as you please; only, whatever you say I shall report to the United Buffaloes.'

'Well, I don't want to go out of my way to offend them, especially since they all vote together. But you had a strike here last summer, had you not?'

'Yes, and a pretty time of it we had.'

'It is over now, and what is the result?'

'Why, that we are going on pretty much as usual.'

'Not exactly. That strike cost a lot of money.'

'I believe you.'

'And that is all thrown away, and to that extent the working men are so much the poorer. Is not that a fact?'

'Well, it is no use denying of it; but the masters have suffered as well, though you get no benefit by their suffering.'

'And whose fault is that?'

'The Unions', I suppose. 'They were beaten, at any rate.'

'The Unions. I am glad you mention them, because there is another thing I have to say. I fear that you can

never get good work as long as men are all paid alike, whether they are good workmen or not.'

'But that is what we insist on more than anything else.'

'I am sorry for it. Such a condition is fatal to individual excellence. Let me illustrate my remarks: I knew a man employed at a printing-office in connection with printing steel-plates. He was an intelligent, careful workman, and he did more work and better than the others, and earned more money. The other men conspired against him, and he found in his absence his work was spoilt, and his press injured, and he was driven away. Now, such cases are of constant occurrence. Let me give you another case: A man was taken into an office at a lesser rate than the others, and they gave up their work and had to come on the Union. Again, how often is a good man worried out of his place unless he joins the Union and works as slowly, and makes a job last as long, as the others! You complain of the great competition from foreign workmen—how is it that they are in this country?'

'Ah! that's the question.'

'A question easily answered. Most of them are brought over on the occasion of a strike, and when they come here they stop here, and add to the overstocked market. Your regulations for the support of your members are excellent, and deserve all praise; your Unions also are most desirable when protection is required against hard and unjust masters, though the number of them is not so large as you endeavour to make it. But when you set up to dictate to masters as to whom they shall employ, you do injustice to respectable men willing to work, whom you compel to starve, and in the long-run you help to create that depression of trade of which we all complain.'

'Have you anything more agin the Unions?' asked Johnson angrily.

'Yes; I maintain that when they thus endeavour to control the labour market they often drive away trade. Why are our shops filled with American manufactures? For this simple reason: In America the men are always looking out to improve the processes of manufacture. A workman who can strike out a new and improved method is rewarded by his masters and applauded by his fellows. Here masters and men are against him. The workmen are too conservative. You are not offended, I hope, by my plain speaking?'

'Not at all,' replied the visitor in a sulky tone.

'Well, I will add that, so far as I can see, they often drive trade away as well. I will just give you one instance: I was spending an evening with an eminent judge a little while ago.'

'Why, the lawyers are the greatest trades unionists going,' said Johnson passionately.

'It may be. I am not a lawyer, and have not much to say on their behalf. The judge of whom I speak had just been at one of our great Midland towns, where an order had come for a large supply for a foreign Government. "But," said the English firm, "we must have a strike clause inserted in the agreement, as our men will strike directly they hear we've got the order." The agent of the foreign Government declined to agree to such a proposal, and the order was taken to Belgium and executed there.'

'Ah, that was an isolated case.'

'Not a bit of it,' said Mr. Wentworth. 'I can give plenty of other cases that show how often the British workmen unwittingly drive away trade, and make us all suffer in consequence.'

'Well, this is a free country, and the workmen have a right to act as they think best,' said Johnson.

‘Undoubtedly; I do not dispute that for an instant. All I say is, don’t throw all the blame of poverty on the rich; a good deal of it is due to the poor themselves. Parliament can do little more than it has done. No Act of Parliament can give permanent employment and good wages to a man who drinks, or neglects his duty, or who will not work properly and efficiently.’

‘Ah, there are people who think otherwise.’

‘I fear there are.’

‘According to your way of talk, Mr. Wentworth, Parliament ain’t of much use.’

‘I fear not. I only defend representative government as the only possible mode of political life in the absence of a benevolent despotism, controlled by a free press. The ideal government is that which interferes least with the people.’

‘Then, what do you recommend?’

‘Moral reform. Do you know,’ continued Wentworth, ‘that Trade Unionism seems to me essentially one-sided.’

‘That is rather too rich,’ said the visitor. ‘All we seek is justice to ourselves.’

‘But is not that unjust to the masters? A firm commences a business or works a mine. It is put to great expense; sinks an enormous amount of capital, and then because it chooses to employ individuals who have a right to be employed, who have as much right to earn their own living as other men, the Union withdraws their men, and the works have to be stopped, and many a firm has given up business in consequence, and thus the area of the unemployed and the amount of national poverty and distress is increased. No man can serve two masters. There must be a head somewhere, and a firm naturally may claim to be at the head of a business, and should be left to regulate its own affairs. What would become of a ship if the crew were to deprive the captain of his command, and to navigate it themselves?’

‘What would you do, then?’

‘Why, just act according to Christian principles.’

‘Christian principles—what are they?’

‘That man and master should do to each other as to themselves.’

Johnson blackened in his face and whispered something about nonsense.

‘But that is not all.’

‘No, I should think not,’ said Johnson.

‘My next demands are moral reform, and the power of the people.’

‘Ah, now, that’s coming to the point.’

‘But I mean by the power of the people, not a vote at the dictation of a caucus, but the action of an educated independent people.’

Again Johnson frowned.

‘Well, let me hear what you recommend. The future belongs to you, Mr. Johnson.’

‘Why, we want State aid against the selfishness of the rich, and State employment for the poor.’

‘Well, that is rather a reversal of the system which has made England great by reason of the energy and freedom of her people. The State works clumsily and ineffectively. Look at the memoirs of officials, or Government reports, or the revelations of our great establishments, and you will see for yourself that the State works in a way which, if a private firm followed, it would soon be in the Bankruptcy Court. In America things in this respect are as bad as here. The abuses of the Civil Service there are greater than at home. A distinguished American writes: “The spoil system, introduced by President Jackson, which is now stigmatized as ‘the American system,’ imperils not only the purity, economy, and efficiency of the Government, but it destroys confidence in the method of popular government by party. It creates a mercenary political class, an oligarchy of stipendiaries, a bureaucracy of the worst kind, which controls parties with relentless despotism.” How do you like that, friend?’

‘Not at all,’ said Johnson.

‘No; we must continue fighting on the old lines. Like Burke, I believe at this period of the world’s history there is nothing new in politics or morals. Society has got into the groove which was the only one possible. It must ever go on the old lines. Upset it, turn it topsey-turvy, as they did in France, or as the Socialists would do, and a little while again you will find it on the old lines. Share the wealth of the country, if you like, between you all; it won’t make much difference to me, but the next generation will be as badly off as ever—worse off—for you will have taken from the labourer all motive for exertion.’

‘And is this what I am to tell the United Buffaloes?’

‘If you like.’

‘If I do, not one of us will vote for you.’

‘Then, perhaps the sooner I give up the contest the better.’

‘That is what I think,’ said Johnson, as he took up his hat and departed, leaving Wentworth to fear that his mission to Sloville was at an end.

Why, even, as he confessed to himself, the Tory programme was more attractive than his own. Toryism is never particular on the score of money. Its generosity at the expense of other people is prodigious. Naturally, we all like a lavish expenditure. There is no one so popular as a spendthrift, as long as his money lasts, no one so hated as a screw.

When rosy-fingered morning next day dawned on Sloville, there was quite a crowd of visitors at the hotel patronized by Mr. Wentworth. Everybody is supernaturally and unusually wise when an election takes place, and, feeling how uncertain is human life, seems apparently determined to make the most of it. It is the harvest, if not of the busy bee, at any rate of the busybody. Before Mr. Wentworth had finished his coffee and bacon and eggs, while the dry toast in the rack was yet untouched, the aged and beery waiter announced as how there was a lady outside waitin’ to speak to him.

‘Show her in,’ said the candidate, and in she walked with that boldness and self-possession, unpleasant in woman, which marks the advanced female.

‘I hear, Mr. Wentworth, you are a candidate for our borough. May I ask what are your views on the

subject of Women's Rights?—a question of vast importance to our sex. You know our abject and degraded state; how we are trodden under foot by our lord and master, man.'

The lady was a spinster, or she would not have talked in that style, but at length she had said all that she wanted, and paused for a reply.

'I fear,' said Wentworth, 'that you and I can never agree. I don't believe that man and woman are the same. Nature has made them different. A woman treads the earth with a lighter step, talks in a feebler voice. If she succeeds on the platform or in public life, it is because of her exceptional performance in that character; and owing to her more excitable temperament and physical peculiarities, and to the duties devolving on her as wife and mother, I argue that she is unfitted for public life. Her duty is at home. It is there she reigns a queen, and where, I ask, can she desire a nobler field? Our men are what their mothers make them. I say it is to the home that we have to look for the purification and elevation of our public life; it is to the mothers of to-day that we look for the great men of the morrow.'

'And is this all you've got to say?' said the lady, with a somewhat chap-fallen countenance. 'I did hope, as a journalist, I might have heard something more satisfactory. There are many of us in Sloville. We are affiliated to a society whose headquarters are in London, and we are determined to vote for no man.'

