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BEAUCHAMP'S CAREER

By George Meredith

1897

BOOK 4.

CHAPTER XXVI

MR. BLACKBURN TUCKHAM

Some time after Beauchamp had been seen renewing his canvass in Bevisham a report reached Mount Laurels that he was lame of a leg. The wits of the opposite camp revived the FRENCH MARQUEES, but it was generally acknowledged that he had come back without the lady: she was invisible. Cecilia Halkett rode home with her father on a dusky Autumn evening, and found the card of Commander Beauchamp awaiting her. He might have stayed to see her, she thought. Ladies are not customarily so very late in returning from a ride on chill evenings of Autumn. Only a quarter of an hour was between his visit and her return. The shortness of the interval made it appear the deeper gulf. She noticed that her father particularly inquired of the man-servant whether Captain Beauchamp limped. It seemed a piece of kindly anxiety on his part. The captain was mounted, the man said. Cecilia was conscious of rumours being abroad relating to Nevil's expedition to France; but he had enemies, and was at war with them, and she held herself indifferent to tattle. This card bearing his name, recently in

his hand, was much more insidious and precise. She took it to her room to look at it. Nothing but his name and naval title was inscribed; no pencilled line; she had not expected to discover one. The simple card was her dark light, as a handkerchief, a flower, a knot of riband, has been for men luridly illuminated by such small sparks to fling their beams on shadows and read the monstrous things for truths. Her purer virgin blood was, not inflamed. She read the signification of the card sadly as she did clearly. What she could not so distinctly imagine was, how he could reconcile the devotion to his country, which he had taught her to put her faith in, with his unhappy subjection to Madame de Rouaillout. How could the nobler sentiment exist side by side with one that was lawless? Or was the wildness characteristic of his political views proof of a nature inclining to disown moral ties? She feared so; he did not speak of the clergy respectfully. Reading in the dark, she was forced to rely on her social instincts, and she distrusted her personal feelings as much as she could, for she wished to know the truth of him; anything, pain and heartrending, rather than the shutting of the eyes in an unworthy abandonment to mere emotion and fascination. Cecilia's love could not be otherwise given to a man, however near she might be drawn to love—though she should suffer the pangs of love cruelly.

She placed his card in her writing-desk; she had his likeness there. Commander Beauchamp encouraged the art of photography, as those that make long voyages do, in reciprocating what they petition their friends for. Mrs. Rosamund Culling had a whole collection of photographs of him, equal to a visual history of his growth in chapters, from boyhood to midshipmanship and to manhood. The specimen possessed by Cecilia was one of a couple that Beauchamp had forwarded to Mrs. Grancey Lespel on the day of his departure for France, and was a present from that lady, purchased, like so many presents, at a cost Cecilia would have paid heavily in gold to have been spared, namely, a public blush. She was allowed to make her choice, and she chose the profile, repeating a remark of Mrs. Culling's, that it suggested an arrow-head in the upflight; whereupon Mr. Stukely Culbrett had said, 'Then there is the man, for he is undoubtedly a projectile'; nor were politically-hostile punsters on an arrow-head inactive. But Cecilia was thinking of the side-face she (less intently than Beauchamp at hers) had glanced at during the drive into Bevisham. At that moment, she fancied Madame de Rouaillout might be doing likewise; and oh that she had the portrait of the French lady as well!

Next day her father tossed her a photograph of another gentleman, coming out of a letter he had received from old Mrs. Beauchamp. He asked her opinion of it. She said, 'I think he would have suited Bevisham better than Captain Baskelett.' Of the original, who presented himself at Mount Laurels in the course of the week, she had nothing to say, except that he was very like the photograph, very unlike Nevil Beauchamp. 'Yes, there I'm of your opinion,' her father observed. The gentleman was Mr. Blackburn Tuckham, and it was amusing to find an exuberant Tory in one who was the reverse of the cavalier type. Nevil and he seemed to have been sorted to the wrong sides. Mr. Tuckham had a round head, square flat forehead, and ruddy face; he stood as if his feet claimed the earth under them for his own, with a certain shortness of leg that detracted from the majesty of his resemblance to our Eighth Harry, but increased his air of solidity; and he was authoritative in speaking. 'Let me set you right, sir,' he said sometimes to Colonel Halkett, and that was his modesty. 'You are altogether wrong,' Miss Halkett heard herself informed, which was his courtesy. He examined some of her water-colour drawings before sitting down to dinner, approved of them, but thought it necessary to lay a broad finger on them to show their defects. On the question of politics, 'I venture to state,' he remarked, in anything but the tone of a venture, 'that no educated man of ordinary sense who has visited our colonies will come back a Liberal.' As for a man of sense and education being a Radical, he scouted the notion with a pooh sufficient to awaken a vessel in the doldrums. He said carelessly of Commander Beauchamp, that he might think himself one. Either the Radical candidate for Bevisham stood self-deceived, or—the other supposition. Mr. Tuckham would venture to state that no English gentleman, exempt from an examination by order of the Commissioners of Lunacy, could be sincerely a Radical. 'Not a bit of it; nonsense,' he replied to Miss Halkett's hint at the existence of Radical views; 'that is, those views are out of politics; they are matters for the police. Dutch dykes are built to shut away the sea from cultivated land, and of course it's a part of the business of the Dutch Government to keep up the dykes,—and of ours to guard against the mob; but that is only a political consideration after the mob has been allowed to undermine our defences.'

'They speak,' said Miss Halkett, 'of educating the people to fit them—'

'They speak of commanding the winds and tides,' he cut her short, with no clear analogy; 'wait till we have a storm. It's a delusion amounting to dementedness to suppose, that with the people inside our defences, we can be taming them and tricking them. As for sending them to school after giving them power, it's like asking a wild beast to sit down to dinner with us—he wants the whole table and us too. The best education for the people is government. They're beginning to see that in Lancashire at last. I ran down to Lancashire for a couple of days on my landing, and I'm thankful to say Lancashire is preparing to take a step back. Lancashire leads the country. Lancashire men see what this Liberalism has done for the Labour-market.'

'Captain Beauchamp considers that the political change coming over the minds of the manufacturers is due to the large fortunes they have made,' said Miss Halkett, maliciously associating a Radical prophet with him.

He was unaffected by it, and continued: 'Property is ballast as well as treasure. I call property funded good sense. I would give it every privilege. If we are to speak of patriotism, I say the possession of property guarantees it. I maintain that the lead of men of property is in most cases sure to be the safe one.'

'I think so,' Colonel Halkett interposed, and he spoke as a man of property.

Mr. Tuckham grew fervent in his allusions to our wealth and our commerce. Having won the race and gained the prize, shall we let it slip out of our grasp? Upon this topic his voice descended to tones of priestlike awe: for are we not the envy of the world? Our wealth is countless, fabulous. It may well inspire veneration. And we have won it with our hands, thanks (he implied it so) to our religion. We are rich in money and industry, in those two things only, and the corruption of an energetic industry is constantly threatened by the profusion of wealth giving it employment. This being the case, either your Radicals do not know the first conditions of human nature, or they do; and if they do they are traitors, and the Liberals opening the gates to them are fools: and some are knaves. We perish as a Great Power if we cease to look sharp ahead, hold firm together, and make the utmost of what we possess. The word for the performance of those duties is Toryism: a word with an older flavour than Conservatism, and Mr. Tuckham preferred it. By all means let workmen be free men but a man must earn his freedom daily, or he will become a slave in some form or another: and the way to earn it is by work and obedience to right direction. In a country like ours, open on all sides to the competition of intelligence and strength, with a Press that is the voice of all parties and of every interest; in a country offering to your investments three and a half and more per cent., secure as the firmament!

He perceived an amazed expression on Miss Halkett's countenance; and 'Ay,' said he, 'that means the certainty of food to millions of mouths, and comforts, if not luxuries, to half the population. A safe percentage on savings is the basis of civilization.'

But he had bruised his eloquence, for though you may start a sermon from stones to hit the stars, he must be a practised orator who shall descend out of the abstract to take up a heavy lump of the concrete without unseating himself, and he stammered and came to a flat ending: 'In such a country—well, I venture to say, we have a right to condemn in advance disturbers of the peace, and they must show very good cause indeed for not being summarily held—to account for their conduct.'

The allocution was not delivered in the presence of an audience other than sympathetic, and Miss Halkett rightly guessed that it was intended to strike Captain Beauchamp by ricochet. He puffed at the mention of Beauchamp's name. He had read a reported speech or two of Beauchamp's, and shook his head over a quotation of the stuff, as though he would have sprung at him like a lion, but for his enrolment as a constable.

Not a whit the less did Mr. Tuckham drink his claret relishingly, and he told stories incidental to his travels now and then, commended the fishing here, the shooting there, and in some few places the cookery, with much bright emphasis when it could be praised; it appeared to be an endearing recollection to him. Still, as a man of progress, he declared his belief that we English would ultimately turn out the best cooks, having indubitably the best material. 'Our incomprehensible political pusillanimity' was the one sad point about us: we had been driven from surrender to surrender.

'Like geese upon a common, I have heard it said,' Miss Halkett assisted him to Dr. Shrapnel's comparison.

Mr. Tuckham laughed, and half yawned and sighed, 'Dear me!'

His laughter was catching, and somehow more persuasive of the soundness of the man's heart and head than his remarks.

She would have been astonished to know that a gentleman so uncourtly, if not uncouth—judged by the standard of the circle she moved in—and so unskilled in pleasing the sight and hearing of ladies as to treat them like junior comrades, had raised the vow within himself on seeing her: You, or no woman!

The colonel delighted in him, both as a strong and able young fellow, and a refreshingly aggressive recruit of his party, who was for onslaught, and invoked common sense, instead of waving the flag of sentiment in retreat; a very horse-artillery man of Tories. Regretting immensely that Mr. Tuckham had not reached England earlier, that he might have occupied the seat for Bevisham, about to be given to Captain Baskelett, Colonel Halkett set up a contrast of Blackburn Tuckham and Nevil Beauchamp; a singular instance of unfairness, his daughter thought, considering that the distinct contrast presented

by the circumstances was that of Mr. Tuckham and Captain Baskelett.

'It seems to me, papa,—that you are contrasting the idealist and the realist,' she said.

'Ah, well, we don't want the idealist in politics,' muttered the colonel.

Latterly he also had taken to shaking his head over Nevil: Cecilia dared not ask him why.

Mr. Tuckham arrived at Mount Laurels on the eve of the Nomination day in Bevisham. An article in the Bevisham Gazette calling upon all true Liberals to demonstrate their unanimity by a multitudinous show of hands, he ascribed to the writing of a child of Erin; and he was highly diverted by the Liberal's hiring of Paddy to 'pen and spout' for him. 'A Scotchman manages, and Paddy does the sermon for all their journals,' he said off-hand; adding: 'And the English are the compositors, I suppose.' You may take that for an instance of the national spirit of Liberal newspapers!

'Ah!' sighed the colonel, as at a case clearly demonstrated against them.

