

Paul Clifford, Volume 3.

Edward Bulwer-Lytton

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Title: Paul Clifford, Volume 3.

Author: Edward Bulwer-Lytton

Release Date: March 2005 [EBook #7730]
[Yes, we are more than one year ahead of schedule]
[This file was first posted on May 13, 2003]

Edition: 10

Language: English

Character set encoding: ASCII

***** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PAUL CLIFFORD, BY LYTTON, V3 *****

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PAUL CLIFFORD, Volume 3.

By Edward Bulwer-Lytton

CHAPTER XII.

Up rouse ye then,
My merry, merry men!
--JOANNA BAILLIE.

When the moon rose that night, there was one spot upon which she palely broke, about ten miles distant from Warlock, which the forewarned traveller would not have been eager to pass, but which might not have afforded a bad study to such artists as have caught from the savage painter of the Apennines a love for the wild and the adventurous. Dark trees, scattered far and wide over a broken but verdant sward, made the background; the moon shimmered through the boughs as she came slowly forth from her pavilion of cloud, and poured a broader beam on two figures just advanced beyond the trees. More plainly brought into light by her rays than his companion, here a horseman, clad in a short cloak that barely covered the crupper of his steed, was looking to the priming of a large pistol which he had just taken from his holster. A slouched hat and a mask of black crape conspired with the action to throw a natural suspicion on the intentions of the rider. His horse, a beautiful dark gray, stood quite motionless, with arched neck, and its short ears quickly moving to and fro, demonstrative of that sagacious and anticipative attention which characterizes the noblest of all tamed animals; you would not have perceived the impatience of the steed, but for the white foam that gathered round the bit, and for an occasional and unfrequent toss of the head. Behind this horseman, and partially thrown into the dark shadow of the trees, another man, similarly clad, was busied in tightening the girths of a horse, of great strength and size. As he did so, he hummed, with no unmusical murmur, the air of a popular drinking-song.

"Sdeath, Ned!" said his comrade, who had for some time been plunged in a silent revery,--"Sdeath! why can you not stifle your love for the fine arts at a moment like this? That hum of thine grows louder every moment; at last I expect it will burst out into a full roar. Recollect we are not at Gentleman George's now!"

"The more's the pity, Augustus," answered Ned. "Soho, Little John; woaho, sir! A nice long night like this is made on purpose for drinking. Will you, sir? keep still then!"

"Man never is, but always to be blest," said the moralizing Tomlinson; "you see you sigh for other scenes even when you have a fine night and the chance of a God-send before you."

"Ay, the night is fine enough," said Ned, who was rather a grumbler, as, having finished his groom-like operation, he now slowly mounted. "D--- it, Oliver! [The moon] looks out as broadly as if he were going to blab. For my part, I love a dark night, with a star here and there winking at us, as much as to say, 'I see you, my boys, but I won't say a word about

it,' and a small, pattering, drizzling, mizzling rain, that prevents Little John's hoofs being heard, and covers one's retreat, as it were. Besides, when one is a little wet, it is always necessary to drink the more, to keep the cold from one's stomach when one gets home."

"Or in other words," said Augustus, who loved a maxim from his very heart, "light wet cherishes heavy wet!"

"Good!" said Ned, yawning. "Hang it, I wish the captain would come. Do you know what o'clock it is? Not far short of eleven, I suppose?"

"About that! Hist, is that a carriage? No, it is only a sudden rise in the wind."

"Very self-sufficient in Mr. Wind to allow himself to be raised without our help!" said Ned; "by the way, we are of course to go back to the Red Cave?"

"So Captain Lovett says. Tell me, Ned, what do you think of the new tenant Lovett has put into the cave?"

"Oh, I have strange doubts there," answered Ned, shaking the hairy honours of his head. "I don't half like it; consider the cave is our stronghold, and ought only to be known--"

"To men of tried virtue," interrupted Tomlinson. "I agree with you; I must try and get Lovett to discard his singular protege, as the French say."

"Gad, Augustus, how came you by so much learning? You know all the poets by heart, to say nothing of Latin and French."

"Oh, hang it, I was brought up, like the captain, to a literary way of life."

"That's what makes you so thick with him, I suppose. He writes (and sings too) a tolerable song, and is certainly a deuced clever fellow. What a rise in the world he has made! Do you recollect what a poor sort of way he was in when you introduced him at Gentleman George's? and now he's the Captain Crank of the gang."

"The gang! the company, you mean. Gang, indeed! One would think you were speaking of a knot of pickpockets. Yes, Lovett is a clever fellow; and, thanks to me, a very decent philosopher!" It is impossible to convey to our reader the grave air of importance with which Tomlinson made his concluding laudation. "Yes," said he, after a pause, "he has a bold, plain way of viewing things, and, like Voltaire, he becomes a philosopher by being a Man of Sense! Hist! see my horse's ears! Some one is coming, though I don't hear him! Keep watch!"

The robbers grew silent; the sound of distant hoofs was indistinctly heard, and, as it came nearer, there was a crash of boughs, as if a hedge had been ridden through. Presently the moon gleamed picturesquely on the figure of a horseman, approaching through the copse in the rear of the robbers.

Now he was half seen among the sinuosities of his forest path; now in full sight, now altogether hid; then his horse neighed impatiently; now he again came in sight, and in a moment more he had joined the pair!

The new-cornet was of a tall and sinewy frame, and in the first bloom of manhood. A frock of dark green, edged with a narrow silver lace, and buttoned from the throat to the middle, gave due effect to an upright mien, a broad chest, and a slender but rounded waist, that stood in no need of the compression of the tailor. A short riding-cloak, clasped across the throat with a silver buckle, hung picturesquely over one shoulder, while his lower limbs were cased in military boots, which, though they rose above the knee, were evidently neither heavy nor embarrassing to the vigorous sinews of the horseman. The caparisons of the steed--the bit, the bridle, the saddle, the holster--were according to the most approved fashion of the day; and the steed itself was in the highest condition, and of remarkable beauty. The horseman's air was erect and bold; a small but coal-black mustachio heightened the resolute expression of his short, curved lip; and from beneath the large hat which overhung his brow his long locks escaped, and waved darkly in the keen night air. Altogether, horseman and horse exhibited a gallant and even a chivalrous appearance, which the hour and the scene heightened to a dramatic and romantic effect.

"Ha! Lovett."

"How are you, my merry men?" were the salutations exchanged.

"What news?" said Ned.

"Brave news! look to it. My lord and his carriage will be by in ten minutes at most."

"Have you got anything more out of the parson I frightened so gloriously?" asked Augustus.

"No; more of that hereafter. Now for our new prey."

"Are you sure our noble friend will be so soon at hand?" said Tomlinson, patting his steed, that now pawed in excited hilarity.

"Sure! I saw him change horses; I was in the stable-yard at the time. He got out for half an hour, to eat, I fancy. Be sure that I played him a trick in the mean while."

"What for?" asked Ned.

"Self and servant."

"The post-boys?"

"Ay, I forgot them. Never mind, you, must frighten them."

"Forwards!" cried Ned; and his horse sprang from his armed heel.

"One moment," said Lovett; "I must put on my mask. Soho, Robin, soho! Now for it,--forwards!"

As the trees rapidly disappeared behind them, the riders entered, at a hand gallop, on a broad tract of waste land interspersed with dikes and occasionally fences of hurdles, over which their horses bounded like quadrupeds well accustomed to such exploits.

Certainly at that moment, what with the fresh air, the fitful moonlight

now breaking broadly out, now lost in a rolling cloud, the exciting exercise, and that racy and dancing stir of the blood, which all action, whether evil or noble in its nature, raises in our veins; what with all this, we cannot but allow the fascination of that lawless life,-- a fascination so great that one of the most noted gentlemen highwaymen of the day, one too who had received an excellent education and mixed in no inferior society, is reported to have said, when the rope was about his neck, and the good Ordinary was exhorting him to repent of his ill-spent life, "Ill-spent, you dog! 'Gad!" (smacking his lips) "it was delicious!"

"Fie! fie! Mr. -----, raise your thoughts to Heaven!"

"But a canter across the common--oh!" muttered the criminal; and his soul cantered off to eternity.

So briskly leaped the heart of the leader of the three that, as they now came in view of the main road, and the distant wheel of a carriage whirled on the ear, he threw up his right hand with a joyous gesture, and burst into a boyish exclamation of hilarity and delight.

"Whist, captain!" said Ned, checking his own spirits with a mock air of gravity, "let us conduct ourselves like gentlemen; it is only your low fellows who get into such confoundedly high spirits; men of the world like us should do everything as if their hearts were broken."

"Melancholy ever cronies with Sublimity, and Courage is sublime," said Augustus, with the pomp of a maxim-maker.

[A maxim which would have pleased Madame de Stael, who thought that philosophy consisted in fine sentiments. In the "Life of Lord Byron," just published by Mr. Moore, the distinguished biographer makes a similar assertion to that of the sage Augustus: "When did ever a sublime thought spring up in the soul that melancholy was not to be found, however latent, in its neighbourhood?" Now, with due deference to Mr. Moore, this is a very sickly piece of nonsense, that has not even an atom of truth to stand on. "God said, Let there be light, and there was light!"--we should like to know where lies the melancholy of that sublime sentence. "Truth," says Plato, "is the body of God, and light is his shadow." In the name of common-sense, in what possible corner in the vicinity of that lofty image lurks the jaundiced face of this eternal *_bete noir_* of Mr. Moore's? Again, in that sublimest passage in the sublimest of the Latin poets (Lucretius), which bursts forth in honour of Epicurus, is there anything that speaks to us of sadness? On the contrary, in the three passages we have referred to, especially in the two first quoted, there is something splendidly luminous and cheering. Joy is often a great source of the sublime; the suddenness of its ventings would alone suffice to make it so. What can be more sublime than the triumphant Psalms of David, intoxicated as they are with an almost delirium of transport? Even in the gloomiest passages of the poets, where we recognize sublimity, we do not often find melancholy. We are stricken by terror, appalled by awe, but seldom softened into sadness. In fact, melancholy rather belongs to another class of feelings than those excited by a sublime passage or those which engender its composition. On one hand, in the loftiest flights of Homer, Milton, and Shakspeare, we will challenge a critic to discover this "green sickness" which Mr. Moore would convert into the magnificence of the plague. On the other hand, where is

the evidence that melancholy made the habitual temperaments of those divine men? Of Homer we know nothing; of Shakspeare and Milton, we have reason to believe the ordinary temperament was constitutionally cheerful. The latter boasts of it. A thousand instances, in contradiction to an assertion it were not worth while to contradict, were it not so generally popular, so highly sanctioned, and so eminently pernicious to everything that is manly and noble in literature, rush to our memory. But we think we have already quoted enough to disprove the sentence, which the illustrious biographer has himself disproved in more than twenty passages, which, if he is pleased to forget, we thank Heaven posterity never will. Now we are on the subject of this Life, so excellent in many respects, we cannot but observe that we think the whole scope of its philosophy utterly unworthy of the accomplished mind of the writer; the philosophy consists of an unpardonable distorting of general truths, to suit the peculiarities of an individual, noble indeed, but proverbially morbid and eccentric. A striking instance of this occurs in the laboured assertion that poets make but sorry domestic characters. What! because Lord Byron is said to have been a bad husband, was (to go no further back for examples)--was Walter Scott a bad husband, or was Campbell, or is Mr. Moore himself? why, in the name of justice, should it be insinuated that Milton was a bad husband, when, as far as any one can judge of the matter, it was Mrs. Milton who was the bad wife? And why, oh! why should we be told by Mr. Moore,--a man who, to judge by Captain Rock and the Epicurean, wants neither learning nor diligence,--why are we to be told, with peculiar emphasis, that Lord Bacon never married, when Lord Bacon not only married, but his marriage was so advantageous as to be an absolute epoch in his career? Really, really, one begins to believe that there is not such a thing as a fact in the world!]