'Excuse me, I understood ladies had no votes.'

'I mean we are determined that no man shall vote for anyone who is not sound on the question of Women's Rights.'

'I am quite ready to give a widow, or any woman housekeeper, or any woman in business, a vote. As a Liberal I don't know whether I ought to say as much. The women will be sure to give a Tory vote. They are sure to vote as their favourite parson or priest wishes.'

'Not the emancipated female of the future.'

'Alas!' said Wentworth, 'I don't know her. I can only talk of woman as she is—charming, lovely, worthy of all honour, in her own peculiar sphere.'

'Thank you,' said the lady haughtily; 'we want something more;' and she went out of the room to report to her committee that on Women's Rights the candidate gave a very uncertain sound.

'Will you,' said one other fair enthusiast a little later on, 'vote for the repeal of the Vaccination Acts?'

'Certainly not,' said Mr. Wentworth. 'Why should I?'

'Because it is an interference with the freedom of the subject.'

In vain he argued all government, more or less, was that, and that small-pox was an awful malady, against which it behoved the nation to take every precaution. He spoke in vain. The anti-vaccinators did not go so far as to say, as the old opponents did, that vaccination made children as hairy as bullocks, or that it led them to bellow like bulls. In our day they have shifted their grounds, but their opposition remains the same.

The Sabbatarians came next. They were Liberals mostly, with a sprinkling of Tory Evangelicals, yet rather than see any mitigation in the severity of the Jewish Sabbath, any attempt made to divert the working man from the public-house on a Sunday, they declared themselves dead against Mr. Wentworth. The loafers, of course, were against him. He refused to treat them to beer. He kept no public-houses

open. He did not even offer to stand glasses round when they called. If he was above obliging them, why should they put themselves out of their way to oblige him? He was for purity and independence. Little they cared for either the one or the other. Every hour it seemed to him that his chance grew less. What was the good of talking about an improved foreign policy, about the advancement of the people in political power, about the reduction of taxation, or free trade in land, or land reform, to such men? According to one class, an election was simply an excuse for bribery and corruption. It meant money and beer. A candidate was to be bled to the uttermost farthing, and he was to repay himself how he could, and as best he could, when he got into Parliament. According to another class, a General Election was simply an opportunity for fighting on side issues, and the ventilation of all sorts of fads.

Musing on these things, the waiter came to him to announce another visitor. Mr. Wentworth groaned.

‘Not a lady, sir.’

‘Thank God for that!’ he replied.

‘A gentleman this time.’

‘Show him in.’

‘Ah, Mr. Wentworth,’ said the new visitor, ‘I thought I would just run in and see you.’

‘Happy to see you—take a seat.’

‘I have read your programme, and am delighted with it.’

‘Sir, you flatter me.’

‘Not a bit of it. It is just what I like. I don’t think I could have done it better myself. You’re the coming man—all Sloville will rally round you.’

‘It does not seem like it at present,’ said Wentworth gloomily.

‘My dear sir, you astonish me; I should have thought a man of your talent would have carried everything before him. But I see I am come in the nick of time—quite providential, as it were. I can promise you entire success.’

‘Upon what terms?’

‘Well, if you put it in that light, I, of course, expect to be paid. As a fellow literary man, I would, of course, prefer to work for you for nothing; but you see, sir, one must live, and the fact is, I have a duty to discharge to my wife and family. A man who neglects them, you know, is worse than an infidel. I believe I have Scriptural authority for that statement?’

‘I believe you have, sir.’

‘Ah, yes, my dear sir, I thought a man of your knowledge and good sense would admit as much. You know me—my name is Roberts.’

‘I can’t say that I do.’

‘Well, that is a good one! Did you never read my poem on the death of Prince Albert?’

‘I can’t say that I have.’

‘Don’t you remember my celebrated speech at Little Pedlington in favour of the Society for the Equal Diffusion of Capital?’

‘I can’t say that I ever heard of it.’

‘Well, you do surprise me! How true it is that the world knows nothing of its greatest men! Surely you must have heard of my celebrated discussion with the great O’Toole in the Town Hall of Mudford on the rights of man, of which the *Mudford Observer* remarked that I demolished my unfortunate antagonist with the brilliancy of Macaulay, with the philosophy of a Burke, with the wit of a Sheridan, and with a native originality indicative of the rarest genius. Why, it was the talk of the whole town for weeks. Do you really mean to tell me, Mr. Wentworth, that you never heard of that?’

‘Never,’ said Wentworth dryly.

‘Well, that’s a good one! I thought you gentlemen of London kept your eye on everybody and everything. But you know the Temple Forum?’

‘Oh, certainly I do.’

‘Ah! I am glad to hear that, because I am one of the leading lights of that select assembly.’

‘Well, I am very unfortunate. I cannot remember to have heard you even there; but I must own I seldom went near the place.’

‘Ah, if you had you would have known me well. Many is the speech I have made there. But perhaps you will kindly glance at this?’ taking out of his hat a dilapidated and somewhat greasy paper.

Reluctantly Mr. Wentworth took it.

‘It is an account of one of my lectures before the Minerva Institute at Bullock Smithy.’

‘Bullock Smithy—never heard of that.’

‘Come, Mr. Wentworth, you are a bit of a wag, I see.’

‘Not a bit of it. Never heard of Bullock Smithy in my life.’

‘Why, it is a rising watering-place in Blankshire, and I had the public hall to lecture in, with the head notable in the chair, and all the *élite* of the place present; and I assure you, as the *Bullock Smithy Observer* remarks, it was quite a treat I gave ’em. “Feast of reason, flow of soul,” they call it. I am to give ’em another lecture next summer.’

‘I am delighted to hear it.’

‘Yes, I knew you would be. We men of genius always recognise each other. And now I’ll tell you why I am here. I’ve come to offer you my services as a public speaker. I was at your meeting the other night, and I saw what was wanted immediately. “Clever fellow,” said I to myself; “but too modest and retiring—not enough bounce and brag to fetch the general public.” Says I to myself: “I will do it for him; I am the boy for that kind of work; I am used to it.” Many a man has got into Parliament through me. Indeed, I have never known anyone fail who has secured my services, and you shall have ’em cheap. Five pounds for the week and board and lodging, and I make a speech for you every night. That’s what I call a fair

offer. You hesitate. Well, suppose we say two pounds ten. I never made so low an offer before, but you are a man and a brother, and I would do for you what I would not do for anyone else.'

'I am afraid, Mr. Roberts,' said Wentworth—'I fear I must dispense with your services.'

'No, don't say that; don't stand in your own light, man. You don't know what you're refusing. I can almost guarantee your election. Let me begin to-night. Send the crier round to say that Mr. Roberts, the celebrated orator of the Temple Forum, will speak at your meeting. If I don't astonish 'em I'll eat my hat.' A very battered one, by-the-bye, which it would have required rather a strong stomach to digest.

'The fact is, Mr. Roberts,' continued Wentworth, 'I consider an election is purely a matter between a candidate and his constituents, and no one else has a right to interfere. I should be glad of all the local strength I could get. That would show the electors we're in earnest in the matter; but as to getting strangers down from town to dazzle the people with rhetorical fireworks, I really don't care about it. I really should not care to gain my election by such means. I think it great presumption even for a London committee, whether sitting at the Carlton or the Liberal Club, to seek to control the electors. It is something very serious to me, the freedom of election and the independence of the voters.'

'Sir, you take matters too seriously. We all know electioneering is humbug, and the biggest humbug wins.'

'I fear you and I could not agree, Mr. Roberts, and perhaps you had better take your talents to another quarter.'

'And you mean to say, then, that you have no occasion for my services?' said the collapsing Roberts, who seemed to become smaller every minute.

'I do, indeed.'

'Then, sir, I am sorry for you,' said the indignant orator. 'I came out of friendship; but I am a professional man, and I shall be under the unpleasant necessity of going to some other party. I believe Sir Watkin Strahan will be only too glad of my assistance.'

'By all means try him,' said Wentworth.

And the itinerant orator retreated, having first secured a trilling loan on the plea that his journey down to Sloville had quite cleaned him out, and that he had been disappointed of a remittance.

No sooner had the orator departed than another arrival was announced.

'A gentleman from London.'

The Hon. Algernon Smithson, a fellow-member with Wentworth of the Mausoleum Club, was his name. In he rushed, protesting that he had called at the club, that he had gone to Clifford's Inn, that he had come on to Sloville, just to see how his friend was getting on.

'And is that all?' asked Wentworth.

'Well, now you mention it, I don't mind telling you,' was the reply, 'that our party are rather uncomfortable about the state of things here, and Twiss, of the Treasury, asked me if I could not have five minutes' chat with you, and so, you see,' said the Honourable, with a jolly laugh, or, rather, an attempt at it, 'like the good-natured donkey that I am, I've let the cat out of the bag. Perhaps that is bad policy; but, then, you and I, Wentworth, are men of the world, and I like to be straightforward.'

In most quarters it was considered that the Hon. Smithson was rather a cunning old fox.