A drive down to Bevisham to witness the ceremony of the nomination in the town-hall sobered Mr. Tuckham's disposition to generalize. Beauchamp had the show of hands, and to say with Captain Baskelett, that they were a dirty majority, was beneath Mr. Tuckham's verbal antagonism. He fell into a studious reserve, noting everything, listening to everybody, greatly to Colonel Halkett's admiration of one by nature a talker and a thunderer.

The show of hands Mr. Seymour Austin declared to be the most delusive of electoral auspices; and it proved so. A little later than four o'clock in the afternoon of the election-day, Cecilia received a message from her father telling her that both of the Liberals were headed; 'Beauchamp nowhere.'

Mrs. Grancey Lespel was the next herald of Beauchamp's defeat. She merely stated the fact that she had met the colonel and Mr. Blackburn Tuckham driving on the outskirts of the town, and had promised to bring Cecilia the final numbers of the poll. Without naming them, she unrolled the greater business in her mind.

'A man who in the middle of an Election goes over to France to fight a duel, can hardly expect to win; he has all the morality of an English borough opposed to him,' she said; and seeing the young lady stiffen: 'Oh! the duel is positive,' she dropped her voice. 'With the husband. Who else could it be? And returns invalided. That is evidence. My nephew Palmet has it from Vivian Ducie, and he is acquainted with her tolerably intimately, and the story is, she was overtaken in her flight in the night, and the duel followed at eight o'clock in the morning; but her brother insisted on fighting for Captain Beauchamp, and I cannot tell you how—but his place in it I can't explain—there was a beau jeune homme, and it's quite possible that he should have been the person to stand up against the marquis. At any rate, he insulted Captain Beauchamp, or thought your hero had insulted him, and the duel was with one or the other. It matters exceedingly little with whom, if a duel was fought, and you see we have quite established that.'

'I hope it is not true,' said Cecilia.

'My dear, that is the Christian thing to do,' said Mrs. Lespel. 'Duelling is horrible: though those Romfreys!—and the Beauchamps were just as bad, or nearly. Colonel Richard fought for a friend's wife or sister. But in these days duelling is incredible. It was an inhuman practice always, and it is now worse—it is a reach of manners. I would hope it is not true; and you may mean that I have it from Lord Palmet. But I know Vivian Ducie as well as I know my nephew, and if he distinctly mentions an occurrence, we may too surely rely on the truth of it; he is not a man to spread mischief. Are you unaware that he met Captain Beauchamp at the chateau of the marquise? The whole story was acted under his eyes. He had only to take up his pen. Generally he favours me with his French gossip. I suppose there were circumstances in this affair more suitable to Palmet than to me. He wrote a description of Madame de Rouaillout that set Palmet strutting about for an hour. I have no doubt she must be a very beautiful woman, for a Frenchwoman: not regular features; expressive, capricious. Vivian Ducie lays great stress on her eyes and eyebrows, and, I think, her hair. With a Frenchwoman's figure, that is enough to make men crazy. He says her husband deserves— but what will not young men write? It is deeply to be regretted that Englishmen abroad—women the same, I fear—get the Continental tone in morals. But how Captain Beauchamp could expect to carry on an Election and an intrigue together, only a head like his can tell us. Grancey is in high indignation with him. It does not concern the Election, you can imagine. Something that man Dr. Shrapnel has done, which he says Captain Beauchamp could have prevented. Quarrels of men! I have instructed Palmet to write to Vivian Ducie for a photograph of Madame de Rouaillout. Do you know, one has a curiosity to see the face of the woman for whom a man ruins himself. But I say again, he ought to be married.'

'That there may be two victims?' Cecilia said it smiling.

She was young in suffering, and thought, as the unseasoned and inexperienced do, that a mask is a concealment.

'Married—settled; to have him bound in honour,' said Mrs. Lespel. 'I had a conversation with him when he was at Itchincope; and his look, and what I know of his father, that gallant and handsome Colonel Richard Beauchamp, would give one a kind of confidence in him; supposing always that he is not struck with one of those deadly passions that are like snakes, like magic. I positively believe in them. I have seen them. And if they end, they end as if the man were burnt out, and was ashes inside; as you see Mr. Stukely Culbrett, all cynicism. You would not now suspect him of a passion! It is true. Oh, I know it! That is what the men go to. The women die. Vera Winter died at twenty-three. Caroline Ormond was hardly older. You know her story; everybody knows it. The most singular and convincing case was that of Lord Alfred Burnley and Lady Susan Gardiner, wife of the general; and there was an instance of two similarly afflicted—a very rare case, most rare: they never could meet to part! It was almost ludicrous. It is now quite certain that they did not conspire to meet. At last the absolute fatality became so well understood by the persons immediately interested—You laugh?'

'Do I laugh?' said Cecilia.

'We should all know the world, my dear, and you are a strong head. The knowledge is only dangerous for fools. And if romance is occasionally ridiculous, as I own it can be, humdrum, I protest, is everlastingly so. By-the-by, I should have told you that Captain Beauchamp was one hundred and ninety below Captain Baskelett when the state of the poll was handed to me. The gentleman driving with your father compared the Liberals to a parachute cut away from the balloon. Is he army or navy?'

'He is a barrister, and some cousin of Captain Beauchamp.'

'I should not have taken him for a Beauchamp,' said Mrs. Lespel; and, resuming her worldly sagacity, 'I should not like to be in opposition to that young man.'

She seemed to have a fancy unexpressed regarding Mr. Tuckham. Reminding herself that she might be behind time at Itchincope, where the guests would be numerous that evening, and the song of triumph loud, with Captain Baskelett to lead it, she kissed the young lady she had unintentionally been torturing so long, and drove away.

Cecilia hoped it was not true. Her heart sank heavily under the belief that it was. She imagined the world abusing Nevil and casting him out, as those electors of Bevisham had just done, and impulsively she pleaded for him, and became drowned in criminal blushes that forced her to defend herself with a determination not to believe the dreadful story, though she continued mitigating the wickedness of it; as if, by a singular inversion of the fact, her clear good sense excused, and it was her heart that condemned him. She dwelt fondly on an image of the 'gallant and handsome Colonel Richard Beauchamp,' conjured up in her mind from the fervour of Mrs. Lespel when speaking of Nevil's father, whose chivalry threw a light on the son's, and whose errors, condoned by time, and with a certain brilliancy playing above them, interceded strangely on behalf of Nevil.

CHAPTER XXVII

A SHORT SIDELOOK AT THE ELECTION

The brisk Election-day, unlike that wearisome but instructive canvass of the Englishman in his castle vicatim, teaches little; and its humours are those of a badly managed Christmas pantomime without a columbine—old tricks, no graces. Nevertheless, things hang together so that it cannot be passed over with a bare statement of the fact of the Liberal-Radical defeat in Bevisham: the day was not without fruit in time to come for him whom his commiserating admirers of the non-voting sex all round the borough called the poor dear commander. Beauchamp's holiday out of England had incited Dr. Shrapnel to break a positive restriction put upon him by Jenny Denham, and actively pursue the canvass and the harangue in person; by which conduct, as Jenny had foreseen, many temperate electors were alienated from Commander Beauchamp, though no doubt the Radicals were made compact: for they may be the skirmishing faction—poor scattered fragments, none of them sufficiently downright for the other; each outstripping each; rudimentary emperors, elementary prophets, inspired physicians, nostrum-devouring patients, whatsoever you will; and still here and there a man shall arise to march them in close columns, if they can but trust him; in perfect subordination, a model even for Tories while they keep shoulder to shoulder. And to behold such a disciplined body is intoxicating to the

eye of a leader accustomed to count ahead upon vapourish abstractions, and therefore predisposed to add a couple of noughts to every tangible figure in his grasp. Thus will a realized fifty become five hundred or five thousand to him: the very sense of number is instinct with multiplication in his mind; and those years far on in advance, which he has been looking to with some fatigue to the optics, will suddenly and rollickingly roll up to him at the shutting of his eyes in a temporary fit of gratification. So, by looking and by not looking, he achieves his phantom victory—embraces his cloud.

Dr. Shrapnel conceived that the day was to be a Radical success; and he, a citizen aged and exercised in reverses, so rounded by the habit of them indeed as to tumble and recover himself on the wind of the blow that struck him, was, it must be acknowledged, staggered and cast down when he saw Beauchamp drop, knowing full well his regiment had polled to a man. Radicals poll early; they would poll at cockcrow if they might; they dance on the morning. As for their chagrin at noon, you will find descriptions of it in the poet's Inferno. They are for lifting our clay soil on a lever of Archimedes, and are not great mathematicians. They have perchance a foot of our earth, and perpetually do they seem to be producing an effect, perpetually does the whole land roll back on them. You have not surely to be reminded that it hurts them; the weight is immense. Dr. Shrapnel, however, speedily looked out again on his vast horizon, though prostrate. He regained his height of stature with no man's help. Success was but postponed for a generation or two. Is it so very distant? Gaze on it with the eye of our parent orb! 'I shall not see it here; you may,' he said to Jenny Denham; and he fortified his outlook by saying to Mr. Lydiard that the Tories of our time walked, or rather stuck, in the track of the Radicals of a generation back. Note, then, that Radicals, always marching to the triumph, never taste it; and for Tories it is Dead Sea fruit, ashes in their mouths! Those Liberals, those temporisers, compromisers, a concourse of atoms! glorify themselves in the animal satisfaction of sucking the juice of the fruit, for which they pay with their souls. They have no true cohesion, for they have no vital principle.

Mr. Lydiard being a Liberal, bade the doctor not to forget the work of the Liberals, who touched on Tory and Radical with a pretty steady swing, from side to side, in the manner of the pendulum of a clock, which is the clock's life, remember that. The Liberals are the professors of the practicable in politics.

'A suitable image for time-servers!' Dr. Shrapnel exclaimed, intolerant of any mention of the Liberals as a party, especially in the hour of Radical discomfiture, when the fact that compromisers should exist exasperates men of a principle. 'Your Liberals are the band of Pyrrhus, an army of bastards, mercenaries professing the practicable for pay. They know us the motive force, the Tories the resisting power, and they feign to aid us in battering our enemy, that they may stop the shock. We fight, they profit. What are they? Stranded Whigs, crotchetty manufacturers; dissentient religionists; the half-minded, the hare- hearted; the I would and I would-not—shifty creatures, with youth's enthusiasm decaying in them, and a purse beginning to jingle; fearing lest we do too much for safety, our enemy not enough for safety. They a party? Let them take action and see! We stand a thousand defeats; they not one! Compromise begat them. Once let them leave sucking the teats of compromise, yea, once put on the air of men who fight and die for a cause, they fly to pieces. And whither the fragments? Chiefly, my friend, into the Tory ranks. Seriously so I say. You between future and past are for the present—but with the hunted look behind of all godless livers in the present. You Liberals are Tories with foresight, Radicals without faith. You start, in fear of Toryism, on an errand of Radicalism, and in fear of Radicalism to Toryism you draw back. There is your pendulum-swing!'