"Now for the hedge!" cried Lovett, unheeding his comrades; and his horse sprang into the road.

The three men now were drawn up quite still and motionless by the side of the hedge. The broad road lay before them, curving out of sight on either side; the ground was hardening under an early tendency to frost, and the clear ring of approaching hoofs sounded on the ear of the robbers, ominous, haply, of the chinks of "more attractive metal" about, if Hope told no flattering tale, to be their own.

Presently the long-expected vehicle made its appearance at the turn of the road, and it rolled rapidly on behind four fleet post-horses.

"You, Ned, with your large steed, stop the horses; you, Augustus, bully the post-boys; leave me to do the rest," said the captain.

"As agreed," returned Ned, laconically. "Now, look at me!" and the horse of the vain highwayman sprang from its shelter. So instantaneous were the operations of these experienced tacticians, that Lovett's orders were almost executed in a briefer time than it had cost him to give them.

The carriage being stopped, and the post-boys white and trembling, with two pistols (levelled by Augustus and Pepper) cocked at their heads, Lovett, dismounting, threw open the door of the carriage, and in a very civil tone and with a very bland address accosted the inmate.

"Do not be alarmed, my lord, you are perfectly safe; we only require your watch and purse."

"Really," answered a voice still softer than that of the robber, while a marked and somewhat French countenance, crowned with a fur cap, peered forth at the arrester,—"Really, sir, your request is so modest that I were worse than cruel to refuse you. My purse is not very full, and you may as well have it as one of my rascally duns; but my watch I have a love for, and--"

"I understand you, my lord," interrupted the highwayman. "What do you value your watch at?"

"Humph! to you it may be worth some twenty guineas."

"Allow me to see it!"

"Your curiosity is extremely gratifying," returned the nobleman, as with great reluctance he drew forth a gold repeater, set, as was sometimes the fashion of that day, in precious stones. The highwayman looked slightly at the bauble.

"Your lordship," said he, with great gravity, "was too modest in your calculation; your taste reflects greater credit on you. Allow me to assure you that your watch is worth fifty guinea's to us, at the least. To show you that I think so most sincerely, I will either keep it, and we will say no more on the matter; or I will return it to you upon your word of honour that you will give me a check for fifty guineas payable, by your real bankers, to 'bearer for self.' Take your choice; it is quite immaterial to me!"

"Upon my honour, sir," said the traveller, with some surprise struggling to his features, "your coolness and self-possession are quite admirable. I see you know the world."

"Your lordship flatters me!" returned Lovett, bowing. "How do you decide?"

"Why, is it possible to write drafts without ink, pen, or paper?"

Lovett drew back, and while he was searching in his pockets for writing implements, which he always carried about him, the traveller seized the opportunity, and suddenly snatching a pistol from the pocket of the carriage, levelled it full at the head of the robber. The traveller was an excellent and practised shot,—he was almost within arm's length of his intended victim,—his pistols were the envy of all his Irish friends. He pulled the trigger,—the powder flashed in the pan; and the highwayman, not even changing countenance, drew forth a small ink-bottle, and placing a steel pen in it, handed it to the nobleman, saying, with incomparable *_sans froid_*: "Would you like, my lord, to try the other pistol? If so, oblige me by a quick aim, as you must see the necessity of despatch. If not, here is the back of a letter, on which you can write the draft."

The traveller was not a man apt to become embarrassed in anything save his circumstances; but he certainly felt a little discomposed and confused as he took the paper, and uttering some broken words, wrote the check. The highwayman glanced over it, saw it was written according to form, and then with a bow of cool respect, returned the watch, and shut the door of the carriage.

Meanwhile the servant had been shivering in front, boxed up in that solitary convenience termed, not euphoniously, a dickey. Him the robber now briefly accosted.

"What have you got about you belonging to your master?" "Only his pills, your honour! which I forgot to put in the--"

"Pills!--throw them down to me!" The valet tremblingly extricated from his side-pocket a little box, which he threw down and Lovett caught in his hand.

He opened the box, counted the pills,--"One, two, four, twelve,--aha!" He reopened the carriage door. "Are these your pills, my lord?"

The wondering peer, who had begun to resettle himself in the corner of his carriage, answered that they were.

"My lord, I see you are in a high state of fever; you were a little delirious just now when you snapped a pistol in your friend's face. Permit me to recommend you a prescription,--swallow off all these pills!"

"My God!" cried the traveller, startled into earnestness; "what do you mean?--twelve of those pills would kill a man!"

"Hear him!" said the robber, appealing to his comrades, who roared with laughter. "What, my lord, would you rebel against your doctor? Fie, fie! be persuaded."

And with a soothing gesture he stretched the pill-box towards the recoiling nose of the traveller. But though a man who could as well as any one make the best of a bad condition, the traveller was especially careful of his health; and so obstinate was he where that was concerned, that he would rather have submitted to the effectual operation of a bullet than incurred the chance operation of an extra pill. He therefore, with great indignation, as the box was still extended towards him, snatched it from the hand of the robber, and flinging it across the road, said with dignity,--

"Do your worst, rascals! But if you leave me alive, you shall repent the outrage you have offered to one of his Majesty's household!" Then, as if becoming sensible of the ridicule of affecting too much in his present situation, he added in an altered tone: "And now, for Heaven's sake, shut the door; and if you must kill somebody, there's my servant on the box,--he's paid for it."

This speech made the robbers laugh more than ever; and Lovett, who liked a joke even better than a purse, immediately closed the carriage door, saying,--

"Adieu, my lord; and let me give you a piece of advice: whenever you get out at a country inn, and stay half an hour while your horses are changing, take your pistols with you, or you may chance to have the charge drawn."

With this admonition the robber withdrew; and seeing that the valet held out to him a long green purse, he said, gently shaking his head,--

"Rogues should not prey on each other, my good fellow. You rob your master; so do we. Let each keep what he has got."

Long Ned and Tomlinson then backing their horses, the carriage was freed; and away started the post-boys at a pace which seemed to show less regard for life than the robbers themselves had evinced.

Meanwhile the captain remounted his steed, and the three confederates, bounding in gallant style over the hedge through which they had previously gained the road, galloped off in the same direction they had come; the moon ever and anon bringing into light their flying figures, and the sound of many a joyous peal of laughter ringing through the distance along the frosty air.

CHAPTER XIII

What is here?--

Gold?

Thus much of this will make black white, foul fair.

Timon of Athens.

Came there a certain lord, neat, trimly drest,
Fresh as a bridegroom.

Henry the Fourth.

I do not know the man I should avoid
So soon as that spare Cassius!
He reads much. He is a great observer; and he looks
Quite through the deeds of men.
Often he smiles; but smiles in such a sort,
As if he mocked himself or scorned his spirit,
That could be moved to smile at anything.

Julius Caesar.

The next day, late at noon, as Lucy was sitting with her father, not as usual engaged either in work or in reading, but seemingly quite idle, with her pretty foot upon the squire's gouty stool, and eyes fixed on the carpet, while her hands (never were hands so soft and so small as Lucy's, though they may have been eclipsed in whiteness) were lightly clasped together and reposed listlessly on her knees,--the surgeon of the village abruptly entered with a face full of news and horror. Old Squire Brandon was one of those persons who always hear news, whatever it may be, later than any of their neighbours; and it was not till all the gossips of the neighbourhood had picked the bone of the matter quite bare, that he was now informed, through the medium of Mr. Pillum, that Lord Mauleverer had on the preceding night been stopped by three highwaymen in his road to his country-seat, and robbed to a considerable amount.

The fame of the worthy Dr. Slopperton's maladventure having long ere this been spread far and wide, the whole neighbourhood was naturally thrown into great consternation. Magistrates were sent to, large dogs borrowed,

blunderbusses cleaned, and a subscription made throughout the parish for the raising of a patrol. There seemed little doubt but that the offenders in either case were members of the same horde; and Mr. Pillum, in his own mind, was perfectly convinced that they meant to encroach upon his trade, and destroy all the surrounding householders who were worth the trouble.

The next week passed in the most diligent endeavours, on the part of the neighbouring magistrates and yeomanry, to detect and seize the robbers; but their labours were utterly fruitless; and one justice of peace, who had been particularly active, was himself entirely "cleaned out" by an old gentleman who, under the name of Mr. Bagshot,--rather an ominous cognomen,--offered to conduct the unsuspecting magistrate to the very spot where the miscreants might be seized. No sooner, however, had he drawn the poor justice away from his comrades into a lonely part of the road than he stripped him to his shirt. He did not even leave his worship his flannel drawers, though the weather was as bitter as the dog-days of 1829.

"It is not my way," said the hoary ruffian, when the justice petitioned at least for the latter article of attire,--"t is not my way. I be 's slow about my work, but I does it thoroughly; so off with your rags, old un."

This was, however, the only additional instance of aggression in the vicinity of Warlock Manor-house; and by degrees, as the autumn declined, and no further enormities were perpetrated, people began to look out for a new topic of conversation. This was afforded them by a piece of unexpected good fortune to Lucy Brandon:

Mrs. Warner--an old lady to whom she was slightly related, and with whom she had been residing during her brief and only visit to London--died suddenly, and in her will declared Lucy to be her sole heiress. The property, which was in the Funds, and which amounted to £60,000, was to be enjoyed by Miss Brandon immediately on her attaining her twenty-first year; meanwhile the executors to the will were to pay to the young heiress the annual sum of £600. The joy which this news created in Warlock Manor-house may easily be conceived. The squire projected improvements here, and repairs there; and Lucy, poor girl, who had no idea of money for herself, beyond the purchase of a new pony, or a gown from London, seconded with affectionate pleasure all her father's suggestions, and delighted herself with the reflection that those fine plans, which were to make the Brandons greater than the Brandons ever were before, were to be realized by her own, own money! It was at this identical time that the surrounding gentry made a simultaneous and grand discovery,--namely, of the astonishing merits and great good-sense of Mr. Joseph Brandon. It was a pity, they observed, that he was of so reserved and shy a turn,--it was not becoming in a gentleman of so ancient a family; but why should they not endeavour to draw him from his retirement into those more public scenes which he was doubtless well calculated to adorn?

Accordingly, as soon as the first month of mourning had expired, several coaches, chariots, chaises, and horses which had never been seen at Warlock Manor-house before, arrived there one after the other in the most friendly manner imaginable. Their owners admired everything,--the house was such a fine relic of old times!--for their parts they liked an oak staircase!--and those nice old windows!--and what a beautiful peacock!--and, Heaven save the mark! that magnificent chestnut-tree was worth a

forest! Mr. Brandon was requested to make one of the county hunt, not that he any longer hunted himself, but that his name would give such

consequence to the thing! Miss Lucy must come to pass a week with her dear friends the Honourable Misses Sansterre! Augustus, their brother, had such a sweet lady's horse! In short, the customary change which takes place in people's characters after the acquisition of a fortune took place in the characters of Mr. and Miss Brandon; and when people become suddenly amiable, it is no wonder that they should suddenly gain a vast accession of friends.

But Lucy, though she had seen so little of the world, was not quite blind; and the squire, though rather obtuse, was not quite a fool. If they were not rude to their new visitors, they were by no means overpowered with gratitude at their condescension. Mr. Brandon declined subscribing to the hunt, and Miss Lucy laughed in the face of the Honourable Augustus Sansterre. Among their new guests, however, was one who to great knowledge of the world joined an extreme and even brilliant polish of manners, which at least prevented deceit from being disagreeable, if not wholly from being unseen this was the new lieutenant of the county, Lord Mauleverer.