‘The fact is, you Government people don’t want an independent candidate. Is not that so?’ asked Wentworth.

‘Why, you see, my dear friend, the circumstances of the case are somewhat peculiar. We are rather hard pushed, as you know, in the House; parties are evenly balanced. Now, Sir Watkin has a good chance here, and his connections are very numerous in this part of the world. He is of an old Whig family.’

‘Yes, I understand; he is to win the borough, and then to be repaid by a Government appointment. And if I throw him out?’

‘Why, then we lose a safe man. You are a very good fellow, Wentworth, but, then, you are only to be depended on when the Government is right. You would desert us to-morrow if we went wrong.’

‘I believe I should.’

‘And if you go to the poll you let in a Tory. Think of that. Our party will never forgive you. There will be a mark against your name as long as you live.’

‘I have an idea that there is something more important than the triumph of a party.’

‘What is that?’

‘The triumph of principle.’

‘Ah, that is so like you, Wentworth!’ said the Hon. Smithson, laughing. ‘Men like you are always in the clouds. We wire-pullers are the only practical men.’

‘And a pretty mess you’ve made of it. Now you’ve a Liberal Government on its last legs that four years ago had nearly a majority of a hundred.’

‘I own it—and I own it with sorrow. But I am here on business. I have a proposition to make.’

‘What is that?’

‘That you arbitrate.’

‘I am quite willing; but the question is, how to arbitrate, and that is rather a difficult one.’

‘Not at all; it is the easiest thing in the world. Get a public meeting, admit an equal number of the supporters of each candidate, and abide by the result.’

‘Which, if there has been fair play—if one party has not taken a mean advantage of the other—will leave matters just as they are.’

‘Well, then, let the meeting be an open one, and let the best man win.’

‘That won’t do. The richer man will be sure to pack it with his supporters.’

‘Well, then, refer it to a London committee.’

‘A committee of wealthy men, who are sure to favour the wealthiest candidate, with whom, possibly, they may be on friendly terms; and a rich man, with the deceitful returns of his paid canvassing, can always

make out a more plausible case than a poor man. I have a plan,' continued the speaker, 'which might solve the difficulty.'

'What is it?'

'Let as many candidates go to the poll as like. Let them be ranged as Liberal or Conservative—for we have in reality no Tories now—let the votes all together be cast up, and let the man who has the highest number of votes on the winning side be the elected candidate. One advantage of such a system would be that it would create more interest in an election. The difficulty is at present to get people to take an intelligent interest in politics at all.'

‘Very good; but that is a question for the future.’

‘In the meanwhile,’ said Wentworth, ‘arbitration is a farce.’

Just before the visitor could ransack his brain for a fitting reply, the waiter (he was an Irishman and a comic genius in his way), in a tone of awe and eagerness, interrupted the *tête-à-tête* by announcing the arrival of Father O’Bourke.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE IRISH PRASTE.

There are three distinct classes of Roman Catholic priests—the ascetic and spiritual, the jolly and intellectual, the brutal and Bœotian. Of the first Cardinal Manning is the type. The second was presented to us in the person of Cardinal Wiseman, who made the Romanist priest as famous in his day as Cardinal Manning in ours. Of the third class you may see specimens every day in every Belgian town, and in many parts of England and Ireland. Father O’ Bourke was a combination of the two latter types—a man of humour, a plausible speaker, a tremendous orator, and a man whose great art was to be conciliatory to all. He could be very rollicking over a glass of whisky-and-water, but his power was more physical than spiritual. He had something of a domineering tone, the result chiefly of his mixing with the low Irish who emigrate to England, where, like the Gibeonites of old, they become chiefly hewers of stone and drawers of water.

Mr. Wentworth received the priest with all due politeness, as he explained that he had come for a friendly chat.

‘I am delighted to hear it,’ said Wentworth. ‘I have been much in Ireland.’

‘And you learnt there, sir,’ said the priest, ‘that England is a very cruel country.’

‘I don’t see that, exactly,’ said Mr. Wentworth; ‘for fifty years we English have been trying to do all the good we can for Ireland.’

‘Ah, so you think, but I assure you, sir, that it is quite otherwise; yet all that we ask from England is justice. England is rich and powerful, and uses her riches and her power to oppress poor Ireland.’

‘How so?’

‘Sir, allow me to refer you to the history of my unfortunate country. There was a time when Ireland had a flourishing linen trade, but England, in her jealousy of Ireland, destroyed it.’

‘Well,’ said Wentworth, ‘I have been in Belfast, and was struck with the prosperity of the place, the respectability of its shops, the size of its warehouses, the extent of its harbours. I saw a large population all seemingly well employed, well dressed, and well fed, with no end of public institutions and newspapers, and all in consequence of that linen trade which you tell me the English have destroyed.’

‘Oh, sir,’ said the priest, ‘one swallow does not make a summer. If one town is fairly well off, that is no reply to the charge of poverty produced by the English. You’ve seen our harbour in Galway?’

‘I have been there, and, undoubtedly, it is a fine harbour.’

‘Indeed, sir, it is,’ replied the priest; ‘and, as you are probably aware, at one time it was intended to be the seat for a great Transatlantic trade.’

‘Yes, we all know that. We have, unfortunately, all heard of the collapse of the Galway Line. It is a sad sight to see the great warehouse standing there empty. I believe a good deal of money was lost by too confiding shareholders?’

‘Indeed, sir, you’re right; but what was the reason?’

‘Well, I really don’t recollect at this particular moment.’

‘Sir, the reason was the jealousy of the Liverpool shipowners. What do you think they did?’

‘I really can’t say.’

‘Well, as soon as the Liverpool shipowners saw the line was going to be a success, they came over to Galway and bribed the pilot to run the ship on the only rock there was in the harbour, and there was the end of the Galway Transatlantic Line.’

‘Of course, Father O’Bourke, I am not going to contradict you,’ replied Wentworth. ‘I am not a Liverpool shipowner, and know little about them; but I was not long ago in Galway, in the very harbour to which you refer, and while I was there a man said to me that Allan’s steamers used to call in there for emigrants, and I asked why they did not then. “Oh,” said he, “the fact was, that while they charged in Londonderry a penny a ton, and in Queenstown a halfpenny, in Galway the charges were sixpence a ton, and so the steamers were driven away.” Thus, you see, it was not the Liverpool shipowners, but the Galway people themselves, that drove the trade away. What do you say to that?’

‘Well,’ said the priest, rather confusedly, ‘the fact is, there are wheels within wheels; we do not want the people to emigrate.’

‘No, you fear you will lose your power over them if they do; but, for the sake of abusing England, you tell me that England ruined the Galway Steam Packet Company. I am inclined to believe it did nothing of the kind.’

‘But the landlords, what do you think of them?’

‘So far as I have seen them, they are a mixed lot, like all the rest of us—some good, some bad. I blame people who bid against each other in their madness to get a bit of land on which it is impossible for anyone to live. I blame the priests and the patriots and the landlords who for ages have winked at this, and allowed the people to sink into a state of degradation such as you see nowhere else. For miles and miles, as you know, Father O’Bourke, in many parts of Galway, you see fields covered with stones, and these fields are let off as farms. If the landlord resides on the estate the stones are cleared off, the soil is drained, and the tenant manages to make a living—not such as he could get in America, or Canada, or Australia, if he had pluck enough to leave the old country and emigrate, but a living of some kind. If he is under a bad landlord—a poor Irish squire, for instance—of course it is different. If the landlord does not reside upon the estate—unless he be a great English landlord, like the Duke of Devonshire—the tenant and the land have alike a bad time of it. But as the stars in their courses fought against Sisera, so the heavens are unpropitious to the small farmer. If he rises early and sits up late, and eats the bread of carefulness, all is in vain. In Liverpool there are five or six miles of docks filled with American corn and cheese and bacon. How can the small farmer, either in England, or Ireland, or Scotland, compete with that? “It is my belief,” said a Liverpool gentleman to me—who in the famine year went on a mission of mercy, and as a messenger of relief exposed himself to all the horrors of a Connemara winter—“that the small farmer could not get a living even if, instead of paying rent, rent were given him on condition of his

taking the farm.”

‘I fear, Mr. Wentworth,’ said the priest, ‘you have looked at Ireland with prejudiced eyes.’

‘Not a bit of it. No one has been more friendly to the Irish than the Liberal Party, of which I am a member, and yet we are called infamous, and bloodthirsty, and base, and brutal. You know yourself here in England you live in perfect peace and security; you are allowed to go in and out amongst the people to make converts if you are so disposed. In Ireland, if I attempted to do anything of the kind, I should stand a good chance of a broken head.’

‘Well, sir, we are a warm-hearted, impulsive people, attached very strongly to the old religion—the religion of our forefathers.’

‘There is no doubt of that, sir,’ continued Wentworth; ‘wherever you go in Ireland, in the midst of all its dirt, and starvation, and wretchedness, and poverty, you see one man well dressed and well fed.’

‘And who may he be, sir?’

‘The parish priest.’

‘And why should he not be? Is not he the guide and shepherd of his flock? I suppose you will blame him next,’ said Father O’ Bourke, reddening.