Lectures to this effect were delivered by Dr. Shrapnel throughout the day, for his private spiritual solace it may be supposed, unto Lydiard, Turbot, Beauchamp, or whomsoever the man chancing to be near him, and never did Sir Oracle wear so extraordinary a garb. The favourite missiles of the day were flour-bags. Dr. Shrapnel's uncommon height, and his outrageous long brown coat, would have been sufficient to attract them, without the reputation he had for desiring to subvert everything old English. The first discharges gave him the appearance of a thawing snowman. Drenchings of water turned the flour to ribs of paste, and in colour at least he looked legitimately the cook's own spitted hare, escaped from her basting ladle, elongated on two legs. It ensued that whenever he was caught sight of, as he walked unconcernedly about, the young street-professors of the decorative arts were seized with a frenzy to add their share to the whitening of him, until he might have been taken for a miller that had gone bodily through his meal. The popular cry proclaimed him a ghost, and he walked like one, impassive, blanched, and silent amid the uproar of mobs of jolly ruffians, for each of whom it was a point of honour to have a shy at old Shrapnel.

Clad in this preparation of pie-crust, he called from time to time at Beauchamp's hotel, and renewed his monologue upon that Radical empire in the future which was for ever in the future for the pioneers of men, yet not the less their empire. 'Do we live in our bodies?' quoth he, replying to his fiery interrogation: 'Ay, the Tories! the Liberals!' They lived in their bodies. Not one syllable of personal consolation did he vouchsafe to Beauchamp. He did not imagine it could be required by a man who had bathed in the pure springs of Radicalism; and it should be remarked that Beauchamp deceived him by

imitating his air of happy abstraction, or subordination of the faculties to a distant view, comparable to a ship's crew in difficulties receiving the report of the man at the masthead. Beauchamp deceived Miss Denham too, and himself, by saying, as if he cherished the philosophy of defeat, besides the resolution to fight on:

'It's only a skirmish lost, and that counts for nothing in a battle without end: it must be incessant.'

'But does incessant battling keep the intellect clear?' was her memorable answer.

He glanced at Lydiard, to indicate that it came of that gentleman's influence upon her mind. It was impossible for him to think that women thought. The idea of a pretty woman exercising her mind independently, and moreover moving him to examine his own, made him smile. Could a sweet-faced girl, the nearest to Renee in grace of manner and in feature of all women known to him, originate a sentence that would set him reflecting? He was unable to forget it, though he allowed her no credit for it.

On the other hand, his admiration of her devotedness to Dr. Shrapnel was unbounded. There shone a strictly feminine quality! according to the romantic visions of the sex entertained by Commander Beauchamp, and by others who would be the objects of it. But not alone the passive virtues were exhibited by Jenny Denham: she proved that she had high courage. No remonstrance could restrain Dr. Shrapnel from going out to watch the struggle, and she went with him as a matter of course on each occasion. Her dress bore witness to her running the gauntlet beside him.

'It was not thrown at me purposely,' she said, to quiet Beauchamp's wrath. She saved the doctor from being rough mobbed. Once when they were surrounded she fastened his arm under hers, and by simply moving on with an unswerving air of serenity obtained a passage for him. So much did she make herself respected, that the gallant rascals became emulous in dexterity to avoid powdering her, by loudly execrating any but dead shots at the detested one, and certain boys were maltreated for an ardour involving clumsiness. A young genius of this horde conceiving, in the spirit of the inventors of our improved modern ordnance, that it was vain to cast missiles which left a thing standing, hurled a stone wrapped in paper. It missed its mark. Jenny said nothing about it. The day closed with a comfortable fight or two in by-quarters of the town, probably to prove that an undaunted English spirit, spite of fickle Fortune, survived in our muscles.

CHAPTER XXVIII

TOUCHING A YOUNG LADY'S HEART AND HER INTELLECT

Mr. Tuckham found his way to Dr. Shrapnel's cottage to see his kinsman on the day after the election. There was a dinner in honour of the Members for Bevisham at Mount Laurels in the evening, and he was five minutes behind military time when he entered the restive drawing-room and stood before the colonel. No sooner had he stated that he had been under the roof of Dr. Shrapnel, than his unpunctuality was immediately overlooked in the burst of impatience evoked by the name.

'That pestilent fellow!' Colonel Halkett ejaculated. 'I understand he has had the impudence to serve a notice on Grancey Lespel about encroachments on common land.'

Some one described Dr. Shrapnel's appearance under the flour storm.

'He deserves anything,' said the colonel, consulting his mantelpiece clock.

Captain Baskelett observed: 'I shall have my account to settle with Dr. Shrapnel.' He spoke like a man having a right to be indignant, but excepting that the doctor had bestowed nicknames upon him in a speech at a meeting, no one could discover the grounds for it. He nodded briefly. A Radical apple had struck him on the left cheekbone as he performed his triumphal drive through the town, and a slight disfigurement remained, to which his hand was applied sympathetically at intervals, for the cheek-bone was prominent in his countenance, and did not well bear enlargement. And when a fortunate gentleman, desiring to be still more fortunate, would display the winning amiability of his character, distension of one cheek gives him an afflictingly false look of sweetness.

The bent of his mind, nevertheless, was to please Miss Halkett. He would be smiling, and intimately smiling. Aware that she had a kind of pitiful sentiment for Nevil, he smiled over Nevil—poor Nevil! 'I

give you my word, Miss Halkett, old Nevil was off his head yesterday. I daresay he meant to be civil. I met him; I called out to him, "Good day, cousin, I'm afraid you're beaten" and says he, "I fancy you've gained it, uncle." He didn't know where he was; all abroad, poor boy. Uncle!—to me!'

Miss Halkett would have accepted the instance for a proof of Nevil's distraction, had not Mr. Seymour Austin, who sat beside her, laughed and said to her: 'I suppose "uncle" was a chance shot, but it's equal to a poetic epithet in the light it casts on the story.' Then it seemed to her that Nevil had been keenly quick, and Captain Baskelett's impenetrability was a sign of his density. Her mood was to think Nevil Beauchamp only too quick, too adventurous and restless: one that wrecked brilliant gifts in a too general warfare; a lover of hazards, a hater of laws. Her eyes flew over Captain Baskelett as she imagined Nevil addressing him as uncle, and, to put aside a spirit of mockery rising within her, she hinted a wish to hear Seymour Austin's opinion of Mr. Tuckham. He condensed it in an interrogative tone: 'The other extreme?' The Tory extreme of Radical Nevil Beauchamp. She assented. Mr. Tuckham was at that moment prophesying the Torification of mankind; not as the trembling venturesome idea which we cast on doubtful winds, but as a ship is launched to ride the waters, with huzzas for a thing accomplished. Mr. Austin raised his shoulders imperceptibly, saying to Miss Halkett: 'The turn will come to us as to others—and go. Nothing earthly can escape that revolution. We have to meet it with a policy, and let it pass with measures carried and our hands washed of some of our party sins. I am, I hope, true to my party, but the enthusiasm of party I do not share. He is right, however, when he accuses the nation of cowardice for the last ten years. One third of the Liberals have been with us at heart, and dared not speak, and we dared not say what we wished. We accepted a compact that satisfied us both—satisfied us better than when we were opposed by Whigs—that is, the Liberal reigned, and we governed: and I should add, a very clever juggler was our common chief. Now we have the consequences of hollow peacemaking, in a suffrage that bids fair to extend to the wearing of hats and boots for a qualification. The moral of it seems to be that cowardice is even worse for nations than for individual men, though the consequences come on us more slowly.'

'You spoke of party sins,' Miss Halkett said incredulously.

'I shall think we are the redoubtable party when we admit the charge.'

'Are you alluding to the landowners?'

'Like the land itself, they have rich veins in heavy matter. For instance, the increasing wealth of the country is largely recruiting our ranks; and we shall be tempted to mistake numbers for strength, and perhaps again be reading Conservatism for a special thing of our own—a fortification. That would be a party sin. Conservatism is a principle of government; the best because the safest for an old country; and the guarantee that we do not lose the wisdom of past experience in our struggle with what is doubtful. Liberalism stakes too much on the chance of gain. It is uncomfortably seated on half-a-dozen horses; and it has to feed them too, and on varieties of corn.'

'Yes,' Miss Halkett said, pausing, 'and I know you would not talk down to me, but the use of imagery makes me feel that I am addressed as a primitive intelligence.'

'That's the fault of my trying at condensation, as the hieroglyphists put an animal for a paragraph. I am incorrigible, you see; but the lecture in prose must be for by-and-by, if you care to have it.'

'If you care to read it to me. Did a single hieroglyphic figure stand for so much?'

'I have never deciphered one.'

'You have been speaking to me too long in earnest, Mr. Austin!'

'I accept the admonition, though it is wider than the truth. Have you ever consented to listen to politics before?'

Cecilia reddened faintly, thinking of him who had taught her to listen, and of her previous contempt of the subject.

A political exposition devoid of imagery was given to her next day on the sunny South-western terrace of Mount Laurels, when it was only by mentally translating it into imagery that she could advance a step beside her intellectual guide; and she was ashamed of the volatility of her ideas. She was constantly comparing Mr. Austin and Nevil Beauchamp, seeing that the senior and the junior both talked to her with the familiar recognition of her understanding which was a compliment without the gross corporeal phrase. But now she made another discovery, that should have been infinitely more of a compliment, and it was bewildering, if not repulsive to her:—could it be credited? Mr. Austin was a firm believer in new and higher destinies for women. He went farther than she could concede the right of human speculation to go; he was, in fact, as Radical there as Nevil Beauchamp politically; and would

not the latter innovator stare, perchance frown conservatively, at a prospect of woman taking counsel, in council, with men upon public affairs, like the women in the Germania! Mr. Austin, if this time he talked in earnest, deemed that Englishwomen were on the road to win such a promotion, and would win it ultimately. He said soberly that he saw more certain indications of the reality of progress among women than any at present shown by men. And he was professedly temperate. He was but for opening avenues to the means of livelihood for them, and leaving it to their strength to conquer the position they might wish to win. His belief that they would do so was the revolutionary sign.

'Are there points of likeness between Radicals and Tories?' she inquired.

'I suspect a cousinship in extremes,' he answered.

'If one might be present at an argument,' said she.

'We have only to meet to fly apart as wide as the Poles,' Mr. Austin rejoined.

But she had not spoken of a particular person to meet him; and how, then, had she betrayed herself? She fancied he looked unwontedly arch as he resumed:

'The end of the argument would see us each entrenched in his party. Suppose me to be telling your Radical friend such truisms as that we English have not grown in a day, and were not originally made free and equal by decree; that we have grown, and must continue to grow, by the aid and the development of our strength; that ours is a fairly legible history, and a fair example of the good and the bad in human growth; that his landowner and his peasant have no clear case of right and wrong to divide them, one being the descendant of strong men, the other of weak ones; and that the former may sink, the latter may rise—there is no artificial obstruction; and if it is difficult to rise, it is easy to sink. Your Radical friend, who would bring them to a level by proclamation, could not adopt a surer method for destroying the manhood of a people: he is for doctoring wooden men, and I for not letting our stout English be cut down short as Laplanders; he would have them in a forcing house, and I in open air, as hitherto. Do you perceive a discussion? and you apprehend the nature of it. We have nerves. That is why it is better for men of extremely opposite opinions not to meet. I dare say Radicalism has a function, and so long as it respects the laws I am ready to encounter it where it cannot be avoided. Pardon my prosing.'