Though possessed of an immense property in that district, Lord Mauleverer had hitherto resided but little on his estates. He was one of those gay lords who are now somewhat uncommon in this country after mature manhood is attained, who live an easy and rakish life, rather among their parasites than their equals, and who yet, by aid of an agreeable manner, natural talents, and a certain graceful and light cultivation of mind (not the less pleasant for its being universally coloured with worldliness, and an amusing rather than offensive regard for self), never lose their legitimate station in society; who are oracles in dress, equipages, cookery, and beauty, and, having no character of their own, are able to fix by a single word a character upon any one else. Thus, while Mauleverer rather lived the dissolute life of a young nobleman, who prefers the company of agreeable demireps to that of wearisome duchesses, than maintained the decorous state befitting a mature age, and an immense interest in the country, he was quite as popular at court, where he held a situation in the household, as he was in the green-room, where he enchanted every actress on the right side of forty. A word from him in the legitimate quarters of power went further than an harangue from another; and even the prudes--at least, all those who had daughters--confessed that his lordship was a very interesting character. Like Brandon, his familiar friend, he had risen in the world (from the Irish baron to the English earl) without having ever changed his politics, which were ultra-Tory; and we need not observe that he was deemed, like Brandon, a model of public integrity. He was possessed of two places under government, six votes in the House of Commons, and eight livings in the Church; and we must add, in justice to his loyal and religious principles, that there was not in the three kingdoms a firmer friend to the existing establishments.

Whenever a nobleman does not marry, people try to take away his character. Lord Mauleverer had never married. The Whigs had been very bitter on the subject; they even alluded to it in the House of Commons,--that chaste assembly, where the never-failing subject of reproach against Mr. Pitt was the not being of an amorous temperament; but they had not hitherto prevailed against the stout earl's celibacy. It is true that if he was devoid of a wife, he had secured to himself plenty of substitutes; his profession was that of a man of gallantry; and though he avoided the

daughters, it was only to make love to the mothers. But his lordship had now attained a certain age, and it was at last circulated among his friends that he intended to look out for a Lady Mauleverer.

"Spare your caresses," said his toady-in-chief to a certain duchess, who had three portionless daughters; "Mauleverer has sworn that he will not choose among your order. You know his high politics, and you will not wonder at his declaring himself averse in matrimony as in morals to a community of goods."

The announcement of the earl's matrimonial design and the circulation of this anecdote set all the clergymen's daughters in England on a blaze of expectation; and when Mauleverer came to shire, upon obtaining the honour of the lieutenancy, to visit his estates and court the friendship of his neighbours, there was not an old-young lady of forty, who worked in broad-stitch and had never been to London above a week at a time, who did not deem herself exactly the sort of person sure to fascinate his lordship.

It was late in the afternoon when the travelling-chariot of this distinguished person, preceded by two outriders, in the earl's undress livery of dark green, stopped at the hall door of Warlock House. The squire was at home, actually and metaphorically; for he never dreamed of denying himself to any one, gentle or simple. The door of the carriage being opened, there descended a small slight man, richly dressed (for lace and silk vestments were not then quite discarded, though gradually growing less the mode), and of an air prepossessing and distinguished rather than dignified. His years--for his countenance, though handsome, was deeply marked, and evinced the tokens of dissipation--seemed more numerous than they really were; and though not actually past middle age, Lord Mauleverer might fairly have received the unpleasing epithet of elderly. However, his step was firm, his gait upright, and his figure was considerably more youthful than his physiognomy. The first compliments of the day having passed, and Lord Mauleverer having expressed his concern that his long and frequent absence from the county had hitherto prevented his making the acquaintance of Mr. Brandon, the brother of one of his oldest and most esteemed friends, conversation became on both sides rather an effort. Mr. Brandon first introduced the subject of the weather, and the turnips; inquired whether his lordship was not very fond (for his part he used to be, but lately the rheumatism had disabled him; he hoped his lordship was not subject to that complaint) of shooting!

Catching only the last words,--for, besides the awful complexity of the squire's sentences, Mauleverer was slightly affected by the aristocratic complaint of deafness,--the earl answered, with a smile,--

"The complaint of shooting! Very good indeed, Mr. Brandon; it is seldom that I have heard so witty a phrase. No, I am not in the least troubled with that epidemic. It is a disorder very prevalent in this county."

"My lord!" said the squire, rather puzzled; and then, observing that Mauleverer did not continue, he thought it expedient to start another subject.

"I was exceedingly grieved to hear that your lordship, in travelling to Mauleverer Park (that is a very ugly road across the waste land; the roads in this country are in general pretty good,--for my own part, when I was a magistrate I was very strict in that respect), was robbed. You

have not yet, I believe, detected (for my part, though I do not profess to be much of a politician, I do think that in affairs of robbery there is a great deal of remissness in the ministers) the villains!"

"Our friend is disaffected!" thought the lord-lieutenant, imagining that the last opprobrious term was applied to the respectable personages specified in the parenthesis. Bowing with a polished smile to the squire, Mauleverer replied aloud, that he was extremely sorry that their conduct (meaning the ministers) did not meet with Mr. Brandon's approbation.

"Well," thought the squire, "that is playing the courtier with a vengeance!--Meet with my approbation!" said he, warmly; "how could your lordship think me (for though I am none of your saints, I am, I hope, a good Christian; an excellent one, judging from your words, your lordship must be!) so partial to crime!"

"I partial to crime!" returned Mauleverer, thinking he had stumbled unawares on some outrageous democrat, yet smiling as softly as usual; "you judge me harshly, Mr. Brandon! You must do me more justice, and you can only do that by knowing me better."

Whatever unlucky answer the squire might otherwise have made was cut off by the entrance of Lucy; and the earl, secretly delighted at the interruption, rose to render her his homage, and to remind her of the introduction he had formerly been so happy as to obtain to her through the friendship of Mr. William Brandon,--a "friendship," said the gallant nobleman, "to which I have often before been indebted, but which was never more agreeably exerted on my behalf."

Upon this Lucy, who though she had been so painfully bashful during her meeting with Mr. Clifford, felt no overpowering diffidence in the presence of so much greater a person, replied laughingly, and the earl rejoined by a second compliment. Conversation was now no longer an effort; and Mauleverer, the most consummate of epicures, whom even royalty trembled to ask without preparation, on being invited by the unconscious squire to partake of the family dinner, eagerly accepted the invitation. It was long since the knightly walls of Warlock had been honoured by the presence of a guest so courtly. The good squire heaped his plate with a profusion of boiled beef; and while the poor earl was contemplating in dismay the Alps upon Alps which he was expected to devour, the gray-headed butler, anxious to serve him with alacrity, whipped away the overloaded plate, and presently returned it, yet more astoundingly surcharged with an additional world of a composition of stony colour and sudorific aspect, which, after examining in mute attention for some moments, and carefully removing as well as he was able to the extreme edge of his plate, the earl discovered to be suet pudding.

"You eat nothing, my lord," cried the squire; "let me give you--this is more underdone;" holding between blade and fork in middle air abhorrent fragment of scarlet, shaking its gory locks,--"another slice."

Swift at the word dropped upon Mauleverer's plate the harpy finger and ruthless thumb of the gray-headed butler. "Not a morsel more," cried the earl, struggling with the murderous domestic. "My dear sir, excuse me; I assure you I have never ate such a dinner before,--never!"

"Nay, now!" quoth the squire, expostulating, "you really (and this air is so keen that your lordship should indulge your appetite, if you follow

the physician's advice) eat nothing!"

Again Mauleverer was at fault.

"The physicians are right, Mr. Brandon," said he, "very right, and I am forced to live abstemiously; indeed I do not know whether, if I were to exceed at your hospitable table, and attack all that you would bestow upon me, I should ever recover it. You would have to seek a new lieutenant for your charming county, and on the tomb of the last Mauleverer the hypocritical and unrelated heir would inscribe, 'Died of the visitation of Beef, John, Earl, etc.'"

Plain as the meaning of this speech might have seemed to others, the squire only laughed at the effeminate appetite of the speaker, and inclined to think him an excellent fellow for jesting so good-humouredly on his own physical infirmity. But Lucy had the tact of her sex, and, taking pity on the earl's calamitous situation, though she certainly never guessed at its extent, entered with so much grace and ease into the conversation which he sought to establish between them, that Mauleverer's gentleman, who had hitherto been pushed aside by the zeal of the gray-headed butler, found an opportunity, when the squire was laughing and the butler staring, to steal away the overburdened plate unsuspected and unseen.

In spite, however, of these evils of board and lodgement, Mauleverer was exceedingly well pleased with his visit; nor did he terminate it till the shades of night had begun to close, and the distance from his own residence conspired with experience to remind him that it was possible for a highwayman's audacity to attack the equipage even of Lord Mauleverer. He then reluctantly re-entered his carriage, and, bidding the postilions drive as fast as possible, wrapped himself in his roquelaire, and divided his thoughts between Lucy Brandon and the homard au gratin with which he proposed to console himself immediately on his return home. However, Fate, which mocks our most cherished hopes, ordained that on arriving at Mauleverer Park the owner should be suddenly afflicted with a loss of appetite, a coldness in the limbs, a pain in the chest, and various other ungracious symptoms of portending malady. Lord Mauleverer went straight to bed; he remained there for some days, and when he recovered his physicians ordered him to Bath. The Whig Methodists, who hated him, ascribed his illness to Providence; and his lordship was firmly of opinion that it should be ascribed to the beef and pudding. However this be, there was an end, for the present, to the hopes of young ladies of forty, and to the intended festivities at Mauleverer Park.

"Good heavens!" said the earl, as his carriage wheels turned from his gates, "what a loss to country tradesmen may be occasioned by a piece of underdone beef, especially if it be boiled!"

About a fortnight had elapsed since Mauleverer's meteoric visit to Warlock House, when the squire received from his brother the following epistle:--

MY DEAR JOSEPH,--You know my numerous avocations, and, amid the press of business which surrounds me, will, I am sure, forgive me for being a very negligent and remiss correspondent. Nevertheless, I assure you, no one can more sincerely sympathize in that good fortune which has befallen my charming niece, and of which your last letter informed me, than I do. Pray give my best love to her, and

tell her how complacently I look forward to the brilliant sensation she will create, when her beauty is enthroned upon that rank which, I am quite sure, it will one day or other command.

You are not aware, perhaps, my dear Joseph, that I have for some time been in a very weak and declining state of health. The old nervous complaint in my face has of late attacked me grievously, and the anguish is sometimes so great that I am scarcely able to bear

it. I believe the great demand which my profession makes upon a frame of body never strong, and now beginning prematurely to feel the infirmities of time, is the real cause of my maladies. At last, however, I must absolutely punish my pocket, and indulge my inclinations by a short respite from toil. The doctors--sworn friends, you know, to the lawyers, since they make common cause against mankind--have peremptorily ordered me to lie by, and to try a short course of air, exercise, social amusements, and the waters of Bath. Fortunately this is vacation time, and I can afford to lose a few weeks of emolument, in order, perhaps, to secure many years of life. I purpose, then, early next week, repairing to that melancholy reservoir of the gay, where persons dance out of life and are fiddled across the Styx. In a word, I shall make one of the adventurers after health who seek the goddess at King Bladud's pump-room. Will you and dear Lucy join me there? I ask it of your friendship, and I am quite sure that neither of you will shrink aghast at the proposal of solacing your invalid relation. At the same time that I am recovering health, my pretty niece will be avenging Pluto, by consigning to his dominions many a better and younger hero in my stead. And it will be a double pleasure to me to see all the hearts, etc.--I break off, for what can I say on that subject which the little coquette does not anticipate? It is high time that Lucy should see the world; and though there are many--at Bath, above all places, to whom the heiress will be an object of interested attentions, yet there are also many in that crowded city by no means undeserving her notice. What say you, dear Joseph? But I know already: you will not refuse to keep company with me in my little holiday; and Lucy's eyes are already sparkling at the idea of new bonnets, Milsom Street, a thousand adorers, and the pump-room.