‘Yes, I do.’

‘What for?’

‘For his desertion of the people.’

‘Really, Mr. Wentworth, you are amusing. You make me laugh,’ said the reverend father, looking uncommonly angry. ‘Should the priest not take the part of the people?’

‘Certainly. But he does nothing of the kind. Is he not the partisan of the popular agitator? Does he not place himself by the side of men whose language is utterly false? Who stimulates the passions of the people to fever heat? who teach the poor Irish—ignorant as they are, assassins as I fear a few of them are, cowards as they are when human life is to be saved—that they have every virtue under heaven?’

‘Indeed, Mr. Wentworth,’ said the priest indignantly, ‘I know nothing of the kind. Ireland has been trampled under foot by the murdering English, and now we are within measurable distance of Home Rule.’

‘And what will be the good of that?’

‘That the Irish will have their rights at last; that we shall be free of English tyranny and English injustice.’

‘Yes, you will change King Stork for King Log. Irishmen are bound to quarrel. I was at Queenstown last summer, and taking up the Cork paper, I read an account of the meeting of the Harbour Commissioners. In the course of the meeting, one member denounced another as a humbug and miscreant of the vilest character, and said, old as he was, he was prepared to fight him with the weapons God had given him, and thereupon asked him to step into the next room and have it out. When I mentioned the matter to a priest, he said sarcastically, “Of course there are no rows in the British House of Commons.” I replied that the questions discussed there were more likely to lead to heated debate than the trifling matters a set of

Harbour Commissioners would have to deal with. Furthermore, I added that when we did have a row, it was often begun by Irishmen, and generally connected with Irish affairs.'

'Ireland must be governed by Irish ideas; that is all we want.'

'Let us look at Scotland. England and Scotland were joined together, and the union was as much hated by the Scotch as the Irish union is hated by your people now. Look at England and Scotland now. Are they not one people—equally great, equally flourishing, equally happy under what was, at one time, a detested union? Why should not England and Ireland get on just as well? Had we given way to Scotch ideas, we should now be at loggerheads.'

'Unfortunately, you see, in Ireland,' said the priest, 'public opinion is the other way.'

'Public opinion! What public opinion have you, where boycotting and the bullet of the midnight assassin, who, coward-like, waits for his unsuspecting victim in a ditch or behind a stone wall, have created a reign of terror under which all freedom of thought and action is suppressed? Public opinion does not exist in Ireland. The Irish are down-trodden indeed. No Russian serfs are worse off.'

'Nevertheless, in the heart of every Irishman there is a passionate desire for freedom which has taught her sons to lead heroic lives and to die heroic deaths. Think of Emmet, Lord Edward Fitzgerald, and many others, whose names will live in immortal song.'

'By all means. They had much to complain of—though they sought a remedy the wrong way, and suffered in consequence. The Ireland of their day was bad enough; but the Ireland of to-day is different.'

'Different indeed,' said the priest proudly. 'Now we are a united people; we have the great American nation on our side.'

'Shall I tell you what an American lady said to me the other day, as I saw her off in a Cunarder for New York?' asked Mr. Wentworth.

'If you like, sir.'

'"Pray, Mr. Wentworth," she said, leaning over the ship's side, as I was getting into the tug—"pray don't send us any more Irish."'

'That may be, sir. We all know ladies have their whims and aversions as well as other people. But you don't seem fond of the Irish.'

'On the contrary, I admire them much. I envy them their ingenuity, their humour, their enthusiasm, their power of oratory, their pluck and spirit. I only wish them better led. A real union of English and Irish would, I believe, make us the first nation in the world.'

'Then, you don't think much of our leaders?'

'Oh yes I do. They are clever men—far cleverer than our average M.P.'s—but they have put the people on the wrong scent. It is not justice Ireland wants. England and Scotland are quite ready to accord her that. The people of England have been the warmest friends of Ireland from the first. Indeed, she has had more justice done to her than England and Scotland. Her farmers have rights denied to ours; her representatives occupy almost entirely the attention of Parliament. Your leaders only play with the people, and make the wrongs of Ireland a stepping-stone for themselves to place and power. What Ireland wants now is a little peace. The people are dying of political delirium tremens. Said an Irish

hotel-keeper to me one day, "What Ireland wants is more industry. Farmers' sons won't work. They prefer instead to go to fairs and races and public meetings. Irishmen won't invest in any Irish enterprise, and if they do it is always a job they make of it." I myself have known when Englishmen have gone to Ireland to establish manufactures to keep the people employed, that the foremen have been shot and the manufactories closed. You must have known something of the same kind, Father O'Bourke.'

'It may be that there are difficulties between Irishmen and Saxon masters, and that these difficulties may have occasionally led to bloodshed and loss of life. We are a hot-headed people. We have besides the wrongs of many long centuries to remember. You recollect Sir Walter Raleigh, Mr. Wentworth?'

'Blessings on his sacred head, I do! Did he not teach us to grow potatoes and smoke tobacco? I'd forgive a man a good deal in consideration of such lasting benefits.'

'Please recollect he was one of the English who accompanied Lord Grey to the South of Ireland, and took part in the attack on a great castle there. All the inmates were slaughtered. A few women, some of them pregnant, were hanged. A servant of Saunders, an Irish gentleman, and a priest were hanged, also. The bodies, six hundred in all, were stripped and laid out upon the sands—"as gallant, goodly personages," said Grey, "as were ever beheld." Was not that murderous work?'

'It was indeed,' said Wentworth sadly. 'But why treasure up such deeds of blood done ages ago? It is not Christian. The Bible tells us to forgive our enemies.'

'But it is human nature. We Irishmen have long memories. Such things can never be forgotten or forgiven.'

'There I think you're wrong. Besides, in the case you refer to the victims were chiefly foreigners, who had no business there, who had come merely for the sake of fighting. What was done in barbarous times would not be permitted now. Let us strive to be better friends. You Irishmen come to England and we welcome you at the bar, on the press, in trade, in the army or navy, or the public service. I will go further still. It is a shame that when a bridge is to be built over the Shannon you have to come to London. You ought to manage your own local affairs. But England is an empire, and high-spirited, intelligent Irishmen would rather take part in Imperial politics than shine in a local Parliament. Home Rule will not satisfy the natural aspirations of an Irishman of talent. I met an old Dutch naval captain at Flushing who complained to me one day bitterly of the hardship of his lot. When he was born Holland was a part of France; now Holland was independent, and he was a citizen of a little principality rather than of a great empire. It will be so with the Irishman of the future—or an Irishman in search of a career.'

'But, sir, is not a desire for Ireland's nationality a reasonable one?'

'Undoubtedly; but Ireland never was a nation. It was always torn with dissension; with leaders and lords ready to kill each other, only kept from doing so by England. No one would rejoice to see Ireland a nation more than I, but that is a dream of which I despair.'

'But Home Rule will make Ireland a nation.'

'How can you say that, sir?' said Wentworth indignantly. 'It is in the Protestant north that the strength of Ireland lies; it is there you meet intelligence and industry and wealth; it is there you see what Ireland might become. In all other parts of Ireland, what do you see but wretchedness and poverty? There is a permanent line of separation which not even Home Rule can obliterate.'

'You are very outspoken, Mr. Wentworth—more so than is politic, I fear,' said the reverend Father, with a

bitter smile. 'We have many Irish voters in this borough, and I fear they will be unable to give you their support; and Irish support is a matter of some consequence. In many borough elections they can turn the scale.'

'Alas! I am quite aware of that; but I hold my opinion, nevertheless. The demand for an Irish Parliament independent of an Imperial one will come to the front, the Liberal Party will find themselves compelled to support it—'

'And then we shall have peace.'

'No a bit of it! Then we shall have civil war. It was only a week or two since I was talking to a porter at the Limerick Station. He said to me: "The people want Home Rule. Let 'em have it, and there won't be many of 'em left." And I fear the porter was right.'

'Why, who will there be to fight?'

'The men of the North. I have no sympathy with Orangemen: they are hard and bigoted, and have done immense mischief in Ireland; but they will never be content with a Home Rule measure which will hand them over to their foes. Things are bad enough now, with England keeping both parties, to a certain extent, from flying at each other. What Ireland will be under Home Rule such as will be accepted by the Nationalists I shudder to contemplate.'

'You are easily alarmed,' said the priest, as he took his leave. 'We shall have Home Rule, and for once Ireland will be at peace.'

'I hope so, I am sure,' said Mr. Wentworth, as the reverend gentleman left him alone.

CHAPTER XIX.

WENTWORTH RETIRES.

Just as the Irish ‘praste’ walked out, a gentleman rushed in, breathless and unannounced.

‘Ah, my dear boy,’ said he, ‘in the language of Scripture I ask, What doest thou here, Elijah?’

‘Ask as much as you like,’ said Wentworth; ‘but I do not know that I am bound to answer.’

‘Wentworth, you are making an ass of yourself. You may think the language rather strong, but it is true, nevertheless. You know I am a candid friend, and I tell you this is not your place.’

‘I am almost of the same opinion.’