'Recommend me some hard books to study through the Winter,' said Cecilia, refreshed by a discourse that touched no emotions, as by a febrifuge. Could Nevil reply to it? She fancied him replying, with that wild head of his—wildest of natures. She fancied also that her wish was like Mr. Austin's not to meet him. She was enjoying a little rest.

It was not quite generous in Mr. Austin to assume that 'her Radical friend' had been prompting her. However, she thanked him in her heart for the calm he had given her. To be able to imagine Nevil Beauchamp intellectually erratic was a tonic satisfaction to the proud young lady, ashamed of a bondage that the bracing and pointing of her critical powers helped her to forget. She had always preferred the society of men of Mr. Austin's age. How old was he? Her father would know. And why was he unmarried? A light frost had settled on the hair about his temples; his forehead was lightly wrinkled; but his mouth and smile, and his eyes, were lively as a young man's, with more in them. His age must be something less than fifty. O for peace! she sighed. When he stepped into his carriage, and stood up in it to wave adieu to her, she thought his face and figure a perfect example of an English gentleman in his prime.

Captain Baskelett requested the favour of five minutes of conversation with Miss Halkett before he followed Mr. Austin, on his way to Steynham.

She returned from that colloquy to her father and Mr. Tuckham. The colonel looked straight in her face, with an elevation of the brows. To these points of interrogation she answered with a placid fall of her eyelids. He sounded a note of approbation in his throat.

All the company having departed, Mr. Tuckham for the first time spoke of his interview with his kinsman Beauchamp. Yesterday evening he had slurred it, as if he had nothing to relate, except the finding of an old schoolfellow at Dr. Shrapnel's named Lydiard, a man of ability fool enough to have turned author on no income. But that which had appeared to Miss Halkett a want of observancy, became attributable to depth of character on its being clear that he had waited for the departure of the transient guests of the house, to pour forth his impressions without holding up his kinsman to public scorn. He considered Shrapnel mad and Beauchamp mad. No such grotesque old monster as Dr. Shrapnel had he seen in the course of his travels. He had never listened to a madman running loose who was at all up to Beauchamp. At a loss for words to paint him, he said: 'Beauchamp seems to have a head like a firework manufactory, he's perfectly pyrocephalic.' For an example of Dr. Shrapnel's talk: 'I

happened,' said Mr. Tuckham, 'casually, meaning no harm, and not supposing I was throwing a lighted match on powder, to mention the word Providence. I found myself immediately confronted by Shrapnel — overtopped, I should say. He is a lank giant of about seven feet in height; the kind of show man that used to go about in caravans over the country; and he began rocking over me like a poplar in a gale, and cries out: "Stay there! away with that! Providence? Can you set a thought on Providence, not seeking to propitiate it? And have you not there the damning proof that you are at the foot of an Idol?"—The old idea about a special Providence, I suppose. These fellows have nothing new but their trimmings. And he went on with: "Ay, invisible," and his arm chopping, "but an Idol! an Idol!"—I was to think of "nought but Laws." He admitted there might be one above the Laws. "To realize him is to fry the brains in their pan," says he, and struck his forehead—a slap: and off he walked down the garden, with his hands at his coat-tails. I venture to say it may be taken for a proof of incipient insanity to care to hear such a fellow twice. And Beauchamp holds him up for a sage and a prophet!'

'He is a very dangerous dog,' said Colonel Halkett.

'The best of it is—and I take this for the strongest possible proof that Beauchamp is mad—Shrapnel stands for an advocate of morality against him. I'll speak of it . . . .'

Mr. Tuckham nodded to the colonel, who said: 'Speak out. My daughter has been educated for a woman of the world.'

'Well, sir, it's nothing to offend a young lady's ears. Beauchamp is for socially enfranchising the sex—that is all. Quite enough. Not a whit politically. Love is to be the test: and if a lady ceases to love her husband . . . if she sets her fancy elsewhere, she's bound to leave him. The laws are tyrannical, our objections are cowardly. Well, this Dr. Shrapnel harangued about society; and men as well as women are to sacrifice their passions on that altar. If he could burlesque himself it would be in coming out as a cleric—the old Pagan!'

'Did he convince Captain Beauchamp?' the colonel asked, manifestly for his daughter to hear the reply; which was: 'Oh dear, no!'

'Were you able to gather from Captain Beauchamp's remarks whether he is much disappointed by the result of the election?' said Cecilia.

Mr. Tuckham could tell her only that Captain Beauchamp was incensed against an elector named Tomlinson for withdrawing a promised vote on account of lying rumours, and elated by the conquest of a Mr. Carpendike, who was reckoned a tough one to drag by the neck. 'The only sane people in the house are a Miss Denham and the cook: I lunched there,' Mr. Tuckham nodded approvingly. 'Lydiard must be mad. What he's wasting his time there for I can't guess. He says he's engaged there in writing a prefatory essay to a new publication of Harry Denham's poems—whoever that may be. And why wasting it there? I don't like it. He ought to be earning his bread. He'll be sure to be borrowing money by-and-by. We've got ten thousand too many fellows writing already, and they 've seen a few inches of the world, on the Continent! He can write. But it's all unproductive-dead weight on the country, these fellows with their writings! He says Beauchamp's praise of Miss Denham is quite deserved. He tells me, that at great peril to herself—and she nearly had her arm broken by a stone he saved Shrapnel from rough usage on the election- day.'

'Hum!' Colonel Halkett grunted significantly.

'So I thought,' Mr. Tuckham responded. 'One doesn't want the man to be hurt, but he ought to be put down in some way. My belief is he's a Fire- worshipper. I warrant I would extinguish him if he came before me. He's an incendiary, at any rate.'

'Do you think,' said Cecilia, 'that Captain Beauchamp is now satisfied with his experience of politics?'

'Dear me, no,' said Mr. Tuckham. 'It's the opening of a campaign. He's off to the North, after he has been to Sussex and Bucks. He's to be at it all his life. One thing he shows common sense in. If I heard him once I heard him say half-a-dozen times, that he must have money:— "I must have money!" And so he must if he 's to head the Radicals. He wants to start a newspaper! Is he likely to get money from his uncle Romfrey?'

'Not for his present plan of campaign.' Colonel Halkett enunciated the military word sarcastically. 'Let's hope he won't get money.'

'He says he must have it.'

'Who is to stand and deliver, then?'

'I don't know; I only repeat what he says: unless he has an eye on my Aunt Beauchamp; and I doubt his luck there, if he wants money for political campaigning.'

'Money!' Colonel Halkett ejaculated.

That word too was in the heart of the heiress.

Nevil must have money! Could he have said it? Ordinary men might say or think it inoffensively; Captain Baskelett, for instance: but not Nevil Beauchamp.

Captain Baskelett, as she had conveyed the information to her father for his comfort in the dumb domestic language familiar between them on these occasions, had proposed to her unavailingly. Italian and English gentlemen were in the list of her rejected suitors: and hitherto she had seen them come and go, one might say, from a watchtower in the skies. None of them was the ideal she waited for: what their feelings were, their wishes, their aims, she had not reflected on. They dotted the landscape beneath the unassailable heights, busy after their fashion, somewhat quaint, much like the pigmy husbandmen in the fields were to the giant's daughter, who had more curiosity than Cecilia. But Nevil Beauchamp had compelled her to quit her lofty station, pulled her low as the littlest of women that throb and flush at one man's footstep: and being well able to read the nature and aspirations of Captain Baskelett, it was with the knowledge of her having been proposed to as heiress of a great fortune that she chanced to hear of Nevil's resolve to have money. If he did say it! And was anything likelier? was anything unlikelier? His foreign love denied to him, why, now he devoted himself to money: money—the last consideration of a man so single-mindedly generous as he! But he must have money to pursue his contest! But would he forfeit the truth in him for money for any purpose?

The debate on this question grew as incessant as the thought of him. Was it not to be supposed that the madness of the pursuit of his political chimaera might change his character?

She hoped he would not come to Mount Laurels, thinking she should esteem him less if he did; knowing that her defence of him, on her own behalf, against herself, depended now on an esteem lodged perhaps in her wilfulness. Yet if he did not come, what an Arctic world!

He came on a November afternoon when the woods glowed, and no sun. The day was narrowed in mist from earth to heaven: a moveless and possessing mist. It left space overhead for one wreath of high cloud mixed with touches of washed red upon moist blue, still as the mist, insensibly passing into it. Wet webs crossed the grass, chill in the feeble light. The last flowers of the garden bowed to decay. Dead leaves, red and brown and spotted yellow, fell straight around the stems of trees, lying thick. The glow was universal, and the chill.

Cecilia sat sketching the scene at a window of her study, on the level of the drawing-room, and he stood by outside till she saw him. He greeted her through the glass, then went round to the hall door, giving her time to recover, if only her heart had been less shaken.

Their meeting was like the features of the day she set her brush to picture: characteristic of a season rather than cheerless in tone, though it breathed little cheer. Is there not a pleasure in contemplating that which is characteristic? Her unfinished sketch recalled him after he had gone: he lived in it, to startle her again, and bid her heart gallop and her cheeks burn. The question occurred to her: May not one love, not craving to be beloved? Such a love does not sap our pride, but supports it; increases rather than diminishes our noble self-esteem. To attain such a love the martyrs writhed up to the crown of saints. For a while Cecilia revelled in the thought that she could love in this most saint- like manner. How they fled, the sordid ideas of him which accused him of the world's one passion, and were transferred to her own bosom in reproach that she should have imagined them existing in his! He talked simply and sweetly of his defeat, of time wasted away from the canvass, of loss of money: and he had little to spare, he said. The water-colour drawing interested him. He said he envied her that power of isolation, and the eye for beauty in every season. She opened a portfolio of Mr. Tuckham's water-colour drawings in every clime; scenes of Europe, Asia, and the Americas; and he was to be excused for not caring to look through them. His remark, that they seemed hard and dogged, was not so unjust, she thought, smiling to think of the critic criticized. His wonderment that a young man like his Lancastrian cousin should be 'an unmitigated Tory' was perhaps natural.

Cecilia said, 'Yet I cannot discern in him a veneration for aristocracy.' 'That's not wanted for modern Toryism,' said Nevil. 'One may venerate old families when they show the blood of the founder, and are not dead wood. I do. And I believe the blood of the founder, though the man may have been a savage and a robber, had in his day finer elements in it than were common. But let me say at a meeting that I respect true aristocracy, I hear a growl and a hiss beginning: why? Don't judge them hastily: because the people have seen the aristocracy opposed to the cause that was weak, and only submitting to it when it commanded them to resist at their peril; clinging to traditions, and not anywhere standing for

humanity: much more a herd than the people themselves. Ah! well, we won't talk of it now. I say that is no aristocracy, if it does not head the people in virtue—military, political, national: I mean the qualities required by the times for leadership. I won't bother you with my ideas now. I love to see you paint-brush in hand.'

Her brush trembled on the illumination of a scarlet maple. 'In this country we were not originally made free and equal by decree, Nevil.'

'No,' said he, 'and I cast no blame on our farthest ancestors.'