Ever, dear Joseph, yours affectionately,

WILLIAM BRANDON.

P. S. I find that my friend Lord Mauleverer is at Bath; I own that is an additional reason to take me thither; by a letter from him, received the other day, I see that he has paid you a visit, and he now raves about his host and the heiress. Ah, Miss Lucy, Miss Lucy! are you going to conquer him whom all London has, for years more than I care to tell (yet not many, for Mauleverer is still young), assailed in vain? Answer me!

This letter created a considerable excitement in Warlock House. The old squire was extremely fond of his brother, and grieved to the heart to find that he spoke so discouragingly of his health. Nor did the squire for a moment hesitate at accepting the proposal to join his distinguished relative at Bath. Lucy also--who had for her uncle, possibly from his profuse yet not indelicate flattery, a very great regard and interest, though she had seen but little of him--urged the squire to lose no time

in arranging matters for their departure, so as to precede the barrister, and prepare everything for his arrival. The father and daughter being thus agreed, there was little occasion for delay; an answer to the invalid's letter was sent by return of post, and on the fourth day from their receipt of the said epistle, the good old squire, his daughter, a country girl by way of abigail, the gray-headed butler, and two or three live pets, of the size and habits most convenient for travelling, were on their way to a city which at that time was gayer at least, if somewhat less splendid, than the metropolis.

On the second day of their arrival at Bath, Brandon (as in future, to avoid confusion, we shall call the younger brother, giving to the elder his patriarchal title of squire) joined them.

He was a man seemingly rather fond of parade, though at heart he disrelished and despised it. He came to their lodging, which had not been selected in the very best part of the town, in a carriage and six, but attended only by one favourite servant.

They found him in better looks and better spirits than they had anticipated. Few persons, when he liked it, could be more agreeable than William Brandon; but at times there mixed with his conversation a bitter sarcasm, probably a habit acquired in his profession, or an occasional tinge of morose and haughty sadness, possibly the consequence of his ill-health. Yet his disorder, which was somewhat approaching to that painful affliction the *_tic douloureux_*, though of fits more rare in occurrence than those of that complaint ordinarily are, never seemed even for an instant to operate upon his mood, whatever that might be. That disease worked unseen; not a muscle of his face appeared to quiver; the smile never vanished from his mouth, the blandness of his voice never grew faint as with pain, and, in the midst of intense torture, his resolute and stern mind conquered every external indication; nor could the most observant stranger have noted the moment when the fit attacked or released him. There was something inscrutable about the man. You felt that you took his character upon trust, and not on your own knowledge. The acquaintance of years would have left you equally dark as to his vices or his virtues. He varied often, yet in each variation he was equally undiscoverable. Was he performing a series of parts, or was it the ordinary changes of a man's true temperament that you beheld in him? Commonly smooth, quiet, attentive, flattering in social intercourse, he was known in the senate and courts of law for a cold asperity, and a caustic venom,--scarcely rivalled even in those arenas of contention. It seemed as if the bitterer feelings he checked in private life, he delighted to indulge in public. Yet even there he gave not way to momentary petulance or gushing passion; all seemed with him systematic sarcasm or habitual sternness. He outraged no form of ceremonial or of society. He stung, without appearing conscious of the sting; and his antagonist writhed not more beneath the torture of his satire than the crushing contempt of his self-command. Cool, ready, armed and defended on all points, sound in knowledge, unfailing in observation, equally consummate in sophistry when needed by himself, and instantaneous in detecting sophistry in another; scorning no art, however painful; begrudging no labour, however weighty; minute in detail, yet not the less comprehending the whole subject in a grasp,--such was the legal and public character William Brandon had established, and such was the fame he joined to the unsullied purity of his moral reputation. But to his friends he seemed only the agreeable, clever, lively, and, if we may use the phrase innocently, the worldly man,--never affecting a superior sanctity, or an over-anxiety to forms, except upon great occasions; and

rendering his austerity of manners the more admired, because he made it seem so unaccompanied by hypocrisy.

"Well," said Brandon, as he sat after dinner alone with his relations, and had seen the eyes of his brother close in diurnal slumber, "tell me, Miss Lucy, what you think of Lord Mauleverer; do you find him agreeable?"

"Very; too much so, indeed!"

"Too much so! That is an uncommon fault, Lucy, unless you mean to insinuate that you find him too agreeable for your peace of mind."

"Oh, no! there is little fear of that. All that I meant to express was that he seems to make it the sole business of his life to be agreeable, and that one imagines he had gained that end by the loss of certain qualities which one would have liked better."

"Umph! and what are they?"

"Truth, sincerity, independence, and honesty of mind."

"My dear Lucy, it has been the professional study of my life to discover a man's character, especially so far as truth is concerned, in as short a time as possible; but you excel me in intuition, if you can tell whether there be sincerity in a courtier's character at the first interview you have with him."

"Nevertheless, I am sure of my opinion," said Lucy, laughing; "and I will tell you one instance I observed among a hundred. Lord Mauleverer is rather deaf, and he imagined, in conversation, that my father said one thing--it was upon a very trifling subject, the speech of some member of parliament [the lawyer smiled],--when in reality he meant to say another. Lord Mauleverer, in the warmest manner in the world, chimed in with him, appeared thoroughly of his opinion, applauded his sentiments, and wished the whole country of his mind. Suddenly my father spoke; Lord Mauleverer bent down his ear, and found that the sentiments he had so lauded were exactly those my father the least favoured. No sooner did he make this discovery than he wheeled round again,--dexterously and gracefully, I allow; condemned all that he had before extolled, and extolled all that he had before abused!"

"And is that all, Lucy?" said Brandon, with a keener sneer on his lip than the occasion warranted. "Why, that is what every one does; only some more gravely than others. Mauleverer in society, I at the bar, the minister in parliament, friend to friend, lover to mistress, mistress to lover,--half of us are employed in saying white is black, and the other half in swearing that black is white. There is only one difference, my pretty niece, between the clever man and the fool: the fool says what is false while the colours stare in his face and give him the lie; but the clever man takes as it were a brush and literally turns the black into white and the white into black before he makes the assertion, which is then true. The fool changes, and is a liar; the clever man makes the colours change, and is a genius. But this is not for your young years yet, Lucy."

"But I can't see the necessity of seeming to agree with people," said Lucy, simply; "surely they would be just as well pleased if you differed from them civilly and with respect?"

"No, Lucy," said Brandon, still sneering; "to be liked, it is not necessary to be anything but compliant. Lie, cheat, make every word a snare, and every act a forgery; but never contradict. Agree with people, and they make a couch for you in their hearts. You know the story of Dante and the buffoon. Both were entertained at the court of the vain pedant, who called himself Prince Scaliger,--the former poorly, the latter sumptuously. 'How comes it,' said the buffoon to the poet, 'that I am so rich and you so poor?' 'I shall be as rich as you,' was the stinging and true reply, 'whenever I can find a patron as like myself as Prince Scaliger is like you!'"

"Yet my birds," said Lucy, caressing the goldfinch, which nestled to her bosom, "are not like me, and I love them. Nay, I often think I could love those better who differ from me the most. I feel it so in books,--when, for instance, I read a novel or a play; and you, uncle, I like almost in proportion to my perceiving in myself nothing in common with you."

"Yes," said Brandon, "you have in common with me a love for old stories of Sir Hugo and Sir Rupert, and all the other 'Sirs' of our mouldered and bygone race. So you shall sing me the ballad about Sir John de Brandon, and the dragon he slew in the Holy Land. We will adjourn to the drawing-room, not to disturb your father."

Lucy agreed, took her uncle's arm, repaired to the drawing-room, and seating herself at the harpsichord, sang to an inspiring yet somewhat rude air the family ballad her uncle had demanded.

It would have been amusing to note in the rigid face of the hardened and habitual man of peace and parchments a certain enthusiasm which ever and anon crossed his cheek, as the verses of the ballad rested on some allusion to the knightly House of Brandon and its old renown. It was an early prejudice, breaking out despite of himself,--a flash of character, stricken from the hard fossil in which it was imbedded. One would have supposed that the silliest of all prides (for the pride of money, though meaner, is less senseless), family pride, was the last weakness which at that time the callous and astute lawyer would have confessed, even to himself.

"Lucy," said Brandon, as the song ceased, and he gazed on his beautiful niece with a certain pride in his aspect, "I long to witness your first appearance in the world. This lodging, my dear, is not fit--But pardon me! what I was about to say is this: your father and yourself are here at my invitation, and in my house you must dwell; you are my guests, not mine host and hostess. I have therefore already directed my servant to secure me a house and provide the necessary establishment; and I make no doubt, as he is a quick fellow, that within three days all will be ready. You must then be the magnet of my abode, Lucy; and meanwhile you must explain this to my brother, and--for you know his jealous hospitality--obtain his acquiescence."

"But--" began Lucy.

"But me no buts," said Brandon, quickly, but with an affectionate tone of wilfulness; "and now, as I feel very much fatigued with my journey, you must allow me to seek my own room."

"I will conduct you to it myself," said Lucy, for she was anxious to show her father's brother the care and forethought which she had lavished on

her arrangements for his comfort. Brandon followed her into an apartment which his eye knew at a glance had been subjected to that female superintendence which makes such uses from what men reject as insignificant; and he thanked her with more than his usual amenity, for the grace which had presided over, and the kindness which had dictated her preparations. As soon as he was left alone, he wheeled his armchair near the clear, bright fire, and resting his face upon his hand, in the attitude of a man who prepares himself as it were for the indulgence of meditation, he muttered,--

"Yes! these women are, first, what Nature makes them, and that is good; next, what use make them, and that is evil! Now, could I persuade myself that we ought to be nice as to the use we put these poor puppets to, I should shrink from enforcing the destiny which I have marked for this girl. But that is a pitiful consideration, and he is but a silly player who loses his money for the sake of preserving his counters. So the young lady must go as another score to the fortunes of William Brandon. After all, who suffers? Not she. She will have wealth, rank, honour. I shall suffer, to yield so pretty and pure a gem to the coronet of-- Faugh! How I despise that dog; but how I could hate, crush, mangle him, could I believe that he despised me! Could he do so? Umph! No, I have resolved myself that is impossible. Well, let me hope that matrimonial point will be settled; and now let me consider what next step I shall take for myself,--myself, ay, only myself! With me perishes the last male of Brandon; but the light shall not go out under a bushel."

As he said this, the soliloquist sunk into a more absorbed and silent revery, from which he was disturbed by the entrance of his servant. Brandon, who was never a dreamer save when alone, broke at once from his reflections.

"You have obeyed my orders, Barlow?" said he.

"Yes, sir," answered the domestic. "I have taken the best house yet unoccupied; and when Mrs. Roberts [Brandon's housekeeper] arrives from London, everything will, I trust, be exactly to your wishes."

"Good! And you gave my note to Lord Mauleverer?"

"With my own hands, sir; his lordship will await you at home all to-morrow."

"Very well! and now, Barlow, see that your room is within call [bells, though known, were not common at that day], and give out that I am gone to bed, and must not be disturbed. What's the hour?"

"Just on the stroke of ten, sir."

"Place on that table my letter-case and the inkstand. Look in, to help me to undress, at half-past one; I shall go to bed at that hour. And--stay--be sure, Barlow, that my brother believes me retired for the night. He does not know my habits, and will vex himself if he thinks I sit up so late in my present state of health."

Drawing the table with its writing appurtenances near to his master, the servant left Brandon once more to his thoughts or his occupations.

CHAPTER XIV.

Servant. Get away, I say, wid dat nasty bell.

Punch. Do you call this a bell? (patting it.) It is an organ.

Servant. I say it is a bell,--a nasty bell!