‘Let us look at the thing seriously. What is Parliamentary life but the dreariest drudgery going?—worse than that of the treadmill. The House meets at four, and rises God knows when. In any civilized community the House would meet in the day, and the business would be got through in a creditable manner. In that House you must remain night after night, never out of the sound of the division-bell or the call of the whip. There is a nice smoking-room, I own, but as it is, I believe you smoke too much. There is a fine library, but it is not so convenient for you as your own in Clifford’s Inn. I believe the dinners are not bad; but you are a philosopher, and prefer your roast potato and your mutton-bone—

“A hollow tree,
A crust of bread and liberty.”

—to the dainties of the gourmand. On a hot night you can have a moonlight walk, to breathe the odours of the silvery Thames, and the chances are you will go home to be laid up with rheumatism.’

This latter aspect of the question was always a serious thing to the speaker. He was a medical man, and had constituted himself the guardian of Wentworth’s health. The two were warmly-attached friends. Buxton, for such was his name, had not made much way in his profession; in fact, he was not a lady’s man. He was rough in voice, blunt in manner, somewhat uncouth in appearance. He might have done for the army or navy; but as a general practitioner he had no chance.

Any respectable lady who had injured her health by tight-lacing or late hours, or her figure by high-heeled boots, or her complexion by cosmetics; any decent tradesman or substantial British merchant who had ruined his liver by a too generous diet and want of fresh air and exercise; any devoted parson who had induced—as he may well have done—softening of the brain, considering what he has to say, and to whom, not once a week, but all the year round, would have deemed Buxton, with his absence of all *finesse*, with his straightforward habit of talking, with his rude and, to them, impertinent and unfeeling questions, a brute; and thus Buxton spread out his net and displayed his head full of strange wares in vain. But he was honest to the core, and a genuine friend, with a love of science nothing could quench, and with a desire to benefit his neighbours, which in his case was its own reward.

His wants were not many, for he was a bachelor; and independently of his profession, he had a comfortable little property of his own. England owes much to her medical men. In the priesthood of the future they will not occupy the lowest scale. Already they rank amongst our greatest theological reformers. Undoubtedly one of the healthiest signs of the times is the attention paid by the modern Christian to that wonderful temple of ours, the human body, fashioned, as we would fain believe, in the Divine image by an Almighty power.

It is lamentable to see how at one time all trace of that elevating idea was lost sight of, and how widely it was accepted as a matter of course that this poor carcase, this earthly tabernacle, this vile body of sin and death, was, if the Divine life was to be kept alive, to be subjected to treatment which would have brought the wrong-doer within the four corners of any decent Act for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, had such an Act been in existence. A good many of the sighs and groans accepted as evidences of exalted piety in past days, were more the result of earthly than of celestial influences—more due to the fact that the digestion was weak than that the spirit was strong; that it was ill with the body rather than it was well with the soul.

It was a common error not many years since—it may be that it exists more or less now—for pious people to assume that a dislike of this world, a shutting of the mental eye to all the wonders and glory of it as revealed by the sun that walks by day, and the moon that rules by night, was a sure sign of fitness for another; that maudlin sentimentalism was religion in its purest form, that to be unhealthy and miserable was to be a saint. We have got rid of that folly, at any rate, and a good deal of the credit of it is due to Dr. Andrew Combe, brother of the phrenologist, George Combe, whose popular phrenology and other works did much to arouse and enlighten the public mind.

It is not now that to treat the body decently is considered a sign of a low state of spirituality—that we hear it urged as an excuse for neglecting to take care of one's health, the most precious talent given by God to man, that it is wrong to take any trouble about the flesh in a state of sin and under bondage, and in a few short years to be food for worms. Such talk was pitilessly flouted, if ever Buxton chanced to come within ear-shot of it, and good people, accordingly, in their abounding charity, fancied he was a sceptic, that he denied the faith, and was worse than an infidel. Buxton continued:

‘What can you do, what can anyone do in the House of Commons, but register the people's will. It is outside the House, not within, that the battle of public opinion is fought. To you or me a Parliamentary struggle is neither more nor less than a trial of the outs to get into office, or of the ins to retain place and power; for, let them call themselves what they will—Tories or Radicals, Advanced Reformers or Obstructionists—no Government can exist in this country that does not represent public opinion, and does not do honest work for its living. It was so in the days of rotten boroughs, of Sir Robert Walpole, of Pitt and Fox, of Castlereagh and Canning and Sidmouth, and is still so now.’

‘I have said as much to you a thousand times,’ said Wentworth, smiling.

‘Of course you have. Like myself, you are a man of sense. If you were a barrister, I would say, Get into Parliament by all means. If you did not do any good for your country, you might get a good place for yourself. If you were a parson you could get a living.’

‘Ah,’ said Wentworth, ‘that reminds me of a good story; you recollect Thompson, who edited the *Political Pioneer*?’

‘Of course I do.’

‘Well, he wrote, as you may remember, very violently and ridiculously in favour of the late Government. He took his articles to the right quarter, and asked for a reward. “If you were a barrister,” said the Government manager, “we could give you a berth; if you were a parson, we could give you a living. As it is, I fear we can’t help you.” Somehow or other Thompson managed to get ordained, and was given a living in the North, which he has been obliged to leave on account of drunkenness, and he is now back in town working at odds and ends on his old paper.’

‘Well,’ said Buxton, ‘I am not surprised at that. He never was a man for whom I had any respect, but I don’t want to see you shelved in that way. If you want office, of course you must get into Parliament, but I don’t think you care much about that sort of thing.’

‘No, I should think not.’

‘Then, what do you want to get into Parliament for? Think of the hypocrisy of public life. An independent M.P. is a nuisance to all parties, and can do no good. You dislike to hear the cry of the Church in danger, because you know the man who raises it means that he is afraid of losing his tithes. You laugh at the man who talks about preserving our glorious Constitution of Church and State, because you and I well know what he means is the preservation of caste and injustice. But is the Liberal politician much better, who, to keep his party in power, goes ranting about the country in the sacred name of Liberty and Freedom and Progress, and the Rights of Man? Depend upon it, there is little to choose between one set of men and the other. Both are equally selfish, equally thinking of number one, when they are most frantic for their revered leader, as they call him, or most eager to champion the masses; their care is the triumph of their party, mostly, too, with an eye to office themselves.’

‘Upon my word, I believe I have heard all this before.’

‘I believe you have, old boy, and as long as you keep such good company as you are in at the present time I believe you stand an uncommon good chance of hearing it again. There is nothing like line upon line, and precept upon precept. You can speak well, but you won’t have a chance of being heard in the House of Commons, where you will be muzzled in order that the officials may have their say. Besides, in the House speeches are mere make-believe. They never influence the voting. All that you can do is to vote black is white in the interests of your party, and is it worth while going into the House for that? Certainly not.’

‘Go on,’ said Wentworth sarcastically.

‘Thank you, I will. Then think of what you have to go through to into the House—the trouble you must take; the time you must waste; the money you must spend; the speeches you must make; the lies you must utter. You will have to tell the voters they are intelligent—you know the mass of them are nothing of the kind. You must make them believe that, if they do not strain every nerve to get you into Parliament, the sun will refuse to shine and the earth to yield her fruit. At any rate, if you do not say that, you will have to say something very much like it. You have got to make the voter feel that his vote will do away with the wrongs of ages, when you and I well know that in this land of ours nothing is done in a hurry if it is done well, and that, as Tennyson writes,

“Freedom broadens slowly down
From precedent to precedent.”

The time is coming when the only chance for anyone to get into Parliament will be either that he is a working man and can secure the votes of his class, or that he shall be some large employer of labour with

a certain number of votes under his thumb, and Parliament will be little better than a parish vestry.'

'Well, we have not come to that yet, and a man may do a great deal of good even in Parliament.'

'Yes, he may, but he can do it better outside. It was an outside organization that carried the repeal of the Corn Laws, that carried reform in Parliament, that repealed the taxes on knowledge, that abolished West Indian slavery.'

'Of course you mean the press.'

'Of course I do, my boy. I repeat daily to myself the words of old Marvell, "Oh, printing, printing, how hast thou disturbed the peace of mankind! That lead, when moulded into bullets, is not so mortal as when formed into letters. There was a mistake, sure, in the story of Cadmus, and the serpent's teeth which he sowed were nothing but the letters he invented." Stick to the press, my boy, and don't lower yourself by descending into the Parliamentary arena. It is long since the House of Commons was the best club in London, which conferred on a man *prestige*. It is now a place where the work is mostly dull, and always hard and unsatisfactory, and the company rather queer. Shall we give up to party what is meant for mankind?" Shall the blessed sun of day prove a Micker and eat blackberries?" Shall we harness Pegasus or Bucephalus to a common dray? Never, my boy, never!'

'I hear you, Buxton, and the worst of it is that what you say is true.'

'I am glad to hear you say so. Come back with me to town. Leave the borough to those who have nursed it. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib. An election is a matter of £ s. d. It is all very well to talk bunkum on the platform, but the wire-pullers want cash for themselves and to work with. When the masses are better educated, they will be proud to return a man like you.'

'Well,' said Wentworth, 'I am of your opinion, and we'll go back to town together.'