It struck her that this might be an outline of a reply to Mr. Austin.

'So you have been thinking over it?' he asked.

'Not to conclusions,' she said, trying to retain in her mind the evanescent suggestiveness of his previous remark, and vexed to find herself upon nothing but a devious phosphorescent trail there.

Her forehead betrayed the unwonted mental action. He cried out for pardon. 'What right have I to bother you? I see it annoys you. The truth is, I came for peace. I think of you when they talk of English homes.'

She felt then that he was comparing her home with another, a foreign home. After he had gone she felt that there had been a comparison of two persons. She remembered one of his observations: 'Few women seem to have courage'; when his look at her was for an instant one of scrutiny or calculation. Under a look like that we perceive that we are being weighed. She had no clue to tell her what it signified.

Glorious and solely glorious love, that has risen above emotion, quite independent of craving! That is to be the bird of upper air, poised on his wings. It is a home in the sky. Cecilia took possession of it systematically, not questioning whether it would last; like one who is too enamoured of the habitation to object to be a tenant-at-will. If it was cold, it was in recompense immeasurably lofty, a star-girdled place; and dwelling in it she could avow to herself the secret which was now working self-deception, and still preserve her pride unwounded. Her womanly pride, she would have said in vindication of it: but Cecilia Halkett's pride went far beyond the merely womanly.

Thus she was assisted to endure a journey down to Wales, where Nevil would surely not be. She passed a Winter without seeing him. She returned to Mount Laurels from London at Easter, and went on a visit to Steynham, and back to London, having sight of him nowhere, still firm in the thought that she loved ethereally, to bless, forgive, direct, encourage, pray for him, impersonally. She read certain speeches delivered by Nevil at assemblies of Liberals or Radicals, which were reported in papers in the easy irony of the style of here and there a sentence, here and there a summary: salient quotations interspersed with running abstracts: a style terrible to friends of the speaker so reported, overwhelming if they differ in opinion: yet her charity was a match for it. She was obliged to have recourse to charity, it should be observed. Her father drew her attention to the spectacle of R. C. S. Nevil Beauchamp, Commander R.N., fighting those reporters with letters in the newspapers, and the dry editorial comment flanked by three stars on the left. He was shocked to see a gentleman writing such letters to the papers. 'But one thing hangs on another,' said he.

'But you seem angry with Nevil, papa,' said she.

'I do hate a turbulent, restless fellow, my dear,' the colonel burst out.

'Papa, he has really been unfairly reported.'

Cecilia laid three privately-printed full reports of Commander Beauchamp's speeches (very carefully corrected by him) before her father.

He suffered his eye to run down a page. 'Is it possible you read this?— this trash!—dangerous folly, I call it.'

Cecilia's reply, 'In the interests of justice, I do,' was meant to express her pure impartiality. By a toleration of what is detested we expose ourselves to the keenness of an adverse mind.

'Does he write to you, too?' said the colonel.

She answered: 'Oh, no; I am not a politician.'

'He seems to have expected you to read those tracts of his, though.'

'Yes, I think he would convert me if he could,' said Cecilia.

'Though you're not a politician.'

'He relies on the views he delivers in public, rather than on writing to persuade; that was my meaning, papa.'

'Very well,' said the colonel, not caring to show his anxiety.

Mr. Tuckham dined with them frequently in London. This gentleman betrayed his accomplishments one by one. He sketched, and was no artist; he planted, and was no gardener; he touched the piano neatly, and was no musician; he sang, and he had no voice. Apparently he tried his hand at anything, for the privilege of speaking decisively upon all things. He accompanied the colonel and his daughter on a day's expedition to Mrs. Beauchamp, on the Upper Thames, and they agreed that he shone to great advantage in her society. Mrs. Beauchamp said she had seen her great- nephew Nevil, but without a comment on his conduct or his person; grave silence. Reflecting on it, Cecilia grew indignant at the thought that Mr. Tuckham might have been acting a sinister part. Mrs. Beauchamp alluded to a newspaper article of her favourite great-nephew Blackburn, written, Cecilia knew through her father, to controvert some tremendous proposition of Nevil's. That was writing, Mrs. Beauchamp said. 'I am not in the habit of fearing a conflict, so long as we have stout defenders. I rather like it,' she said.

The colonel entertained Mrs. Beauchamp, while Mr. Tuckham led Miss Halkett over the garden. Cecilia considered that his remarks upon Nevil were insolent.

'Seriously, Miss Halkett, to take him at his best, he is a very good fellow, I don't doubt; I am told so; and a capital fellow among men, a good friend and not a bad boon-fellow, and for that matter, the smoking- room is a better test than the drawing-room; all he wants is emphatically school—school—school. I have recommended the simple iteration of that one word in answer to him at his meetings, and the printing of it as a foot-note to his letters.'

Cecilia's combative spirit precipitated her to say, 'I hear the mob in it shouting Captain Beauchamp down.'

'Ay,' said Mr. Tuckham, 'it would be setting the mob to shout wisely at last.'

'The mob is a wild beast.'

'Then we should hear wisdom coming out of the mouth of the wild beast.'

'Men have the phrase, "fair play."'

'Fair play, I say, is not applicable to a man who deliberately goes about to stir the wild beast. He is laughed at, plucked, hustled, and robbed, by those who deafen him with their "plaudits"—their roars. Did you see his advertisement of a great-coat, lost at some rapscallion gathering down in the North, near my part of the country? A great-coat and a packet of letters. He offers a reward of L10. But that's honest robbery compared with the bleeding he'll get.'

'Do you know Mr. Seymour Austin?' Miss Halkett asked him.

'I met him once at your father's table. Why?'

'I think you would like to listen to him.'

'Yes, my fault is not listening enough,' said Mr. Tuckham.

He was capable of receiving correction.

Her father told her he was indebted to Mr. Tuckham past payment in coin, for services rendered by him on a trying occasion among the miners in Wales during the first spring month. 'I dare say he can speak effectively to miners,' Cecilia said, outvying the contemptuous young man in superciliousness, but with effort and not with satisfaction.

She left London in July, two days before her father could be induced to return to Mount Laurels. Feverish, and strangely subject to caprices now, she chose the longer way round by Sussex, and alighted at the station near Steynham to call on Mrs. Culling, whom she knew to be at the Hall, preparing it for Mr. Romfrey's occupation. In imitation of her father she was Rosamund's fast friend, though she had never quite realized her position, and did not thoroughly understand her. Would it not please her father to hear that she had chosen the tedious route for the purpose of visiting this lady, whose champion he was?

So she went to Steynham, and for hours she heard talk of no one, of nothing, but her friend Nevil.

Cecilia was on her guard against Rosamund's defence of his conduct in France. The declaration that there had been no misbehaviour at all could not be accepted; but the news of Mr. Romfrey's having installed Nevil in Holdesbury to manage that property, and of his having mooted to her father the question of an alliance between her and Nevil, was wonderful. Rosamund could not say what answer her father had made: hardly favourable, Cecilia supposed, since he had not spoken of the circumstance to her. But Mr. Romfrey's influence with him would certainly be powerful.

It was to be assumed, also, that Nevil had been consulted by his uncle. Rosamund said full-heartedly that this alliance had for years been her life's desire, and then she let the matter pass, nor did she once loop at Cecilia searchingly, or seem to wish to probe her. Cecilia disagreed with Rosamund on an insignificant point in relation to something Mr. Romfrey and Captain Baskelett had done, and, as far as she could recollect subsequently, there was a packet of letters, or a pocket-book containing letters of Nevil's which he had lost, and which had been forwarded to Mr. Romfrey; for the pocket-book was originally his, and his address was printed inside. But among these letters was one from Dr. Shrapnel to Nevil: a letter so horrible that Rosamund frowned at the reminiscence of it, holding it to be too horrible for the quotation of a sentence. She owned she had forgotten any three consecutive words. Her known dislike of Captain Baskelett, however, was insufficient to make her see that it was unjustifiable in him to run about London reading it, with comments of the cruellest. Rosamund's greater detestation of Dr. Shrapnel blinded her to the offence committed by the man she would otherwise have been very ready to scorn. So small did the circumstance appear to Cecilia, notwithstanding her gentle opposition at the time she listened to it, that she never thought of mentioning it to her father, and only remembered it when Captain Baskelett, with Lord Palmet in his company, presented himself at Mount Laurels, and proposed to the colonel to read to him 'a letter from that scoundrelly old Shrapnel to Nevil Beauchamp, upon women, wives, thrones, republics, British loyalty, et caetera,'—an et caetera that rolled a series of tremendous reverberations down the list of all things held precious by freeborn Englishmen.

She would have prevented the reading. But the colonel would have it.

'Read on,' said he. 'Mr. Romfrey saw no harm.'

Captain Baskelett held up Dr. Shrapnel's letter to Commander Beauchamp, at about half a yard's distance on the level of his chin, as a big- chested singer in a concert-room holds his music-scroll.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE EPISTLE OF DR. SHRAPNEL TO COMMANDER BEAUCHAMP

Before we give ear to the recital of Dr. Shrapnel's letter to his pupil in politics by the mouth of Captain Baskelett, it is necessary to defend this gentleman, as he would handsomely have defended himself, from the charge that he entertained ultimate designs in regard to the really abominable scrawl, which was like a child's drawing of ocean with here and there a sail capsized, and excited his disgust almost as much as did the contents his great indignation. He was prepared to read it, and stood blown out for the task, but it was temporarily too much for him. 'My dear Colonel, look at it, I entreat you,' he said, handing the letter for exhibition, after fixing his eye-glass, and dropping it in repulsion. The common sentiment of mankind is offended by heterodoxy in mean attire; for there we see the self-convicted villain—the criminal caught in the act; we try it and convict it by instinct without the ceremony of a jury; and so thoroughly aware of our promptitude in this respect has our arch- enemy become since his mediaeval disgraces that his particular advice to his followers is now to scrupulously copy the world in externals; never to appear poorly clothed, nor to impart deceptive communications in bad handwriting. We can tell black from white, and our sagacity has taught him a lesson.

Colonel Halkett glanced at the detestable penmanship. Lord Palmet did the same, and cried, 'Why, it's worse than mine!'

Cecilia had protested against the reading of the letter, and she declined to look at the writing. She was entreated, adjured to look, in Captain Baskelett's peculiarly pursuing fashion; a 'nay, but you shall,' that she had been subjected to previously, and would have consented to run like a schoolgirl to escape from.

To resume the defence of him: he was a man incapable of forming plots, because his head would not hold them. He was an impulsive man, who could impale a character of either sex by narrating fables

touching persons of whom he thought lightly, and that being done he was devoid of malice, unless by chance his feelings or his interests were so aggrieved that his original haphazard impulse was bent to embrace new circumstances and be the parent of a line of successive impulses, in the main resembling an extremely far-sighted plot, whereat he gazed back with fondness, all the while protesting sincerely his perfect innocence of anything of the kind. Circumstances will often interwind with the moods of simply irritated men. In the present instance he could just perceive what might immediately come of his reading out of this atrocious epistle wherein Nevil Beauchamp was displayed the dangling puppet of a mountebank wire- pulley, infidel, agitator, leveller, and scoundrel. Cognizant of Mr. Romfrey's overtures to Colonel Halkett, he traced them to that scheming woman in the house at Steynham, and he was of opinion that it was a friendly and good thing to do to let the old colonel and Cissy Halkett know Mr. Nevil through a bit of his correspondence. This, then, was a matter of business and duty that furnished an excuse for his going out of his, way to call at Mount Laurels on the old familiar footing, so as not to alarm the heiress.