Punch. I say it is an organ (striking him with it). What do you say it is now?

Servant. An organ, Mr. Punch!

The Tragical Comedy of Punch and Judy.

The next morning, before Lucy and her father had left their apartments, Brandon, who was a remarkably early riser, had disturbed the luxurious Mauleverer in his first slumber. Although the courtier possessed a villa some miles from Bath, he preferred a lodging in the town, both as being warmer than a rarely inhabited country-house, and as being to an indolent man more immediately convenient for the gayeties and the waters of the medicinal city. As soon as the earl had rubbed his eyes, stretched himself, and prepared himself for the untimeous colloquy, Brandon poured forth his excuses for the hour he had chosen for a visit. "Mention it not, my dear Brandon," said the good-natured nobleman, with a sigh; "I am glad at any hour to see you, and I am very sure that what you have to communicate is always worth listening to."

"It was only upon public business, though of rather a more important description than usual, that I ventured to disturb you," answered Brandon, seating himself on a chair by the bedside. "This morning, an hour ago, I received by private express a letter from London, stating that a new arrangement will positively be made in the Cabinet,--nay, naming the very promotions and changes. I confess that as my name occurred, as also your own, in these nominations, I was anxious to have the benefit of your necessarily accurate knowledge on the subject, as well as of your advice."

"Really, Brandon," said Mauleverer, with a half-peevisish smile, "any other hour in the day would have done for 'the business of the nation,' as the newspapers call that troublesome farce we go through; and I had imagined you would not have broken my nightly slumbers except for something of real importance,--the discovery of a new beauty or the invention of a new dish."

"Neither the one nor the other could you have expected from me, my dear lord," rejoined Brandon. "You know the dry trifles in which a lawyer's life wastes itself away; and beauties and dishes have no attraction for us, except the former be damsels deserted, and the latter patents invaded. But my news, after all, is worth hearing, unless you have heard it before."

"Not !! but I suppose I shall hear it in the course of the day. Pray Heaven I be not sent for to attend some plague of a council. Begin!"

"In the first place Lord Duberly resolves to resign, unless this negotiation for peace be made a Cabinet question."

"Pshaw! let him resign. I have opposed the peace so long that it is out of the question. Of course, Lord Wansted will not think of it, and he may count on my boroughs. A peace!--shameful, disgraceful, dastardly proposition!"

"But, my dear lord, my letter says that this unexpected firmness on the part of Lord Daberly has produced so great a sensation that, seeing the impossibility of forming a durable Cabinet without him, the king has consented to the negotiation, and Daberly stays in!"

"The devil!--what next?"

"Raffden and Sternhold go out in favour of Baldwin and Charlton, and in the hope that you will lend your aid to--"

"I!" said Lord Mauleverer, very angrily,--"I lend my aid to Baldwin, the Jacobin, and Charlton, the son of a brewer!"

"Very true!" continued Brandon. "But in the hope that you might be persuaded to regard the new arrangements with an indulgent eye, you are talked of instead of the Duke of for the vacant garter and the office of chamberlain."

"You don't mean it!" cried Mauleverer, starting from his bed.

"A few other (but, I hear, chiefly legal) promotions are to be made. Among the rest, my learned brother, the democrat Sarsden, is to have a silk gown; Cromwell is to be attorney-general; and, between ourselves, they have offered me a judgeship."

"But the garter!" said Mauleverer, scarcely hearing the rest of the lawyer's news,--"the whole object, aim, and ambition of my life. How truly kind in the king! After all," continued the earl, laughing, and throwing himself back, "opinions are variable, truth is not uniform. The times change, not we; and we must have peace instead of war!"

"Your maxims are indisputable, and the conclusion you come to is excellent," said Brandon.

"Why, you and I, my dear fellow," said the earl, "who know men, and who have lived all our lives in the world, must laugh behind the scenes at the cant we wrap in tinsel, and send out to stalk across the stage. We know that our Coriolanus of Tory integrity is a corporal kept by a prostitute, and the Brutus of Whig liberty is a lacquey turned out of place for stealing the spoons; but we must not tell this to the world. So, Brandon, you must write me a speech for the next session, and be sure it has plenty of general maxims, and concludes with 'my bleeding country!'"

The lawyer smiled. "You consent then to the expulsion of Sternhold and Raffden? for, after all, that is the question. Our British vessel, as the d---d metaphor-mongers call the State, carries the public good safe in the hold like brandy; and it is only when fear, storm, or the devil makes the rogues quarrel among themselves and break up the casks, that one gets above a thimbleful at a time. We should go on fighting with the rest of the world forever, if the ministers had not taken to fight among themselves."

"As for Sternhold," said the earl, "'t is a vulgar dog, and voted for economical reform. Besides, I don't know him; he may go to the devil, for aught I care; but Raffden must be dealt handsomely with, or, despite the garter, I will fall back among the Whigs, who, after all, give tolerable dinners."

"But why, my lord, must Raffden be treated better than his brother recusant?"

"Because he sent me, in the handsomest manner possible, a pipe of that wonderful Madeira, which you know I consider the chief grace of my cellars, and he gave up a canal navigation bill, which would have enriched his whole county, when he knew that it would injure my property. No, Brandon, curse public cant! we know what that is. But we are gentlemen, and our private friends must not be thrown overboard,--unless, at least, we do it in the civilest manner we can."

"Fear not," said the lawyer; "you have only to say the word, and the Cabinet can cook up an embassy to Owhyhee, and send Raffden there with a stipend of five thousand a year."

"Ah! that's well thought of; or we might give him a grant of a hundred thousand acres in one of the colonies, or let him buy crown land at a discount of eighty per cent. So that's settled."

"And now, my dear friend," said Brandon, "I will tell you frankly why I come so early; I am required to give a hasty answer to the proposal I have received, namely, of the judgeship. Your opinion?"

"A judgeship! you a judge? What! forsake your brilliant career for so petty a dignity? You jest!"

"Not at all. Listen. You know how bitterly I have opposed this peace, and what hot enemies I have made among the new friends of the administration. On the one hand, these enemies insist on sacrificing me; and on the other, if I were to stay in the Lower House and speak for what I have before opposed, I should forfeit the support of a great portion of my own party. Hated by one body, and mistrusted by the other, a seat in the House of Commons ceases to be an object. It is proposed that I should retire on the dignity of a judge, with the positive and pledged though secret promise of the first vacancy among the chiefs. The place of chief-justice or chief-baron is indeed the only fair remuneration for my surrender of the gains of my profession, and the abandonment of my parliamentary and legal career; the title, which will of course be attached to it, might go (at least, by an exertion of interest) to the eldest son of my niece,--in case she married a commoner,--or," added he, after a pause, "her second son in case she married a peer."

"Ha, true!" said Mauleverer, quickly, and as if struck by some sudden thought; "and your charming niece, Brandon, would be worthy of any honour, either to her children or herself. You do not know how struck I was with her. There is something so graceful in her simplicity; and in her manner of smoothing down the little rugosities of Warlock House there was so genuine and so easy a dignity that I declare I almost thought myself young again, and capable of the self-cheat of believing myself in love. But, oh! Brandon, imagine me at your brother's board,--me, for whom ortolans are too substantial, and who feel, when I tread, the slightest inequality in the carpets of Tournay,--imagine me, dear Brandon, in a black wainscot room, hung round with your ancestors in

brown wigs with posies in their button-hole; an immense fire on one side, and a thorough draught on the other; a huge circle of beef before me, smoking like Vesuvius, and twice as large; a plateful (the plate was pewter,--is there not a metal so called?) of this mingled flame and lava sent under my very nostril, and upon pain of ill-breeding to be despatched down my proper mouth; an old gentleman in fustian breeches and worsted stockings, by way of a butler, filling me a can of ale, and your worthy brother asking me if I would not prefer port; a lean footman in livery,--such a livery, ye gods!--scarlet, blue, yellow, and green, a rainbow ill made!--on the opposite side of the table, looking at the 'Lord' with eyes and mouth equally open, and large enough to swallow me; and your excellent brother himself at the head of the table glowing through the mists of the beef, like the rising sun in a signpost; and then, Brandon, turning from this image, behold beside me the fair, delicate, aristocratic, yet simple loveliness of your niece, and--But you look angry; I have offended you?"

It was high time for Mauleverer to ask that question, for during the whole of the earl's recital the dark face of his companion had literally burned with rage; and here we may observe how generally selfishness, which makes the man of the world, prevents its possessor, by a sort of paradox, from being consummately so. For Mauleverer, occupied by the pleasure he felt at his own wit, and never having that magic sympathy with others which creates the incessantly keen observer, had not for a moment thought that he was offending to the quick the hidden pride of the lawyer. Nay, so little did he suspect Brandon's real weaknesses that he thought him a philosopher who would have laughed alike at principles and people, however near to him might be the latter, and however important the former. Mastering by a single effort, which restored his cheek to its usual steady hue, the outward signs of his displeasure, Brandon rejoined,--

"Offend me! By no means, my dear lord. I do not wonder at your painful situation in an old country-gentleman's house, which has not for centuries offered scenes fit for the presence of so distinguished a guest,--never, I may say, since the time when Sir Charles de Brandon entertained Elizabeth at Warlock, and your ancestor (you know my old musty studies on those points of obscure antiquity), John Mauleverer, who was a noted goldsmith of London, supplied the plate for the occasion."

"Fairly retorted," said Mauleverer, smiling; for though the earl had a great contempt for low birth set on high places in other men, he was utterly void of pride in his own family,--"fairly retorted! But I never meant anything else but a laugh at your brother's housekeeping,--a joke surely permitted to a man whose own fastidiousness on these matters is so standing a jest. But, by heavens, Brandon! to turn from these subjects, your niece is the prettiest girl I have seen for twenty years; and if she would forget my being the descendant of John Mauleverer, the noted goldsmith of London, she may be Lady Mauleverer as soon as she pleases."

"Nay, now, let us be serious, and talk of the judgeship," said Brandon, affecting to treat the proposal as a joke.

"By the soul of Sir Charles de Brandon, I am serious!" cried the earl; "and as a proof of it, I hope you will let me pay my respects to your niece to-day,--not with my offer in my hand yet, for it must be a love match on both sides." And the earl, glancing towards an opposite glass, which reflected his attenuated but comely features beneath his velvet nightcap trimmed with Mechlin, laughed half-triumphantly as he spoke.

A sneer just passed the lips of Brandon, and as instantly vanished, while Mauleverer continued,--

"And as for the judgeship, dear Brandon, I advise you to accept it, though you know best; and I do think no man will stand a fairer chance of the chief-justiceship,--or, though it be somewhat unusual for 'common' lawyers, why not the woolsack itself? As you say, the second son of your niece might inherit the dignity of a peerage!"

"Well, I will consider of it favourably," said Brandon; and soon afterwards he left the nobleman to renew his broken repose.

"I can't laugh at that man," said Mauleverer to himself, as he turned round in his bed, "though he has much that I should laugh at in another; and, faith, there is one little matter I might well scorn him for, if I were not a philosopher. 'T is a pretty girl, his niece, and with proper instructions might do one credit; besides, she has £60,000 ready money; and, faith, I have not a shilling for my own pleasure, though I have--or alas! had--fifty thousand a year for that of my establishment! In all probability she will be the lawyer's heiress, and he must have made at least as much again as her portion; nor is he, poor devil, a very good life. Moreover, if he rise to the peerage? and the second son--Well! well! it will not be such a bad match for the goldsmith's descendant either!"

With that thought, Lord Mauleverer fell asleep. He rose about noon, dressed himself with unusual pains, and was just going forth on a visit to Miss Brandon, when he suddenly remembered that her uncle had not mentioned her address or his own. He referred to the lawyer's note of the preceding evening; no direction was inscribed on it; and Mauleverer was forced, with much chagrin, to forego for that day the pleasure he had promised himself.