The mob, however, was determined not to let Wentworth depart in peace. They followed him with stones and mud until he found shelter in the station waiting-room.

'Good heavens!' said the station-master. 'Mr. Wentworth, what a state you are in! What have you been up to? Who would have thought of seeing you in such a mess?'

'Ah, Mr. Johnson, you remember me!'

'I should think so, sir. We all missed you when you left Bethesda Chapel. But what have you been doing?'

'Only speaking the truth to the free and independent electors of this enlightened borough.'

'You mean casting pearls before swine.'

'Well, I fear that is the proper way of putting it; but neither you nor I may say that in this place, and especially at this time.'

'No, the people are half crazy, and most of them tipsy. They always are so at election time. I can't say who are the worst, Liberals or Tories, rich or poor—they all seem to me bad alike. The fact is, parties are very fairly divided here, that the election is really in the hands of a few, who only want a debauch, and don't care a rap for politics of any kind. The only question with them is, Who will spend the most money? But what are you going to do?'

‘Why, get out of the place as soon as possible.’

‘Well, perhaps that is the best thing you can do; but first let me see if I can’t help to make you look a little more respectable.’

The attempt was partly successful; and having washed and covered his rags with a great-coat, and exchanged his battered hat for a travelling cap, Wentworth took his seat in a first-class carriage, and, lighting his cigar, mused on the dangers he had run, and the disgusting scene of which he had been a witness.

‘Good heavens!’ said he to himself, ‘what a farce! And yet there are those who say, *Vox populi, vox dei!* Happily, as a rule, we get gentlemen in Parliament, and the result of an election is not bad on the whole. Shall we be able to say as much when a lower class of candidates are returned?’

The Liberal press were angry, and Wentworth came in for his share of abuse. He laughed as he read of his wickedness. Still more did he laugh as he thought of the people who had interviewed him—the needy Scotchman who sympathized with his manly struggle, had read his speeches with undying interest, who fervently prayed that he might win, and who, though he was not an elector, felt sure that Wentworth was a Scotchman, and would lend a brother Scot a small loan; the ladies who had endeavoured to capture him by storm; the collectors of various great societies who felt sure that Wentworth would not refuse to subscribe to their funds, as all the Liberal candidates had done the same; the stupid questions he had to answer; the slanders of which he had been the victim; the enthusiasm he had evoked; the temporary importance he had achieved. It was an experience which he would not have missed, and so far he was quite satisfied with the result.

CHAPTER XX.

A STORM BREWING.

The elections were over; Parliament had met; the nobles of the land had returned to town as well as their toadies, and admirers, and imitators; and all was gay and glittering in the parks, at the clubs, and in Belgravian *salons*. The *quidnuncs* of society were as busy as bees. In our time the Church and the theatre are in equal request, and it is hard to say who is the winner in the race for public favour, the last new star at the theatre or the last pulpit pet; the last strong man of the music-hall, the newest favourite of the ring. We are a catholic-minded people, and are grateful to anyone who will give us something to talk about.

For once the shopkeepers of Regent Street and Bond Street were in good spirits. There was every prospect of a successful season. London was full, and there was no end of society balls and dinners. An Austrian archduke was to appear on the scene. One of the richest of the American Bonanza kings had taken a great house in Grosvenor Square.

The deserted palace of Buckingham would once more open its doors, and there were to be Drawing-rooms, whether as regards numbers or brilliancy rivalling any that had ever been held.

We had a strong Government, with a strong majority behind, and speculators on the Stock Exchange were buying for a rise. The Rothschilds of London and Paris and Vienna had all agreed that there should be peace, and it was also understood that a great German Chancellor had kindly condescended to intimate that for the present, at any rate, the sword might be sheathed, and that honest peasant lads, instead of being served up as food for powder, might be usefully employed in agricultural occupations, much to the joy of hotel-keepers on the Rhine, at Baden-Baden and elsewhere. Even in the valleys and mountains of the Alps, in the new nation of Italy, in the gilded palaces of the Sultan on the Bosphorus, there was unusual light-heartedness, for the Eastern Question was indefinitely postponed. The talk of the clubs had ceased to have any reference to politics. A great calm had settled everywhere in the East of London, where poverty makes men Radicals and Social Democrats, and in the West, where the only burning question of the hour is how to put off the day of reckoning to a more convenient season.

If it had not been for the occasional appearance of a wealthy American heiress, whose father had ‘struck ile,’ of a fair Anonyma on horseback, in an exquisitely-appointed equipage in some fashionable thoroughfare, or for a whisper of a scandal in high life, or for a wild adventure now and then of a man about town, or the unexpected collapse of a favourite on the turf, or the disgraceful bankruptcy of a pious banker, society would have been duller than ditch water. As it was, what to do with the heavy hours intervening between luncheon and dinner seemed a problem too difficult for human ingenuity—even when most fitly trained and fairly developed—to solve.

It was precisely at this trying hour Sir Watkin Strahan might be seen lolling idly and discontentedly in one of the many armchairs which adorned the smoking-room of his Piccadilly club. By his side was an emptied glass, the ashes of a defunct cigar, and the usual journals which are humorously supposed to be comic, or to be remarkably witty, or to represent society. He did not look particularly pleased, not even

when a brother member, evidently a chip of the same block, seated himself by his side, exclaiming:

‘Holloa, Sir Watkin, what brings yon up to town? I thought you were carrying all before you at Sloville.’

‘Sloville be d---d!’

‘Certainly, my dear friend, if you wish it. What’s Hecuba to me?’

‘Now, look at me, and drop that style of remark.’

We comply with the Baronet’s suggestion, and look at him. He was, after all, a handsome man, carefully dressed and fitted to shine in Belgravia; soft and gentle in manner, sleek as a tiger. Time had dealt gently with him, had spared his head of hair, and saved him from the obesity which attacks most men after a certain age. Mr. Disraeli tells us that the English aristocracy do not read, and live much in the open air. Hence their juvenility. At a distance Sir Watkin looked anywhere between five-and-twenty and fifty. To-day, however, he looked nearer the latter than the former. He did not look like a good man, such as you read of in evangelical biographies or on the tombstones in churchyards and cemeteries. There was a scowl on his forehead, anger in his eye and in his tones.

‘Well,’ said another friend, ‘all I can say is I have just seen ---,’ naming the Liberal whip, ‘and he’s terribly cut up. He thought you were safe for Sloville.’

‘So I should have been if it had not been for that infernal Wentworth. My canvassers and election agent made me feel quite certain of success. I believe they humbugged me frightfully.’

‘Oh, they always do that. It is their nature.’

‘But it is none the less disagreeable. My own opinion is, there was a good deal of bribery. Money seemed very plentiful. The Carlton had a finger in the pie. Old Shrouder was there; and he is always at his old game. There is not another such a rascal in all England.’

‘That’s saying a great deal. I wonder how the old scamp has managed to keep out of Newgate.’

‘Lord bless you, man! you know none of our hands are very clean; but I am sure I could get the new M.P. unseated on petition.’

‘What, and claim the vacant seat?’

‘No, alas! that won’t do. How can I say what my agent was up to, or what was done by idiotic friends? The law is so particular. They make out everything to be bribery nowadays. It is precious hard nowadays for a gentleman to get into Parliament, and that is a rascally shame. We have been in the place for a hundred years. There is not a charity in it I don’t support. I have spent a fortune in nursing the town. All I can say is, next Christmas some of the free and independent will feel rather silly when they miss the coals and blankets, and find the key of the wine cellar lost.’

‘I can’t make it out; there must be some other reason. Do you think that fellow Wentworth had anything to do with your defeat?’ asked the Baronet’s friend. ‘You know he seems to be rather high-minded, and these men are in the way at an election.’

‘Well, he might, with his nonsense, have kept some of the voters away. I did hear some ill-natured gossip about myself, but I can’t trace it to him.’

‘Oh!’ said his friend; ‘that’s what I was waiting for. The British mob won’t stand that sort of thing, though they ill-use their wives every day.’

‘Why, I never said what the gossip was.’

‘No, but I know. You’re not a saint, Sir Watkin.’

‘Nor you either. The people, somehow or other, had got it into their heads that I behaved badly to a Sloville girl.’

‘A thing you could never think of doing,’ said his friend, with affected indignation.

‘No, it is too near home,’ said the Baronet.

‘But you know I have always said to you that the way in which you went on with women would, one day or other, get you into a scrape. Stick to the married ones, and leave the young ones alone. That is my plan. If you get into a mess then, the woman is bound to help you out. The chances, you see, are two to one in your favour. But there is a better plan still.’

‘What is that?’

‘Leave ’em alone. They all mean mischief.’

‘Well, it is not everyone who is such a cool hand as you are.’

‘So much the worse for other people,’ was the reply. ‘But in the case of that Sloville girl, I really don’t see you have anything to reproach yourself with. She ran away from you, did she not? and I don’t see how any mischief could be made of that. I suppose she is still able to carry on the highly respectable calling of a dressmaker; I think she was that. She was an uncommonly fine girl; there was quite a style about her; and a girl like that can’t take much harm—that is, as long as she keeps her good looks.’