A warrior accustomed to wear the burnished breastplates between London and Windsor has, we know, more need to withstand than to discharge the shafts of amorous passion; he is indeed, as an object of beauty, notoriously compelled to be of the fair sex in his tactics, and must practise the arts and whims of nymphs to preserve himself: and no doubt it was the case with the famous Captain Baskelett, in whose mind sweet ladies held the place that the pensive politician gives to the masses, dreadful in their hatred, almost as dreadful in their affection. But an heiress is a distinct species among women; he hungered for the heiress; his elevation to Parliament made him regard her as both the ornament and the prop of his position; and it should be added that his pride, all the habits of thought of a conqueror of women, had been shocked by that stupefying rejection of him, which Cecilia had intimated to her father with the mere lowering of her eyelids. Conceive the highest bidder at an auction hearing the article announce that it will not have him! Captain Baskelett talked of it everywhere for a month or so:—the girl could not know her own mind, for she suited him exactly! and he requested the world to partake of his astonishment. Chronicles of the season in London informed him that he was not the only fellow to whom the gates were shut. She could hardly be thinking of Nevil? However, let the epistle be read. 'Now for the Shrapnel shot,' he nodded finally to Colonel Halkett, expanded his bosom, or natural cuirass, as before-mentioned, and was vocable above the common pitch:—

> '"MY BRAVE BEAUCHAMP,—On with your mission, and never a summing of results in hand, nor thirst for prospects, nor counting upon harvests; for seed sown in faith day by day is the nightly harvest of the soul, and with the soul we work. With the soul we see."'

Captain Baskelett intervened: 'Ahem! I beg to observe that this delectable rubbish is underlined by old Nevil's pencil.' He promised to do a little roaring whenever it occurred, and continued with ghastly false accentuation, an intermittent sprightliness and depression of tone in the wrong places.

'"The soul," et caetera. Here we are!

> "Desires to realize our gains are akin to the passion of usury; these are tricks of the usurer to grasp his gold in act and imagination. Have none of them. Work at the people!"

—At them, remark!—

> "Moveless do they seem to you? Why, so is the earth to the sowing husbandman, and though we cannot forecast a reaping season, we have in history durable testification that our seasons come in the souls of men, yea, as a planet that we have set in motion, and faster and faster are we spinning it, and firmer and firmer shall we set it to regularity of revolution. That means life!"

—Shrapnel roars: you will have Nevil in a minute.

> "Recognize that now we have bare life; at best for the bulk of men the Saurian lizard's broad back soaking and roasting in primeval slime; or say, in the so-called teachers of men, as much of life as pricks the frog in March to stir and yawn, and up on a flaccid leap that rolls him over some three inches nearer to the ditchwater besought by his instinct."

'I ask you, did you ever hear? The flaccid frog! But on we go.'

> '"Professors, prophets, masters, each hitherto has had his creed and system to offer, good mayhap for the term; and each has put it forth for the truth everlasting, to drive the dagger to the heart of time, and put the axe to human growth!—that one circle of wisdom issuing of the experience and needs of their day, should act the despot over all other circles for ever!—so where at first light shone to light the yawning frog to his wet ditch, there, with the necessitated revolution of men's minds in the course of ages, darkness

radiates."

'That's old Nevil. Upon my honour, I haven't a notion of what it all means, and I don't believe the old rascal Shrapnel has himself. And pray be patient, my dear colonel. You will find him practical presently. I'll skip, if you tell me to. Darkness radiates, does it!

> '"The creed that rose in heaven sets below; and where we had an angel we have claw-feet and fangs. Ask how that is! The creed is much what it was when the followers diverged it from the Founder. But humanity is not where it was when that creed was food and guidance. Creeds will not die not fighting. We cannot root them up out of us without blood."

'He threatens blood!—'

> '"Ours, my Beauchamp, is the belief that humanity advances beyond the limits of creeds, is to be tied to none. We reverence the Master in his teachings; we behold the limits of him in his creed— and that is not his work. We truly are his disciples, who see how far it was in him to do service; not they that made of his creed a strait-jacket for humanity. So, in our prayers we dedicate the world to God, not calling him great for a title, no—showing him we know him great in a limitless world, lord of a truth we tend to, have not grasped. I say Prayer is good. I counsel it to you again and again: in joy, in sickness of heart. The infidel will not pray; the creed-slave prays to the image in his box."'

'I've had enough!' Colonel Halkett ejaculated.

'"We,"' Captain Baskelett put out his hand for silence with an ineffable look of entreaty, for here was Shrapnel's hypocrisy in full bloom:

> '"We make prayer a part of us, praying for no gifts, no interventions; through the faith in prayer opening the soul to the undiscerned. And take this, my Beauchamp, for the good in prayer, that it makes us repose on the unknown with confidence, makes us flexible to change, makes us ready for revolution—for life, then! He who has the fountain of prayer in him will not complain of hazards. Prayer is the recognition of laws; the soul's exercise and source of strength; its thread of conjunction with them. Prayer for an object is the cajolery of an idol; the resource of superstition. There you misread it, Beauchamp. We that fight the living world must have the universal for succour of the truth in it. Cast forth the soul in prayer, you meet the efuence of the outer truth, you join with the creative elements giving breath to you; and that crust of habit which is the soul's tomb; and custom, the soul's tyrant; and pride, our volcano-peak that sinks us in a crater; and fear, which plucks the feathers from the wings of the soul and sits it naked and shivering in a vault, where the passing of a common hodman's foot above sounds like the king of terrors coming,—you are free of them, you live in the day and for the future, by this exercise and discipline of the soul's faith. Me it keeps young everlastingly, like the fountain of . . ."'

'I say I cannot sit and hear any more of it!' exclaimed the colonel, chafing out of patience.

Lord Palmet said to Miss Halkett: 'Isn't it like what we used to remember of a sermon?'

Cecilia waited for her father to break away, but Captain Baskelett had undertaken to skip, and was murmuring in sing-song some of the phrases that warned him off:

'"History—Bible of Humanity; . . . Permanency—enthusiast's dream— despot's aim—clutch of dead men's fingers in live flesh . . . Man animal; man angel; man rooted; man winged": . . . Really, all this is too bad. Ah! here we are: "At them with outspeaking, Beauchamp!" Here we are, colonel, and you will tell me whether you think it treasonable or not. "At them," et caetera: "We have signed no convention to respect their"—he speaks of Englishmen, Colonel Halkett—"their passive idolatries; a people with whom a mute conformity is as good as worship, but a word of dissent holds you up to execration; and only for the freedom won in foregone days their hate would be active. As we have them in their present stage,"—old Nevil's mark—"We are not parties to the tacit agreement to fill our mouths and shut our eyes. We speak because it is better they be roused to lapidate us than soused in their sty, with none to let them hear they live like swine, craving only not to be disturbed at the trough. The religion of this vast English middle-class ruling the land is Comfort. It is their central thought; their idea of necessity; their sole aim. Whatsoever ministers to Comfort, seems to belong to it, pretends to support it, they yield their passive worship to. Whatsoever alarms it they join to crush. There you get at their point of unity. They will pay for the security of Comfort, calling it national worship, or national defence, if too much money is not subtracted from the means of individual comfort: if too much foresight is not demanded for the comfort of their brains. Have at them there. Speak. Moveless as you find them, they

are not yet all gross clay, and I say again, the true word spoken has its chance of somewhere alighting and striking root. Look not to that. Seeds perish in nature; good men fail. Look to the truth in you, and deliver it, with no afterthought of hope, for hope is dogged by dread; we give our courage as hostage for the fulfilment of what we hope. Meditate on that transaction. Hope is for boys and girls, to whom nature is kind. For men to hope is to tremble. Let prayer—the soul's overflow, the heart's resignation—supplant it . . ."

'Pardon, colonel; I forgot to roar, but old Nevil marks all down that page for encomium,' said Captain Baskelett. 'Oh! here we are. English loyalty is the subject. Now, pray attend to this, colonel. Shrapnel communicates to Beauchamp that if ten Beauchamps were spouting over the country without intermission he might condescend to hope. So on—to British loyalty. We are, so long as our sovereigns are well-conducted persons, and we cannot unseat them—observe; he is eminently explicit, the old traitor!—we are to submit to the outward forms of respect, but we are frankly to say we are Republicans; he has the impudence to swear that England is a Republican country, and calls our thoroughgoing loyalty —yours and mine, colonel—disloyalty. Hark: "Where kings lead, it is to be supposed they are wanted. Service is the noble office on earth, and where kings do service let them take the first honours of the State: but"—hark at this—"the English middle-class, which has absorbed the upper, and despises, when it is not quaking before it, the lower, will have nothing above it but a ricketty ornament like that you see on a confectioner's twelfth-cake."'

'The man deserves hanging!' said Colonel Halkett.

'Further, my dear colonel, and Nevil marks it pretty much throughout: "This loyalty smacks of a terrible perfidy. Pass the lords and squires; they are old trees, old foundations, or joined to them, whether old or new; they naturally apprehend dislocation when a wind blows, a river rises, or a man speaks;—that comes of age or aping age: their hearts are in their holdings! For the loyalty of the rest of the land, it is the shopkeeper's loyalty, which is to be computed by the exact annual sum of his net profits. It is now at high tide. It will last with the prosperity of our commerce."—The insolent old vagabond!—"Let commercial disasters come on us, and what of the loyalty now paying its hundreds of thousands, and howling down questioners! In a day of bankruptcies, how much would you bid for the loyalty of a class shivering under deprivation of luxuries, with its God Comfort beggared? Ay, my Beauchamp,"—the most offensive thing to me is that "my Beauchamp," but old Nevil has evidently given himself up hand and foot to this ruffian—"ay, when you reflect that fear of the so-called rabble, i.e. the people, the unmoneyed class, which knows not Comfort, tastes not of luxuries, is the main component of their noisy frigid loyalty, and that the people are not with them but against, and yet that the people might be won by visible forthright kingly service to a loyalty outdoing theirs as the sun the moon; ay, that the people verily thirst to love and reverence; and that their love is the only love worth having, because it is disinterested love, and endures, and takes heat in adversity,—reflect on it and wonder at the inversion of things! So with a Church. It lives if it is at home with the poor. In the arms of enriched shopkeepers it rots, goes to decay in vestments—vestments! flakes of mummy-wraps for it! or else they use it for one of their political truncheons—to awe the ignorant masses: I quote them. So. Not much ahead of ancient Egyptians in spirituality or in priestcraft! They call it statesmanship. O for a word for it! Let Palsy and Cunning go to form a word. Deadmanship, I call it."—To quote my uncle the baron, this is lunatic dribble!—"Parsons and princes are happy with the homage of this huge passive fleshpot class. It is enough for them. Why not? The taxes are paid and the tithes. Whilst commercial prosperity lasts!"'