In truth, the wary lawyer, who, as we have said, despised show and outward appearances as much as any man, was yet sensible of their effect even in the eyes of a lover; and moreover, Lord Mauleverer was one whose habits of life were calculated to arouse a certain degree of vigilance on points of household pomp even in the most unobservant. Brandon therefore resolved that Lucy should not be visited by her admirer till the removal to their new abode was effected; nor was it till the third day from that on which Mauleverer had held with Brandon the interview we have recorded, that the earl received a note from Brandon, seemingly turning only on political matters, but inscribed with the address and direction in full form.

Mauleverer answered it in person. He found Lucy at home, and more beautiful than ever; and from that day his mind was made up, as the mammas say, and his visits became constant.

CHAPTER XV.

There is a festival where knights and dames,
And aught that wealth or lofty lineage claims,
Appear.

'T is he,--how came he thence?
What doth he here?

Lara.

There are two charming situations in life for a woman,--one, the first freshness of heiressship and beauty; the other, youthful widowhood, with a large jointure. It was at least Lucy's fortune to enjoy the first. No sooner was she fairly launched into the gay world than she became the object of universal idolatry. Crowds followed her wherever she moved nothing was talked of or dreamed of, toasted or betted on, but Lucy Brandon; even her simplicity, and utter ignorance of the arts of fine life, enhanced the eclat of her reputation. Somehow or other, young people of the gentler sex are rarely ill-bred, even in their eccentricities; and there is often a great deal of grace in inexperience. Her uncle, who accompanied her everywhere, himself no slight magnet of attraction, viewed her success with a complacent triumph which he suffered no one but her father or herself to detect. To the smooth coolness of his manner, nothing would have seemed more foreign than pride at the notice gained by a beauty, or exultation at any favour won from the caprices of fashion. As for the good old squire, one would have imagined him far more the invalid than his brother. He was scarcely ever seen; for though he went everywhere, he was one of those persons who sink into a corner the moment they enter a room. Whoever discovered him in his retreat, held out their hands, and exclaimed, "God bless me! you here! We have not seen you for this age!" Now and then, if in a very dark niche of the room a card-table had been placed, the worthy gentleman toiled through an obscure rubber; but more frequently he sat with his hands clasped and his mouth open, counting the number of candles in the room, or calculating "when that stupid music would be over."

Lord Mauleverer, though a polished and courteous man, whose great object was necessarily to ingratiate himself with the father of his intended bride, had a horror of being bored, which surpassed all other feelings in his mind. He could not therefore persuade himself to submit to the melancholy duty of listening to the squire's "linked speeches long drawn out." He always glided by the honest man's station, seemingly in an exceeding hurry, with a "Ah, my dear sir, how do you do? How delighted I am to see you! And your incomparable daughter? Oh, there she is! Pardon me, dear sir,--you see my attraction."

Lucy, indeed, who never forgot any one (except herself occasionally), sought her father's retreat as often as she was able; but her engagements were so incessant that she no sooner lost one partner than she was claimed and carried off by another. However, the squire bore his solitude with tolerable cheerfulness, and always declared that "he was very well amused; although balls and concerts were necessarily a little dull to one who came from a fine old place like Warlock Manor-house, and it was not the same thing that pleased young ladies (for, to them, that fiddling and giggling till two o'clock in the morning might be a very pretty way of killing time) and their papas!"

What considerably added to Lucy's celebrity was the marked notice and admiration of a man so high in rank and ton as Lord Mauleverer. That personage, who still retained much of a youthful mind and temper, and who was in his nature more careless than haughty, preserved little or no state in his intercourse with the social revellers at Bath. He cared not whither he went, so that he was in the train of the young beauty; and the most fastidious nobleman of the English court was seen in every second and third rate set of a great watering-place,--the attendant, the flirt,

and often the ridicule of the daughter of an obscure and almost insignificant country squire. Despite the honour of so distinguished a lover, and despite all the novelties of her situation, the pretty head of Lucy Brandon was as yet, however, perfectly unturned; and as for her heart, the only impression that it had ever received was made by that wandering guest of the village rector, whom she had never again seen, but who yet clung to her imagination, invested not only with all the graces which in right of a singularly handsome person he possessed, but with those to which he never could advance a claim,--more dangerous to her peace, for the very circumstance of their origin in her fancy, not his merits.

They had now been some little time at Bath, and Brandon's brief respite was pretty nearly expired, when a public ball of uncommon and manifold attraction was announced. It was to be graced not only by the presence of all the surrounding families, but also by that of royalty itself; it being an acknowledged fact that people dance much better and eat much more supper when any relation to a king is present.

"I must stay for this ball, Lucy," said Brandon, who, after spending the day with Lord Mauleverer, returned home in a mood more than usually cheerful,--"I must stay for this one ball, Lucy, and witness your complete triumph, even though it will be necessary to leave you the very next morning."

"So soon!" cried Lucy.

"So soon!" echoed the uncle, with a smile. "How good you are to speak thus to an old valetudinarian, whose company must have fatigued you to death! Nay, no pretty denials! But the great object of my visit to this place is accomplished: I have seen you, I have witnessed your debut in the great world, with, I may say, more than a father's exultation, and I go back to my dry pursuits with the satisfaction of thinking our old and withered genealogical tree has put forth one blossom worthy of its freshest day."

"Uncle!" said Lucy, reprovingly, and holding up her taper finger with an arch smile, mingling with a blush, in which the woman's vanity spoke, unknown to herself.

"And why that look, Lucy?" said Brandon.

"Because--because--well, no matter! you have been bred to that trade in which, as you say yourself, men tell untruths for others till they lose all truth for themselves. But let us talk of you, not me; are you really well enough to leave us?"

Simple and even cool as the words of Lucy's question, when written, appear, in her mouth they took so tender, so anxious a tone, that Brandon, who had no friend nor wife nor child, nor any one in his household in whom interest in his health or welfare was a thing of course, and who was consequently wholly unaccustomed to the accent of kindness, felt himself of a sudden touched and stricken.

"Why, indeed, Lucy," said he, in a less artificial voice than that in which he usually spoke, "I should like still to profit by your cares, and forget my infirmities and pains in your society; but I cannot: the tide of events, like that of nature, waits not our pleasure!"

"But we may take our own time for setting sail!" said Lucy.

"Ay, this comes of talking in metaphor," rejoined Brandon, smiling; "they who begin it always get the worst of it. In plain words, dear Lucy, I can give no more time to my own ailments. A lawyer cannot play truant in term-time without--"

"Losing a few guineas!" said Lucy, interrupting him.

"Worse than that,--his practice and his name."

"Better those than health and peace of mind."

"Out on you, no!" said Brandon, quickly, and almost fiercely. "We waste all the greenness and pith of our life in striving to gain a distinguished slavery; and when it is gained, we must not think that an humble independence would have been better. If we ever admit that thought, what fools, what lavish fools, we have been! No!" continued Brandon, after a momentary pause, and in a tone milder and gayer, though not less characteristic of the man's stubbornness of will, "after losing all youth's enjoyments and manhood's leisure, in order that in age the mind, the all-conquering mind, should break its way at last into the applauding opinions of men, I should be an effeminate idler indeed, did I suffer, so long as its jarring parts hold together, or so long as I have the power to command its members, this weak body to frustrate the labour of its better and nobler portion, and command that which it is ordained to serve."

Lucy knew not while she listened, half in fear, half in admiration, to her singular relation, that at the very moment he thus spoke, his disease was preying upon him in one of its most relentless moods, without the power of wringing from him a single outward token of his torture. But she wanted nothing to increase her pity and affection for a man who in consequence, perhaps, of his ordinary surface of worldly and cold properties of temperament never failed to leave an indelible impression on all who had ever seen that temperament broken through by deeper though often by more evil feelings.

"Shall you go to Lady-----'s rout?" asked Brandon, easily sliding back into common topics. "Lord Mauleverer requested me to ask you."

"That depends on you and my father."

"If on me, I answer yes," said Brandon. "I like hearing Mauleverer, especially among persons who do not understand him. There is a refined and subtle sarcasm running through the commonplaces of his conversation, which cuts the good fools, like the invisible sword in the fable, that lopped off heads without occasioning the owners any other sensation than a pleasing and self-complacent titillation. How immeasurably superior he is in manner and address to all we meet here! Does it not strike you?"

"Yes--no--I can't say that it does exactly," rejoined Lucy.

"Is that confusion tender?" thought Brandon.

"In a word," continued Lucy, "Lord Mauleverer is one whom I think pleasing without fascination, and amusing without brilliancy. He is evidently accomplished in mind and graceful in manner, and withal the

most uninteresting person I ever met."

"Women have not often thought so," said Brandon. "I cannot believe that they can think otherwise."

A certain expression, partaking of scorn, played over Brandon's hard features. It was a noticeable trait in him, that while he was most anxious to impress Lucy with a favourable opinion of Lord Mauleverer, he was never quite able to mask a certain satisfaction at any jest at the earl's expense, or any opinion derogatory to his general character for pleasing the opposite sex; and this satisfaction was no sooner conceived than it was immediately combated by the vexation he felt that Lucy did not seem to share his own desire that she should become the wife of the courtier. There appeared as if in that respect there was a contest in his mind between interest on one hand and private dislike or contempt on the other.

"You judge women wrongly!" said Brandon. "Ladies never know each other; of all persons, Mauleverer is best calculated to win them, and experience has proved my assertion. The proudest lot I know for a woman would be the thorough conquest of Lord Mauleverer; but it is impossible. He may be gallant, but he will never be subdued. He defies the whole female world, and with justice and impunity. Enough of him. Sing to me, dear Lucy."

The time for the ball approached; and Lucy, who was a charming girl and had nothing of the angel about her, was sufficiently fond of gayety, dancing, music, and admiration to feel her heart beat high at the expectation of the event.

At last the day itself came. Brandon dined alone with Mauleverer, having made the arrangement that he, with the earl, was to join his brother and niece at the ball. Mauleverer, who hated state, except on great occasions, when no man displayed it with a better grace, never suffered his servants to wait at dinner when he was alone or with one of his peculiar friends. The attendants remained without, and were summoned at will by a bell laid beside the host.

The conversation was unrestrained.

"I am perfectly certain, Brandon," said Mauleverer, "that if you were to live tolerably well, you would soon get the better of your nervous complaints. It is all poverty of blood, believe me. Some more of the fins, eh?--No! Oh, hang your abstemiousness; it is d----d unfriendly to eat so little! Talking of fins and friends, Heaven defend me from ever again forming an intimacy with a pedantic epicure, especially if he puns!"

"Why, what has a pedant to do with fins?"

"I will tell you,--ah, this madeira--I suggested to Lord Dareville, who affects the gourmand, what a capital thing a dish all fins (turbot's fins) might be made. 'Capital!' said he, in a rapture; 'dine on it with me to-morrow.' 'Volontiers!' said I. The next day, after indulging in a pleasing revery all the morning as to the manner in which Dareville's cook, who is not without genius, would accomplish the grand idea, I betook myself punctually to my engagement. Would you believe it? When the cover was removed, the sacrilegious dog of an Amphitryon had put into the dish Cicero's 'De Finibus.' 'There is a work all fins!' said he.

"Atrocious jest!" exclaimed Brandon, solemnly.

"Was it not? Whenever the gastronomists set up a religious inquisition, I trust they will roast every impious rascal who treats the divine mystery with levity. Pun upon cooking, indeed! _A propos_ of Dareville, he is to come into the administration."

"You astonish me!" said Brandon. "I never heard that; I don't know him. He has very little power; has he any talent?"

"Yes, a very great one,--acquired, though."

"What is it?"

"A pretty wife!"

"My lord!" exclaimed Brandon, abruptly, and half rising from his seat.