‘Oh no, the girl is all right. She is now the popular Miss Howard, of the --- Theatre.’

‘The deuce she is! Why, then, don’t you make it up with her? A bracelet and a dinner at the Star and Garter will do the trick.’

‘I fear not. The fact is, I met her accidentally a short time ago, and she held her head as high as Lucifer.’

‘Only acting, my dear boy. ’Tis only pretty Fanny’s way. ’Tis well—she might have come to you for money.’

‘I wish she had. That would have given me a pull on her.’

‘She might have served you with an action for breach of promise.’

‘That would have been too ridiculous.’

‘She was young. I don’t feel sure that she might not have had you up under the Act which makes the parent the guardian of the child till she is sixteen.’

‘Oh no, she was older than that.’

‘Perhaps she wants to excite you. She knows now that you are a single man, and she thinks it well to begin the renewal of her acquaintance with a little seasonable aversion.’

‘The fact is, she not only treated me with aversion, but she cut me dead.’

‘Shocking!’ said his friend.

‘Yes, it was. I was always fond of her, and I am mad to get hold of her again.’

‘That ought not to be difficult to Sir Watkin Strahan.’

‘Perhaps not. But there is a man in the case—a newspaper fellow—the fellow, in short, who had the impudence to come down to Sloville to contest the borough. I believe he lost me the seat. I believe the girl got him to do it out of revenge.’

‘Then, I would be even with him.’

‘So I will before I’ve done with him. You may be sure I’ll have my revenge,’ said the Baronet angrily.

‘Yes, I can trust you for that,’ said his friend. ‘You are a good fellow, Sir Watkin, but you neither forget nor forgive.’

‘No, we don’t in our family, and we have found it answer our purpose very well.’

‘But, come, liquor up. Never mind the women; leave them to themselves.’

‘Ah, that is easier said than done. I suppose I must give up this sort of life. I must marry again, and reform, and settle down into a quiet life, look after my tenants, attend the parish church, do my duty as a magistrate and a breeder of fat cattle, as my fathers before me. They seem to have been all highly beloved and deeply regretted. That is, if I read aright the inscriptions on their monuments in Sloville Church.’

‘They must have been if they were at all like their latest representative,’ said his friend sarcastically.

‘You be blowed!’ was the uncomplimentary reply. ‘I tell you what. I see the girl is acting to-night. I have nothing better to do—I’ll go and see her.’

‘Shall I come with you?’

‘No, I thank you; I’d rather go alone.’

‘You had better take me with you. You’ll get into another scrape. You always do when I am not with you.’

‘Thanks, but I think I am old enough to run alone. If I want your valuable aid I shall send for you.’

‘Do—I shall be here all right. It amuses me more to have a quiet rubber than to be tearing all over London by night after anything in petticoats.’

‘Ah, you are a philosopher.’

‘I wish I could return the compliment.’

‘By-the-by,’ said the Baronet, changing the subject, ‘did you ever hear of the curious predicament I am in?’

‘What do you mean—the birth and disappearance of the baby?’

‘Exactly so. You were in Italy at the time, or I should have liked to have talked it over. My lady, as you know, did me the favour to present me with a son and heir. I am not a judge of babies myself, nor am I particularly partial to them, but it was a creditable baby, so far as I can judge. I imagine its lungs were sound by the way in which it squealed. It had the regulation number of limbs, the family proboscis, and apparently the parental eyes. The women all voted it a sweet little innocent, and the image of its father.’

‘That’s a matter of course,’ said the friend.

‘Well, one day the child was missing.’

‘I remember hearing of it. It was said your lady was in delicate health at the time, and the shock caused her death.’

‘I believe it had something to do with it; but the fact was with all her admirable qualities she had peculiar notions, and that led to little unpleasantnesses between us at times, and she worried herself about trifles in a way I am sure that was not good for her, and I must own that when the child was missing, naturally, she was very much cut up.’

‘And the father?’ said the friend.

‘I took it more calmly, I own. You can’t expect a man of the world, like myself, to have been broken-hearted about the loss of a little bit of flesh like that. Had it lived to become a young man, and to have plagued his poor father as I plagued mine, or as most young fellows do, I should have been prostrated with grief, I dare say. As it was, I bore the loss with the heroism of a martyr, and the resignation of a saint.’

‘You need not tell me that; I can quite believe it,’ remarked his friend with a smile.

‘Well, as I have said, her ladyship worried herself a good deal unnecessarily. I never can understand why women have such particular ideas. I suppose they learn them from the parson. Now, there was Lady ---’ (naming the wife of a volatile premier forgotten now, but much beloved by the British public for his spirited foreign policy and his low Church bishops). ‘I had the honour of dining with her ladyship at the time there was a little scandal afloat respecting his lordship’s proceedings with a governess who had made her appearance in the family of one of his relatives. The thing was in the papers, and it was nonsense pretending to ignore it. Somehow or other it was incidentally alluded to.’

“‘Ah,” said her ladyship, turning to me with one of her most bewitching smiles, “that is so like my dear old man.”

‘Her ladyship was a sensible woman, and loved her gay Lothario not a bit the less for his little peccadilloes. I never saw a more harmonious pair. They were a model couple, and if they had gone to Dunmow for the flitch of bacon, they would have won it. I never could get my lady to look at things in such a sensible manner, and I do fear that at times she fretted herself a good deal, and we know that is bad for health. One of our nursemaids was a perfect Hebe. I could not resist the temptation. I believe some ill-natured female aroused my lady’s suspicions. At any rate, one cold winter’s evening she forced herself into my sanctum. I did not happen to be alone. Hebe, as I called her, was with me. We had a scene. I took the mail train that same night to Paris. The poor girl, I understand, was turned out of the house the moment I had gone. My opinion is she stole that baby out of revenge. It was missing about a month after. I must own her ladyship took every step she could to prove that the girl had stolen the child. We had detectives hard at work, and when the child was restored in a mysterious way, the matter

dropped. Then, alas! the child died, and the mother too. That was many years ago, and from that day to this I never have been able to hear anything of the woman. The child is buried in the family vault, but I have been much troubled lately.'

'As how?'

'Why, suppose the child is not dead. That the one restored was someone else's. That I have a son and heir suddenly about to be sprung upon me, at an inconvenient season. That would be awkward, to say the least.'

'D--- awkward,' was the sympathetic reply.

'Suppose, for the sake of argument, I were to marry again, and have a family, and another son and heir, and a claimant came forward for the family title and estate.'

'Ah, that would be a nice business for the lawyers, and a godsend for the newspapers.'

'Undoubtedly, but a bad one for everyone else, especially if the costs were to come out of the estate.'

'Well, the lawyers would have to be paid.'

'You may trust them for that, but I want to keep out of their clutches. In case of a second marriage all this business will have to be gone into; but marry I will, if it is only to spite the presumptive heir, a man whom I always hated as a sneaking boy, and I don't love the man now he fancies he is going to step into my shoes, or, if not, who feels that his family will. I am bound to marry, if only out of spite.'

'The best thing you can do, Sir Watkin, and I wish you well through it. I am not a marrying man myself. I never was. I am getting too old for it, and I could not afford it if I wished. When we are young we have dreams of love in a cottage, and try to persuade ourselves that what is enough for one is enough for two; that there is nothing half so sweet as love's young dream. But, oh, the terrible awakening, when the dream is over, and the grim-reality of poverty stalks in at the door, and the husband has endless toil, and the wife endless sorrow, and even then the wolf is not kept from the door; and things are worse when the happy couple come to their senses and feel what fools they have been. There is little room for love then. I believe matrimony is the sin of the age. No one can pretend now that to increase and multiply is the whole duty of man. The world is over-peopled, half of the people of England cannot get a decent living as it is. Why am I to drag a respectable woman down into the depths of poverty? Why, I ask, is she to drag me down? I have my comforts, my clubs, my amusements, my occupations, my position in society. Were I married I should lose them all, unless I married a Miss Kilmansegg with her golden leg. But your case is different, Sir Watkin. You are bound to marry. It is a duty you owe to your ancestors, who have given you title and fortune, to continue the family.'

It may be that some may not approve of this style of talk. They may question the need of great hereditary families. They may go so far as to insinuate that the happiness of such few individuals is often inconsistent with the welfare of the many; that the system which keeps up such is an artificial one; that the true aim of legislation should be the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Respectability in wonder may well ask what next? But in the coming era respectability will have a good deal to wonder about.

CHAPTER XXI.

AN UNPLEASANT RENCONTRE.

Left alone with himself, Sir Watkin revolved many things. He was not sorry after all, he tried to persuade himself, that he was not in Parliament. He was no eager politician, and he had none of that fatal fluency when on his legs, so common in our day among the ambitious clerks and traders who join Parliamentary societies, and figure in them with the hope at some time or other of calling themselves M.P.'s. It was time, he thought, that he should again try his luck in the matrimonial market, and, indeed, he had almost made up his mind to secure a prize which had been temptingly displayed.