Colonel Halkett threw his arms aloft.

> '"Meanwhile, note this: the people are the Power to come. Oppressed, unprotected, abandoned; left to the ebb and flow of the tides of the market, now taken on to work, now cast off to starve, committed to the shifting laws of demand and supply, slaves of Capital-the whited name for old accursed. Mammon: and of all the. ranked and black-uniformed host no pastor to come out of the association of shepherds, and proclaim before heaven and man the primary claim of their cause; they are, I say, the power, worth the seduction of by another Power not mighty in England now: and likely in time to set up yet another Power not existing in England now. What if a passive comfortable clergy hand them over to men on the models of Irish pastors, who will succour, console, enfold, champion them? what if, when they have learnt to use their majority, sick of deceptions and the endless pulling of interests, they raise ONE representative to force the current of action with an authority as little fictitious as their preponderance of numbers? The despot and the priest! There I see our danger, Beauchamp. You and I and some dozen labour to tie and knot them to manliness. We are few; they are many and weak. Rome offers them real comfort in return for their mites in coin, and—poor souls! mites in conscience, many of them. A Tyrant offers them to be directly their friend. Ask, Beauchamp, why they should not have comfort for pay as well as the big round—"'

Captain Baskelett stopped and laid the letter out for Colonel Halkett to read an unmentionable word, shamelessly marked by Nevil's pencil:

> "—belly-class!" Ask, too, whether the comfort they wish for is not approaching divine compared with the stagnant fleshliness of that fat shopkeeper's Comfort.
>
> '"Warn the people of this. Ay, warn the clergy. It is not only the poor that are caught by ranters. Endeavour to make those accommodating shepherds understand that they stand a chance of losing rich as well as poor! It should awaken them. The helpless poor and the uneasy rich are alike open to the seductions of Romish priests and intoxicated ranters. I say so it will be if that band of forty thousand go on slumbering and nodding. They walk in a dream. The flesh is a dream. The soul only is life."

'Now for you, colonel.

> '"No extension of the army—no! A thousand times no. Let India go, then! Good for India that we hold India? Ay, good: but not at such a cost as an extra tax, or compulsory service of our working man. If India is to be held for the good of India, throw open India to the civilized nations, that they help us in a task that overstrains us. At present India means utter perversion of the policy of England. Adrift India! rather than England red-coated. We dissent, Beauchamp! For by-and-by."

'That is,' Captain Baskelett explained, 'by-and-by Shrapnel will have old Nevil fast enough.'

'Is there more of it?' said Colonel Halkett, flapping his forehead for coolness.

'The impudence of this dog in presuming to talk about India!—eh, colonel? Only a paragraph or two more: I skip a lot . . . . Ah! here we are.' Captain Baskelett read to himself and laughed in derision: 'He calls our Constitution a compact unsigned by the larger number involved in it. What's this? "A band of dealers in fleshpottery." Do you detect a gleam of sense? He underscores it. Then he comes to this': Captain Baskelett requested Colonel Halkett to read for himself: 'The stench of the trail of Ego in our History.'

The colonel perused it with an unsavoury expression of his features, and jumped up.

'Oddly, Mr. Romfrey thought this rather clever,' said Captain Baskelett, and read rapidly:

> '"Trace the course of Ego for them: first the king who conquers and can govern. In his egoism he dubs him holy; his family is of a selected blood; he makes the crown hereditary —Ego. Son by son the shame of egoism increases; valour abates; hereditary Crown, no hereditary qualities. The Barons rise. They in turn hold sway, and for their order—Ego. The traders overturn them: each class rides the classes under it while it can. It is ego—ego, the fountain cry, origin, sole source of war! Then death to ego, I say! If those traders had ruled for other than ego, power might have rested with them on broad basis enough to carry us forward for centuries. The workmen have ever been too anxious to be ruled. Now comes on the workman's era. Numbers win in the end: proof of small wisdom in the world. Anyhow, with numbers there is rough nature's wisdom and justice. With numbers ego is inter-dependent and dispersed; it is universalized. Yet these may require correctives. If so, they will have it in a series of despots and revolutions that toss, mix, and bind the classes together: despots, revolutions; panting alternations of the quickened heart of humanity."

'Marked by our friend Nevil in notes of admiration.'

'Mad as the writer,' groaned Colonel Halkett. 'Never in my life have I heard such stuff.'

'Stay, colonel; here's Shrapnel defending Morality and Society,' said Captain Baskelett.

Colonel Halkett vowed he was under no penal law to listen, and would not; but Captain Baskelett persuaded him: 'Yes, here it is: I give you my word. Apparently old Nevil has been standing up for every man's right to run away with . . . Yes, really! I give you my word; and here we have Shrapnel insisting on respect for the marriage laws. Do hear this; here it is in black and white:—

> "Society is our one tangible gain, our one roofing and flooring in a world of most uncertain structures built on morasses. Toward the laws that support it men hopeful of progress give their adhesion. If it is martyrdom, what then? Let the martyrdom be. Contumacy is animalism. And attend to me," says Shrapnel, "the truer the love the readier

> for sacrifice! A thousand times yes. Rebellion against Society, and advocacy of Humanity, run counter. Tell me Society is the whited sepulchre, that it is blotched, hideous, hollow: and I say, add not another disfigurement to it; add to the purification of it. And you, if you answer, what can only one? I say that is the animal's answer, and applies also to politics, where the question, what can one? put in the relapsing tone, shows the country decaying in the individual. Society is the protection of the weaker, therefore a shield of women, who are our temple of civilization, to be kept sacred; and he that loves a woman will assuredly esteem and pity her sex, and not drag her down for another example of their frailty. Fight this out within you—!"

But you are right, colonel; we have had sufficient. I shall be getting a democratic orator's twang, or a crazy parson's, if I go on much further. He covers thirty-two pages of letter-paper. The conclusion is: —"Jenny sends you her compliments, respects, and best wishes, and hopes she may see you before she goes to her friend Clara Sherwin and the General."'

'Sherwin? Why, General Sherwin's a perfect gentleman,' Colonel Halkett interjected; and Lord Palmet caught the other name: 'Jenny? That's Miss Denham, Jenny Denham; an amazingly pretty girl: beautiful thick brown hair, real hazel eyes, and walks like a yacht before the wind.'

'Perhaps, colonel, Jenny accounts for the defence of society,' said Captain Baskelett. 'I have no doubt Shrapnel has a scheme for Jenny. The old communist and socialist!' He folded up the letter: 'A curious composition, is it not, Miss Halkett?'

Cecilia was thinking that he tempted her to be the apologist of even such a letter.

'One likes to know the worst, and what's possible,' said the colonel.

After Captain Baskelett had gone, Colonel Halkett persisted in talking of the letter, and would have impressed on his daughter that the person to whom the letter was addressed must be partly responsible for the contents of it. Cecilia put on the argumentative air of a Court of Equity to discuss the point with him.

'Then you defend that letter?' he cried.

Oh, no: she did not defend the letter; she thought it wicked and senseless. 'But,' said she, 'the superior strength of men to women seems to me to come from their examining all subjects, shrinking from none. At least, I should not condemn Nevil on account of his correspondence.'

'We shall see,' said her father, sighing rather heavily. 'I must have a talk with Mr. Romfrey about that letter.'

CHAPTER XXX

THE BAITING OF DR. SHRAPNEL

Captain Baskelett went down from Mount Laurels to Bevisham to arrange for the giving of a dinner to certain of his chief supporters in the borough, that they might know he was not obliged literally to sit in Parliament in order to pay a close attention to their affairs. He had not distinguished himself by a speech during the session, but he had stored a political precept or two in his memory, and, as he told Lord Palmet, he thought a dinner was due to his villains. 'The way to manage your Englishman, Palmet, is to dine him.' As the dinner would decidedly be dull, he insisted on having Lord Palmet's company.

They crossed over to the yachting island, where portions of the letter of Commander Beauchamp's correspondent were read at the Club, under the verandah, and the question put, whether a man who held those opinions had a right to wear his uniform.

The letter was transmitted to Steynham in time to be consigned to the pocket-book before Beauchamp arrived there on one of his rare visits. Mr. Romfrey handed him the pocketbook with the frank declaration that he had read Shrapnel's letter. 'All is fair in war, Sir!' Beauchamp quoted him ambiguously.

The thieves had amused Mr. Romfrey by their scrupulous honesty in returning what was useless to

them, while reserving the coat: but subsequently seeing the advertized reward, they had written to claim it; and, according to Rosamund Culling, he had been so tickled that he had deigned to reply to them, very briefly, but very comically.

Speaking of the matter with her, Beauchamp said (so greatly was he infatuated with the dangerous man) that the reading of a letter of Dr. Shrapnel's could do nothing but good to any reflecting human creature: he admitted that as the lost pocket-book was addressed to Mr. Romfrey, it might have been by mistake that he had opened it, and read the topmost letter lying open. But he pressed Rosamund to say whether that one only had been read.

'Only Dr. Shrapnel's letter,' Rosamund affirmed. 'The letter from Normandy was untouched by him.'

'Untouched by anybody?'

'Unopened, Nevil. You look incredulous.'

'Not if I have your word, ma'am.'

He glanced somewhat contemptuously at his uncle Everard's anachronistic notions of what was fair in war.

To prove to him Mr. Romfrey's affectionate interest in his fortunes, Rosamund mentioned the overtures which had been made to Colonel Halkett for a nuptial alliance between the two houses; and she said: 'Your uncle Everard was completely won by your manly way of taking his opposition to you in Bevisham. He pays for Captain Baskelett, but you and your fortunes are nearest his heart, Nevil.'

Beauchamp hung silent. His first remark was, 'Yes, I want money. I must have money.' By degrees he seemed to warm to some sense of gratitude. 'It was kind of the baron,' he said.

'He has a great affection for you, Nevil, though you know he spares no one who chooses to be antagonistic. All that is over. But do you not second him, Nevil? You admire her? You are not adverse?'

Beauchamp signified the horrid intermixture of yes and no, frowned in pain of mind, and Walked up and down. 'There's no living woman I admire so much.'

'She has refused the highest matches.'

'I hold her in every way incomparable.'

'She tries to understand your political ideas, if she cannot quite sympathize with them, Nevil. And consider how hard it is for a young English lady, bred in refinement, to understand such things.'

'Yes,' Beauchamp nodded; yes. Well, more 's the pity for me!'

'Ah! Nevil, that fatal Renee!'

'Ma'am, I acquit you of any suspicion of your having read her letter in this pocket-book. She wishes me to marry. You would have seen it written here. She wishes it.'

'Fly, clipped wing!' murmured Rosamund, and purposely sent a buzz into her ears to shut out his extravagant talk of Renee's friendly wishes.

'How is it you women will not believe in the sincerity of a woman!' he exclaimed.

'Nevil, I am not alluding to the damage done to your election.'

'To my candidature, ma'am. You mean those rumours, those lies of the enemy. Tell me how I could suppose you were alluding to them. You bring them forward now to justify your charge of "fatal" against her. She has one fault; she wants courage; she has none other, not one that is not excuseable. We won't speak of France. What did her father say?'