Mauleverer looked up hastily, and on seeing the expression of his companion's face coloured deeply; there was a silence for some moments.

"Tell me," said Brandon, indifferently, helping himself to vegetables, for he seldom touched meat; and a more amusing contrast can scarcely be conceived than that between the earnest epicurism of Mauleverer and the careless contempt of the sublime art manifested by his guest,--"tell me, you who necessarily know everything, whether the government really is settled,--whether you are to have the garter, and I (mark the difference!) the judgeship."

"Why so, I imagine, it will be arranged; namely, if you will consent to hang up the rogues instead of living by the fools!"

"One may unite both!" returned Brandon. "But I believe, in general, it is vice versa; for we live by the rogues, and it is only the fools we are able to hang up. You ask me if I will take the judgeship. I would not--no, I would rather cut my hand off," and the lawyer spoke with great bitterness, "forsake my present career, despite all the obstacles that now encumber it, did I think that this miserable body would suffer me for two years longer to pursue it."

"You shock me!" said Mauleverer, a little affected, but nevertheless applying the cayenne to his cucumber with his usual unerring nicety of tact,--"you shock me; but you are considerably better than you were."

"It is not," continued Brandon, who was rather speaking to himself than to his friend,--"it is not that I am unable to conquer the pain and to master the recreant nerves; but I feel myself growing weaker and weaker beneath the continual exertion of my remaining powers, and I shall die before I have gained half my objects, if I do not leave the labours which are literally tearing me to pieces."

"But," said Lord Mauleverer, who was the idlest of men, "the judgeship is not an easy sinecure."

"No; but there is less demand on the mind in that station than in my present one;" and Brandon paused before he continued. "Candidly, Mauleverer, you do not think they will deceive me,--you do not think they mean to leave me to this political death without writing 'Resurgam' over the hatchment?"

"They dare not!" said Mauleverer, quaffing his fourth glass of madeira.

"Well, I have decided on my change of life," said the lawyer, with a slight sigh.

"So have I on my change of opinion," chimed in the earl. "I will tell you what opinions seem to me like."

"What?" said Brandon, abstractedly.

"Trees!" answered Mauleverer, quaintly. "If they can be made serviceable by standing, don't part with a stick; but when they are of that growth that sells well, or whenever they shut out a fine prospect, cut them down, and pack them off by all manner of means!--And now for the second course."

"I wonder," said the earl, when our political worthies were again alone, "whether there ever existed a minister who cared three straws for the people; many care for their party, but as for the country--"

"It is all fiddlestick!" added the lawyer, with more significance than grace.

"Right; it is all fiddlestick, as you tersely express it. King, Constitution, and Church, forever! which, being interpreted, means, first, King or Crown influence, judgeships, and garters; secondly, Constitution, or fees to the lawyer, places to the statesman, laws for the rich, and Game Laws for the poor; thirdly, Church, or livings for our younger sons, and starvings for their curates!"

"Ha, ha!" said Brandon, laughing sardonically; "we know human nature!"

"And how it may be gulled!" quoth the courtier. "Here's a health to your niece; and may it not be long before you hail her as your friend's bride!"

"Bride, et cetera," said Brandon, with a sneer meant only for his own satisfaction. "But mark me, my dear lord, do not be too sure of her. She is a singular girl, and of more independence than the generality of women. She will not think of your rank and station in estimating you; she will think only of their owner; and pardon me if I suggest to you, who know the sex so well, one plan that it may not be unadvisable for you to pursue. Don't let her fancy you entirely hers; rouse her jealousy, pique her pride, let her think you unconquerable, and unless she is unlike all women, she will want to conquer you."

The earl smiled. "I must take my chance!" said he, with a confident tone.

"The hoary coxcomb!" muttered Brandon, between his teeth; "now will his folly spoil all."

"And that reminds me," continued Mauleverer, "that time wanes, and dinner is not over; let us not hurry, but let us be silent, to enjoy the more. These truffles in champagne,--do taste them; they would raise the dead."

The lawyer smiled, and accepted the kindness, though he left the delicacy untouched; and Mauleverer, whose soul was in his plate, saw not the

heartless rejection.

Meanwhile the youthful beauty had already entered the theatre of pleasure, and was now seated with the squire at the upper end of the half-filled ball-room.

A gay lady of the fashion at that time, and of that half and half rank to which belonged the aristocracy of Bath,--one of those curious persons we meet with in the admirable novels of Miss Burney, as appertaining to the order of fine ladies,--made the trio with our heiress and her father, and pointed out to them by name the various characters that entered the apartments. She was still in the full tide of scandal, when an unusual sensation was visible in the environs of the door; three strangers of marked mien, gay dress, and an air which, though differing in each, was in all alike remarkable for a sort of "dashing" assurance, made their entree. One was of uncommon height, and possessed of an exceedingly fine head of hair; another was of a more quiet and unpretending aspect, but nevertheless he wore upon his face a supercilious yet not ill-humoured expression; the third was many years younger than his companions, strikingly handsome in face and figure, altogether of a better taste in dress, and possessing a manner that, though it had equal ease, was not equally noticeable for impudence and swagger.

"Who can those be?" said Lucy's female friend, in a wondering tone. "I never saw them before,--they must be great people,--they have all the airs of persons of quality! Dear, how odd that I should not know them!"

While the good lady, who, like all good ladies of that stamp, thought people of quality had airs, was thus lamenting her ignorance of the new-comers, a general whisper of a similar import was already circulating round the room, "Who are they?" and the universal answer was, "Can't tell,--never saw them before!"

Our strangers seemed by no means displeased with the evident and immediate impression they had made. They stood in the most conspicuous part of the room, enjoying among themselves a low conversation, frequently broken by fits of laughter,--tokens, we need not add, of their supereminently good breeding. The handsome figure of the youngest stranger, and the simple and seemingly unconscious grace of his attitudes were not, however, unworthy of the admiration he excited; and even his laughter, rude as it really was, displayed so dazzling a set of teeth, and was accompanied by such brilliant eyes, that before he had been ten minutes in the room there was scarcely a young lady under thirty-nine not disposed to fall in love with him.

Apparently heedless of the various remarks which reached their ears, our strangers, after they had from their station sufficiently surveyed the beauties of the ball, strolled arm-in-arm through the rooms. Having sauntered through the ball and card rooms, they passed the door that led to the entrance passage, and gazed, with other loiterers, upon the new-comers ascending the stairs. Here the two younger strangers renewed their whispered conversation, while the eldest, who was also the tallest one, carelessly leaning against the wall, employed himself for a few moments in thrusting his fingers through his hair. In finishing this occupation, the peculiar state of his rules forced itself upon the observation of our gentleman, who, after gazing for some moments on an envious rent in the right ruffle, muttered some indistinct words, like "the cock of that confounded pistol," and then tucked up the mutilated ornament with a peculiarly nimble motion of the fingers of his left hand;

the next moment, diverted by a new care, the stranger applied his digital members to the arranging and caressing of a remarkably splendid brooch, set in the bosom of a shirt the rude texture of which formed a singular contrast with the magnificence of the embellishment and the fineness of the one ruffle suffered by our modern Hyperion to make its appearance beneath his cinnamon-coloured coatsleeve. These little personal arrangements completed, and a dazzling snuff-box released from the confinement of a side-pocket, tapped thrice, and lightened of two pinches of its titillating luxury, the stranger now, with the guardian eye of friendship, directed a searching glance to the dress of his friends. There all appeared meet for his strictest scrutiny, save, indeed, that the supercilious-looking stranger having just drawn forth his gloves, the lining of his coat-pocket which was rather soiled into the bargain--had not returned to its internal station; the tall stranger, seeing this little inelegance, kindly thrust three fingers with a sudden and light dive into his friend's pocket, and effectually repulsed the forwardness of the intrusive lining. The supercilious stranger no sooner felt the touch than he started back, and whispered to his officious companion,--

"What! among friends, Ned! Fie now; curb the nature of thee for one night at least."

Before he of the flowing locks had time to answer, the master of the ceremonies, who had for the last three minutes been eying the strangers through his glass, stepped forward with a sliding bow; and the handsome gentleman, taking upon himself the superiority and precedence over his comrades, was the first to return the courtesy. He did this with so good a grace and so pleasing an expression of countenance that the censor of bows was charmed at once, and with a second and more profound salutation announced himself and his office. "You would like to dance probably, gentlemen?" he asked, glancing at each, but directing his words to the one who had prepossessed him.

"You are very good," said the comely stranger; "and, for my part, I shall be extremely indebted to you for the exercise of your powers in my behalf. Allow me to return with you to the ball-room, and I can there point out to you the objects of my especial admiration."

The master of the ceremonies bowed as before, and he and his new acquaintance strolled into the ball-room, followed by the two comrades of the latter.

"Have you been long in Bath, sir?" inquired the monarch of the rooms.

"No, indeed! we only arrived this evening."

"From London?"

"No; we made a little tour across the country."

"Ah! very pleasant, this fine weather."

"Yes; especially in the evenings."

"Oho! romantic!" thought the man of balls, as he rejoined aloud, "Why, the nights are agreeable, and the moon is particularly favourable to us."

"Not always!" quoth the stranger.

"True, true, the night before last was dark; but, in general, surely the moon has been very bright."

The stranger was about to answer, but checked himself, and simply bowed his head in assent.

"I wonder who they are!" thought the master of the ceremonies. "Pray, sir," said he, in a low tone, "is that gentle man, that tall gentleman, any way related to Lord -----? I cannot but think I see a family likeness."

"Not in the least related to his lordship," answered the stranger; "but he is of a family that have made a noise in the world; though he, as well as my other friend, is merely a commoner!" laying a stress on the last word.

"Nothing, sir, can be more respectable than a commoner of family," returned the polite Mr. -----, with a bow.

"I agree with you, sir," answered the stranger, with another. "But, heavens!"--and the stranger started; for at that moment his eye caught for the first time, at the far end of the room, the youthful and brilliant countenance of Lucy Brandon,--"do I see rightly, or is that Miss Brandon?"

"It is indeed that lovely young lady," said Mr. -----, "I congratulate you on knowing one so admired. I suppose that you, being blessed with her acquaintance, do not need the formality of my introduction?"

"Umph!" said the stranger, rather shortly and uncourteously. "No! Perhaps you had better present me!"

"By what name shall I have that honour, sir?" discreetly inquired the nomenclator.

"Clifford!" answered the stranger; "Captain Clifford!" Upon this the prim master of the ceremonies, threading his path through the now fast-filling room, approached towards Lucy to obey Mr. Clifford's request. Meanwhile that gentleman, before he followed the steps of the tutelary spirit of the place, paused and said to his friends, in a tone careless yet not without command, "Hark ye, gentlemen; oblige me by being as civil and silent as ye are able; and don't thrust yourselves upon me, as you are accustomed to do, whenever you see no opportunity of indulging me with that honour with the least show of propriety!" So saying, and waiting no reply, Mr. Clifford hastened after the master of the ceremonies.

"Our friend grows mighty imperious!" said Long Ned, whom our readers have already recognized in the tall stranger.

"T is the way with your rising geniuses," answered the moralizing Augustus Tomlinson. "Suppose we go to the cardroom and get up a rubber!"

"Well thought of," said Ned, yawning,--a thing he was very apt to do in society; "and I wish nothing worse to those who try our rubbers than that they may be well cleaned by them." Upon this witticism the Colossus of Roads, glancing towards the glass, strutted off, arm-in-arm with his companion, to the card-room.

During this short conversation the re-introduction of Mr. Clifford (the stranger of the Rectory and deliverer of Dr. Slopperton) to Lucy Brandon had been effected, and the hand of the heiress was already engaged, according to the custom of that time, for the two ensuing dances.