He had been staying at Brighton, at a grand hotel, and there he had made the acquaintance of a wealthy merchant, an old widower, with an only daughter, for whose hand and heart he had already commenced angling. The father was chatty and cheerful in the smoking-room, of one of the Brighton clubs, and the girl, if she had not the birth of a lady, had all the accomplishments of one. She was not romantic, few girls nowadays are. She was not a philosopher in petticoats, as so many of them try to be. She read novels, could quote Tennyson, had the usual accomplishments, never failed to put in an appearance at a fashionable church on a Sunday, and had once or twice figured at a stall at a charity bazaar. Her figure looked well on horseback, and did not disgrace a Belgravian ball-room. It was to her credit that she had not attempted authorship. She was not a bad hand at a charade, and was a proficient in lawn tennis, where one weak curate after another had succumbed to her charms. Poor fellows, they singed their wings in vain at that candle. Neither father nor daughter was ecclesiastically inclined. In addition, she had had the measles and been vaccinated and confirmed, and was ambitious of worldly success.

'Just a woman to make a lady of,' said the Baronet to himself, as he watched her receding figure one morning as she was on her way to Brill's Baths for a swimming lesson. 'They tell me the old man has no end of tin, and this is his only child.'

He met the Baronet half way. When Sir William Holles, the son of that Sir William Holles, Lord Mayor of London, and Alderman of Candlewick Ward, and knighted by Henry VIII., was recommended by his friends to marry his daughter to the Earl of Cumberland, he replied:

'Sake of God' (his usual mode of expression), 'I do not like to stand with my cap in hand to my son-in-law. I will see her married to an honest gentleman with whom I may have friendship and conversation.'

Sir Watkin relieved the London merchant of any apprehension on that score, when, one day, he managed to dine in his company. It was wonderful how well they got on together. Sir Watkin talked of stocks and shares, of foreign loans and the rate of exchange, of hostile tariffs, of the fall of this house and the rise of another, of aldermen and lord mayors, as if he had been a City man himself. It is true this talk is rather dull, but Sir Watkin was not brilliant by any means.

Back in town the Baronet felt rather dull. Such men often are dull. Time hangs heavily on the hands of such.

As Sir Watkin looked into the advertising columns of the evening paper he caught the name of Miss

Howard. She was acting that very night. He would go and see her. Just as he resolved to carry out this idea, his old club friend reappeared upon the scene. Sir Watkin stated his intention. There could be no harm in his doing that. Perhaps she might soften; perhaps her anger was only assumed. Perhaps it was not the woman but the actress that seemed so indignant at their unexpected meeting.

‘How foolish,’ thought his friend, ‘Sir Watkin is! He had better take me with him, or he’ll be sure to get into a scrape. That’s like him. Just as he wants to pull off that Brighton affair he’s off after another woman.’

Sir Watkin meanwhile is making his way to the theatre. I don’t say that he is to be condemned because he did that. As a rule a man of a gay turn or of idle disposition is better inside a theatre than out. At any rate, there he is out of harm’s way, and not losing money, as he might be if he remained betting and gambling at his club. The life there produced is a good deal of it artificial and unnatural, but the spectacle is generally pleasant, and if the actors are often ridiculous, some of them are good, and a few of them clever.

It was late when Sir Watkin entered the theatre. For awhile he waited in vain; at length, on the stage, sure enough, was the woman he wanted to see. Did she recognise him in the stalls? He hoped she did. He was got up regardless of expense, and occupied a good place. He had dined well, and had somewhat the appearance of a son of Belial, flushed with insolence and wine. He felt that the actress was in his power. He knew the manager, and was certain that he could gain access, when he sought it, behind the scenes. Strange to say, the actress regarded him not. When you are acting, it is not always easy—especially if you are in earnest—to single out particular individuals from the motley mass in front of the footlights. The good actor throws himself into his part, and has something else to do than to gaze on occupants of the benches. His eyes and his heart are elsewhere. At the time, when Sir Watkin arrived, Miss Howard was a simple village girl, engaged in warding off the libertine advances of a wicked baron. It seemed that he was about to succeed in his foul designs. According to all human appearances he had her completely in his power. Happily her cry for help was heard, and, after a due amount of agony on her part, and of breathless suspense on the part of the audience, she was saved, and the curtain fell amidst thunders of applause. The piece was not much as regards novelty, but it was of a class that has just that touch of nature which makes the whole world kin. Miss Howard well acted the *rôle* of the virtuous village maiden, and when the true lover, who had come back with a fortune which he had made in the Australian diggings, turned up, everyone felt that her faith and virtue were to meet an appropriate reward. Sir Watkin, cynic as he was, could not but admire. At first he ventured to hesitate, dislike, to damn with faint praise, as in his somewhat superior style he attempted one or two remarks to those around; but the feeling was too strong, and he found himself applauding in spite of his stern resolve to do nothing of the kind. Yes, the girl had become a fine woman and a clever actress. She surely would not cut him if he made his way behind the scenes. In vain, however, he would have tried had not the manager seen him.

‘How d’ye do, Sir Watkin? glad to see you. You have not been much with us of late.’

‘No,’ replied the Baronet; ‘I’ve been busy elsewhere. You’ve got a good house to-night. A good deal of paper, I suppose?’

‘Not a bit of it. The public pay.’

‘I am glad to hear that. How do you account for it?’

‘Sir Watkin, I am surprised you ask such a question when you see what a star we’ve got.’

‘Oh, Miss Howard. Not bad. I should like to speak to her.’

‘By all means; come along.’

And they made their way to the back, cold and draughty, and very disenchanting, as the workmen were shifting the scenes.

‘Take care, Sir Watkin. Mind that trapdoor. Look out, Sir Watkin!’ and suchlike exclamations were uttered by the manager as one danger after another threatened. The scene-shifters, very dirty, were numerous. There a ballet-girl was talking to an admirer, as she was waiting her turn. There another was by herself practising the step which was, in a few minutes, to crown her with well-deserved applause. In the midst of them presently Miss Howard appeared. The manager hastened to introduce his old friend, who, with his hat off, was preparing one of the polite speeches for which men of the world are famous, and by means of which, occasionally, they ensnare a woman.

The lady walked on.

The manager was shocked.

It was now the Baronet’s turn.

‘Permit an old friend to offer Miss Howard his congratulations on her great success this evening.’

The lady thus addressed coldly bowed, but uttered never a word.

The situation was embarrassing. Fain would the Baronet have detained the actress.

‘Rose,’ he said passionately, ‘one word!’

But before he could utter another he found himself face to face with Wentworth, who, as usual, had come to see the actress home.

‘You here?’ said he to the Baronet.

‘Yes, and why not?’ said the latter angrily.

‘And you dare speak to that lady?’

‘Yes, why not? Do you think I am to be balked by a fellow like you?’

‘Say that again,’ said Wentworth, ‘and I’ll break every bone in your body.’

‘Gentlemen, gentlemen,’ exclaimed the manager, ‘pray be quiet! Sir Watkin, come along with me.’

The manager was in a dilemma. He would not for the world offend the Baronet, who had often aided him with money, and at the same time he was afraid of the press, of which Wentworth was a representative. As he said afterwards, he felt as if he were between the devil and the deep sea. His aim was to offend no one who could be of any use.

‘Come along with you—yes, I will, but I must have it out with this fellow first,’ said the Baronet, making a rush at Wentworth, who seemed quite prepared for the encounter.

Fortunately, just at that time there was a rush of ballet-girls between the angry combatants. They covered the Baronet in a cloud of muslin, who, though not seen, could be heard expressing indignation in no measured terms. The Baronet was powerless as, like a protecting wall, they encircled him, all smiles and sunshine—a contrast to his scowling face.

‘Pardon me, ladies,’ said he, ‘you’re rather in my way. I have been insulted on this stage, and I’ll have my revenge.’

What more the Baronet would have said is lost to history. The stage is full of pit-fells. One gave way as he was speaking, and suddenly he sank out of sight. The ballet-girls shrieked, and then burst into a fit of laughter as they saw no harm was done. It is needless to say the Baronet was soon extricated from his unpleasant position, and made a rapid retreat. It does not do to be ridiculous, especially when you are in a towering rage, as we all know there is but a step between the sublime and the ridiculous.

‘I wish,’ he said to himself, as he drove home, ‘I had stopped at the club. I was a fool to go behind the scenes. I would like to be revenged on that Wentworth, but how? That’s the difficulty. The age of duelling is past, murder has ceased to be one of the fine arts, and I must grin and bear it.’

So far the Baronet was right. In the eye of the law, and at the bar of public opinion, the man who resorts to force is hopelessly in the wrong. We moderns, like the gods of Epicurus, approve

‘The depth, but not the tumult of the soul.’

Poor Rose was not a little upset. Her face was marble, but her heart was sad. Was this man to track her steps?

‘Rose, my beautiful,’ said her companion, when they were fairly out of the theatre, ‘we have loved each other long, and the sooner we get married the better. It is not safe for you to be alone.’

It was thus he spoke, nor did he speak in vain.

We hear much of woman’s rights in these days. I am old-fashioned enough to believe that her first right is a husband to look after her. It is not well for man or woman to be alone.

END OF VOL. II.

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