It was about twenty minutes after the above presentation had taken place that Lord Mauleverer and William Brandon entered the rooms; and the buzz created by the appearance of the noted peer and the distinguished lawyer had scarcely subsided, before the royal personage expected to grace the "festive scene" (as the newspapers say of a great room with plenty of miserable-looking people in it) arrived. The most attractive persons in Europe may be found among the royal family of England, and the great personage then at Bath, in consequence of certain political intrigues, wished, at that time especially, to make himself as popular as possible. Having gone the round of the old ladies, and assured them, as the "Court Journal" assures the old ladies at this day, that they were "morning stars" and "swan-like wonders," the prince espied Brandon, and immediately beckoned to him with a familiar gesture. The smooth but saturnine lawyer approached the royal presence with the manner that peculiarly distinguished him, and which blended in no ungraceful mixture a species of stiffness that passed with the crowd for native independence, with a supple insinuation that was usually deemed the token of latent benevolence of heart. There was something, indeed, in Brandon's address that always pleased the great; and they liked him the better because, though he stood on no idle political points, mere differences in the view taken of a hairbreadth,--such as a corn-law or a Catholic bill, alteration in the Church or a reform in parliament,--yet he invariably talked so like a man of honour (except when with Mauleverer) that his urbanity seemed attachment to individuals, and his concessions to power sacrifices of private opinion for the sake of obliging his friends.

"I am very glad indeed," said the royal personage, "to see Mr. Brandon looking so much better. Never was the crown in greater want of his services; and if rumour speak true, they will soon be required in another department of his profession."

Brandon bowed, and answered,--

"So please your royal highness, they will always be at the command of a king from whom I have experienced such kindness, in any capacity for which his Majesty may deem them fitting."

"It is true, then!" said his royal highness, significantly. "I congratulate you! The quiet dignity of the bench must seem to you a great change after a career so busy and restless."

"I fear I shall feel it so at first, your royal highness," answered Brandon, "for I like even the toil of my profession; and at this moment, when I am in full practice, it more than ever--But" (checking himself at once) "his Majesty's wishes, and my satisfaction in complying with them, are more than sufficient to remove any momentary regret I might otherwise have felt in quitting those toils which have now become to me a second nature."

"It is possible," rejoined the prince, "that his Majesty took into consideration the delicate state of health which, in common with the whole public, I grieve to see the papers have attributed to one of the most distinguished ornaments of the bar."

"So please your royal highness," answered Brandon, coolly, and with a smile which the most piercing eye could not have believed the mask to the agony then gnawing at his nerves, "it is the interest of my rivals to exaggerate the little ailments of a weak constitution. I thank Providence that I am now entirely recovered; and at no time of my life have I been less unable to discharge--so far as my native and mental, incapacities will allow--the duties of any occupation, however arduous. Nay, as the brute grows accustomed to the mill, so have I grown wedded to business; and even the brief relaxation I have now allowed myself seems to me rather irksome than pleasurable."

"I rejoice to hear you speak thus," answered his royal highness, warmly; "and I trust for many years, and," added he, in a lower tone, "in the highest chamber of the senate, that we may profit by your talents. The times are those in which many occasions occur that oblige all true friends of the Constitution to quit minor employment for that great constitutional one that concerns us all, the highest and the meanest; and" (the royal voice sank still lower) "I feel justified in assuring you that the office of chief-justice alone is not considered by his Majesty as a sufficient reward for your generous sacrifice of present ambition to the difficulties of government."

Brandon's proud heart swelled, and that moment the veriest pains of hell would scarcely have been felt.

While the aspiring schemer was thus agreeably engaged, Mauleverer, sliding through the crowd with that grace which charmed every one, old and young, and addressing to all he knew some lively or affectionate remark, made his way to the dancers, among whom he had just caught a glimpse of Lucy. "I wonder," he thought, "whom she is dancing with. I hope it is that ridiculous fellow, Mossop, who tells a good story against himself; or that handsome ass, Belmont, who looks at his own legs, instead of seeming to have eyes for no one but his partner. Ah! if Tarquin had but known women as well as I do, he would have had no reason to be rough with Lucretia. 'T is a thousand pities that experience comes, in women as in the world, just when it begins to be no longer of use to us!"

As he made these moral reflections, Mauleverer gained the dancers, and beheld Lucy listening, with downcast eyes and cheeks that evidently blushed, to a young man whom Mauleverer acknowledged at once to be one of the best-looking fellows he had ever seen. The stranger's countenance, despite an extreme darkness of complexion, was, to be sure, from the great regularity of the features, rather effeminate; but, on the other hand, his figure, though slender and graceful, betrayed to an experienced eye an extraordinary proportion of sinew and muscle; and even the dash of effeminacy in the countenance was accompanied by so manly and frank an air, and was so perfectly free from all coxcombry or self-conceit, that it did not in the least decrease the prepossessing effect of his appearance. An angry and bitter pang shot across that portion of Mauleverer's frame which the earl thought fit, for want of another name, to call his heart. "How cursedly pleased she looks!" muttered he. "By Heaven! that stolen glance under the left eyelid, dropped as suddenly as it is raised; and he--ha! how firmly he holds that little hand! I think I see him paddle with it; and then the dog's earnest, intent look,--and she all blushes, though she dare not look up to meet his gaze, feeling it by intuition. Oh, the demure, modest, shamefaced hypocrite! How silent she is! She can prate enough to me! I would give my promised garter if

she would but talk to him. Talk, talk, laugh, prattle, only simper, in God's name, and I shall be happy. But that bashful, blushing silence,-- it is insupportable. Thank Heaven, the dance is over! Thank Heaven, again! I have not felt such pains since the last nightmare I had after dining with her father!"

With a face all smiles, but with a mien in which more dignity than he ordinarily assumed was worn, Mauleverer now moved towards Lucy, who was leaning on her partner's arm. The earl, who had ample tact where his consummate selfishness did not warp it, knew well how to act the lover, without running ridiculously into the folly of seeming to play the hoary dangler. He sought rather to be lively than sentimental; and beneath the wit to conceal the suitor.

Having paid, then, with a careless gallantry his first compliments, he entered into so animated a conversation, interspersed with so many naive yet palpably just observations on the characters present, that perhaps he had never appeared to more brilliant advantage. At length, as the music was about to recommence, Mauleverer, with a careless glance at Lucy's partner, said, "Will Miss Brandon now allow me the agreeable duty of conducting her to her father?"

"I believe," answered Lucy, and her voice suddenly became timid, "that, according to the laws of the rooms, I am engaged to this gentleman for another dance."

Clifford, in an assured and easy tone, replied in assent.

As he spoke. Mauleverer honoured him with a more accurate survey than he had hitherto bestowed on him; and whether or not there was any expression of contempt or superciliousness in the survey, it was sufficient to call up the indignant blood to Clifford's cheek. Returning the look with interest, he said to Lucy, "I believe, Miss Brandon, that the dance is about to begin;" and Lucy, obeying the hint, left the aristocratic Mauleverer to his own meditations.

At that moment the master of the ceremonies came bowing by, half afraid to address so great a person as Mauleverer, but willing to show his respect by the profoundness of his salutation.

"Aha! my dear Mr. -----!" said the earl, holding out both his hands to the Lycurgus of the rooms; "how are you? Pray can you inform me who that young man is, now dancing with Miss Brandon?"

"It is--let me see--oh! it is a Captain Clifford, my lord! a very fine young man, my lord! Has your lordship never met him?"

"Never! Who is he? One under your more especial patronage?" said the earl, smiling.

"Nay, indeed!" answered the master of the ceremonies, with a simper of gratification; "I scarcely know who he is yet; the captain only made his appearance here to-night for the first time. He came with two other gentlemen,--ah! there they are!" and he pointed the earl's scrutinizing attention to the elegant forms of Mr. Augustus Tomlinson and Mr. Ned Pepper, just emerging from the card-rooms. The swagger of the latter gentleman was so peculiarly important that Mauleverer, angry as he was, could scarcely help laughing. The master of the ceremonies noted the earl's countenance, and remarked that "that fine-looking man seemed

disposed to give himself airs."

"Judging from the gentleman's appearance," said the earl, dryly (Ned's face, to say truth, did betoken his affection for the bottle), "I should imagine that he was much more accustomed to give himself thorough draughts!"

"Ah!" renewed the arbiter elegantiarum, who had not heard Mauleverer's observation, which was uttered in a very low voice,--"ah! they seem real dashers!"

"Dashers!" repeated Mauleverer; "true, haberdashers!" Long Ned now, having in the way of his profession acquitted himself tolerably well at the card-table, thought he had purchased the right to parade himself through the rooms, and show the ladies what stuff a Pepper could be made of.

Leaning with his left hand on Tomlinson's arm, and employing the right in fanning himself furiously with his huge chapeau bras, the lengthy adventurer stalked slowly along, now setting out one leg jauntily, now the other, and ogling "the ladies" with a kind of Irish look,--namely, a look between a wink and a stare.

Released from the presence of Clifford, who kept a certain check on his companions, the apparition of Ned became glaringly conspicuous; and wherever he passed, a universal whisper succeeded.

"Who can he be?" said the widow Matemore. "'T is a droll creature; but what a head of hair!"

"For my part," answered the spinster Sneerall, "I think he is a linen-draper in disguise; for I heard him talk to his companion of 'tape.'"

"Well, well," thought Mauleverer, "it would be but kind to seek out Brandon, and hint to him in what company his niece seems to have fallen!" And so thinking, he glided to the corner where, with a gray-headed old politician, the astute lawyer was conning the affairs of Europe.

In the interim the second dance had ended, and Clifford was conducting Lucy to her seat, each charmed with the other, when he found himself abruptly tapped on the back, and turning round in alarm,--for such taps were not unfamiliar to him,--he saw the cool countenance of Long Ned, with one finger sagaciously laid beside the nose.

"How now?" said Clifford, between his ground teeth; "did I not tell thee to put that huge bulk of thine as far from me as possible?"

"Humph!" granted Ned; "if these are my thanks, I may as well keep my kindness to myself; but know you, my kid, that Lawyer Brandon is here, peering through the crowd at this very moment, in order to catch a glimpse of that woman's face of thine."

"Ha!" answered Clifford, in a very quick tone; "begone, then! I will meet you without the rooms immediately." Clifford now turned to his partner, and bowing very low, in reality to hide his face from those sharp eyes which had once seen it in the court of Justice Burnflat, said: "I trust, madam, I shall have the honour to meet you again. Is it, if I may be allowed to ask, with your celebrated uncle that you are staying, or--"

"With my father," answered Lucy, concluding the sentence Clifford had left unfinished; "but my uncle has been with us, though I fear he leaves us to-morrow."

Clifford's eyes sparkled; he made no answer, but bowing again, receded into the crowd and disappeared. Several times that night did the brightest eyes in Somersetshire rove anxiously round the rooms in search of our hero; but he was seen no more.

It was on the stairs that Clifford encountered his comrades; taking an arm of each, he gained the door without any adventure worth noting, save that, being kept back by the crowd for a few moments, the moralizing Augustus Tomlinson, who honoured the moderate Whigs by enrolling himself among their number, took up, *_pour passer le temps_*, a tall gold-headed cane, and weighing it across his finger with a musing air, said, "Alas! among our supporters we often meet heads as heavy, but of what a different metal!" The crowd now permitting, Augustus was walking away with his companions, and, in that absence of mind characteristic of philosophers, unconsciously bearing with him the gold-headed object of his reflection, when a stately footman, stepping up to him, said, "Sir, my cane!"

"Cane, fellow!" said Tomlinson. "Ah, I am so absent! Here is thy cane. Only think of my carrying off the man's cane, Ned! Ha, ha!"

"Absent indeed!" grunted a knowing chairman, watching the receding figures of the three gentlemen; "body o' me! but it was the cane that was about to be absent!"

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