'Colonel Halkett? I do not know. He and his daughter come here next week, and the colonel will expect to meet you here. That does not look like so positive an objection to you?'

'To me personally, no,' said Beauchamp. 'But Mr. Romfrey has not told me that I am to meet them.'

'Perhaps he has not thought it worth while. It is not his way. He has asked you to come. You and Miss Halkett will be left to yourselves. Her father assured Mr. Romfrey that he should not go beyond advising her. His advice might not be exactly favourable to you at present, but if you sued and she accepted—and she would, I am convinced she would; she was here with me, talking of you a whole

afternoon, and I have eyes—then he would not oppose the match, and then I should see you settled, the husband of the handsomest wife and richest heiress in England.'

A vision of Cecilia swam before him, gracious in stateliness.

Two weeks back Renee's expression of a wish that he would marry had seemed to him an idle sentence in a letter breathing of her own intolerable situation. The marquis had been struck down by illness. What if she were to be soon suddenly free? But Renee could not be looking to freedom, otherwise she never would have written the wish for him to marry. She wrote perhaps hearing temptation whisper; perhaps wishing to save herself and him by the aid of a tie that would bring his honour into play and fix his loyalty. He remembered Dr. Shrapnel's written words: 'Rebellion against society and advocacy of humanity run counter.' They had a stronger effect on him than when he was ignorant of his uncle Everard's plan to match him with Cecilia. He took refuge from them in the image of that beautiful desolate Renee, born to be beloved, now wasted, worse than trodden under foot—perverted; a life that looked to him for direction and resuscitation. She was as good as dead in her marriage. It was impossible for him ever to think of Renee without the surprising thrill of his enchantment with her, and tender pity that drew her closer to him by darkening her brightness.

Still a man may love his wife. A wife like Cecilia was not to be imagined coldly. Let the knot once be tied, it would not be regretted, could not be; hers was a character, and hers a smile, firmly assuring him of that.

He told Mr. Romfrey that he should be glad to meet Colonel Halkett and Cecilia. Business called him to Holdesbury. Thence he betook himself to Dr. Shrapnel's cottage to say farewell to Jenny Denham previous to her departure for Switzerland with her friend Clara Sherwin. She had never seen a snow-mountain, and it was pleasant to him to observe in her eyes, which he had known weighing and balancing intellectual questions more than he quite liked, a childlike effort to conjure in imagination the glories of the Alps. She appeared very happy, only a little anxious about leaving Dr. Shrapnel with no one to take care of him for a whole month. Beauchamp promised he would run over to him from Holdesbury, only an hour by rail, as often as he could. He envied her the sight of the Alps, he said, and tried to give her an idea of them, from which he broke off to boast of a famous little Jersey bull that he had won from a rival, an American, deeply in love with the bull; cutting him out by telegraph by just five minutes. The latter had examined the bull in the island and had passed on to Paris, not suspecting there would be haste to sell him. Beauchamp, seeing the bull advertized, took him on trust, galloped to the nearest telegraph station forthwith, and so obtained possession of him; and the bull was now shipped on the voyage. But for this precious bull, however, and other business, he would have been able to spend almost the entire month with Dr. Shrapnel, he said regretfully. Miss Denham on the contrary did not regret his active occupation. The story of his rush from the breakfast-table to the stables, and gallop away to the station, while the American Quaker gentleman soberly paced down a street in Paris on the same errand, in invisible rivalry, touched her risible fancy. She was especially pleased to think of him living in harmony with his uncle— that strange, lofty, powerful man, who by plot or by violence punished opposition to his will, but who must be kind at heart, as well as forethoughtful of his nephew's good; the assurance of it being, that when the conflict was at an end he had immediately installed him as manager of one of his estates, to give his energy play and make him practically useful.

The day before she left home was passed by the three in botanizing, some miles distant from Bevisham, over sand country, marsh and meadow; Dr. Shrapnel, deep in the science, on one side of her, and Beauchamp, requiring instruction in the names and properties of every plant and simple, on the other. It was a day of summer sweetness, gentle laughter, conversation, and the happiest homeliness. The politicians uttered barely a syllable of politics. The dinner basket was emptied heartily to make way for herb and flower, and at night the expedition homeward was crowned with stars along a road refreshed by mid-day thunder-showers and smelling of the rain in the dust, past meadows keenly scenting, gardens giving out their innermost balm and odour. Late at night they drank tea in Jenny's own garden. They separated a little after two in the morning, when the faded Western light still lay warm on a bow of sky, and on the level of the East it quickened. Jenny felt sure she should long for that yesterday when she was among foreign scenes, even among high Alps-those mysterious eminences which seemed in her imagination to know of heaven and have the dawn of a new life for her beyond their peaks.

Her last words when stepping into the railway carriage were to Beauchamp: 'Will you take care of him?' She flung her arms round Dr. Shrapnel's neck, and gazed at him under troubled eyelids which seemed to be passing in review every vision of possible harm that might come to him during her absence; and so she continued gazing, and at no one but Dr. Shrapnel until the bend of the line cut him from her sight. Beauchamp was a very secondary person on that occasion, and he was unused to being so in the society of women—unused to find himself entirely eclipsed by their interest in another. He

speculated on it, wondering at her concentrated fervency; for he had not supposed her to possess much warmth.

After she was fairly off on her journey, Dr. Shrapnel mentioned to Beauchamp a case of a Steynham poacher, whom he had thought it his duty to supply with means of defence. It was a common poaching case.

Beauchamp was not surprised that Mr. Romfrey and Dr. Shrapnel should come to a collision; the marvel was that it had never occurred before, and Beauchamp said at once: 'Oh, my uncle Mr. Romfrey would rather see them stand their ground than not.' He was disposed to think well of his uncle. The Jersey bull called him away to Holdesbury.

Captain Baskelett heard of this poaching case at Steynham, where he had to appear in person when he was in want of cheques, and the Bevisham dinner furnished an excuse for demanding one. He would have preferred a positive sum annually. Mr. Romfrey, however, though he wrote his cheques out like the lord he was by nature, exacted the request for them; a system that kept the gallant gentleman on his good behaviour, probably at a lower cost than the regular stipend. In handing the cheque to Cecil Baskelett, Mr. Romfrey spoke of a poacher, of an old poaching family called the Dicketts, who wanted punishment and was to have it, but Mr. Romfrey's local lawyer had informed him that the man Shrapnel was, as usual, supplying the means of defence. For his own part, Mr. Romfrey said, he had no objection to one rascal's backing another, and Shrapnel might hit his hardest, only perhaps Nevil might somehow get mixed up in it, and Nevil was going on quietly now—he had in fact just done capitally in lassoing with a shot of the telegraph a splendid little Jersey bull that a Yankee was after: and on the whole it was best to try to keep him quiet, for he was mad about that man Shrapnel; Shrapnel was his joss: and if legal knocks came of this business Nevil might be thinking of interfering: 'Or he and I may be getting to exchange a lot of shindy letters,' Mr. Romfrey said. 'Tell him I take Shrapnel just like any other man, and don't want to hear apologies, and I don't mix him up in it. Tell him if he likes to have an explanation from me, I'll give it him when he comes here. You can run over to Holdesbury the morning after your dinner.'

Captain Baskelett said he would go. He was pleased with his cheque at the time, but hearing subsequently that Nevil was coming to Steynham to meet Colonel Halkett and his daughter, he became displeased, considering it a very silly commission. The more he thought of it the more ridiculous and unworthy it appeared. He asked himself and Lord Palmet also why he should have to go to Nevil at Holdesbury to tell him of circumstances that he would hear of two or three days later at Steynham. There was no sense in it. The only conclusion for him was that the scheming woman Culling had determined to bring down every man concerned in the Bevisham election, and particularly Mr. Romfrey, on his knees before Nevil. Holdesbury had been placed at his disposal, and the use of the house in London, which latter would have been extremely serviceable to Cecil as a place of dinners to the Parliament of Great Britain in lieu of the speech-making generally expected of Members, and not so effectively performed. One would think the baron had grown afraid of old Nevil! He had spoken as if he were.

Cecil railed unreservedly to Lord Palmet against that woman 'Mistress Culling,' as it pleased him to term her, and who could be offended by his calling her so? His fine wit revelled in bestowing titles that were at once batteries directed upon persons he hated, and entrenchments for himself.

At four o'clock on a sultry afternoon he sat at table with his Bevisham supporters, and pledged them correspondingly in English hotel champagne, sherry and claret. At seven he was rid of them, but parched and heated, as he deserved to be, he owned, for drinking the poison. It would be a good subject for Parliament if he could get it up, he reflected.

'And now,' said he to Palmet, 'we might be crossing over to the Club if I hadn't to go about that stupid business to Holdesbury to-morrow morning. We shall miss the race, or, at least, the start.'

The idea struck him: 'Ten to one old Nevil 's with Shrapnel,' and no idea could be more natural.

'We 'll call on Shrapnel,' said Palmet. 'We shall see Jenny Denham. He gives her out as his niece. Whatever she is she's a brimming little beauty. I assure you, Bask, you seldom see so pretty a girl.'

Wine, which has directed men's footsteps upon more marvellous adventures, took them to a chemist's shop for a cooling effervescent draught, and thence through the town to the address, furnished to them by the chemist, of Dr. Shrapnel on the common.

Bad wine, which is responsible for the fate of half the dismal bodies hanging from trees, weltering by rocks, grovelling and bleaching round the bedabbled mouth of the poet's Cave of Despair, had rendered Captain Baskelett's temper extremely irascible; so when he caught sight of Dr. Shrapnel walling in his

garden, and perceived him of a giant's height, his eyes fastened on the writer of the abominable letter with an exultation peculiar to men having a devil inside them that kicks to be out. The sun was low, blazing among the thicker branches of the pollard forest trees, and through sprays of hawthorn. Dr. Shrapnel stopped, facing the visible master of men, at the end of his walk before he turned his back to continue the exercise and some discourse he was holding aloud either to the heavens or bands of invisible men.

'Ahem, Dr. Shrapnel!' He was accosted twice, the second time imperiously.

He saw two gentlemen outside the garden-hedge.

'I spoke, sir,' said Captain Baskelett.

'I hear you now, sir,' said the doctor, walking in a parallel line with them.

'I desired to know, sir, if you are Dr. Shrapnel?'

'I am.'

They arrived at the garden-gate.

'You have a charming garden, Dr. Shrapnel,' said Lord Palmet, very affably and loudly, with a steady observation of the cottage windows.

Dr. Shrapnel flung the gate open.

Lord Palmet raised his hat and entered, crying loudly, 'A very charming garden, upon my word!'

Captain Baskelett followed him, bowing stiffly.

'I am,' he said, 'Captain Beauchamp's cousin. I am Captain Baskelett, one of the Members for the borough.'

The doctor said, 'Ah.'

'I wish to see Captain Beauchamp, sir. He is absent?'

'I shall have him here shortly, sir.'

'Oh, you will have him!' Cecil paused.

'Admirable roses!' exclaimed Lord Palmet.

'You have him, I think,' said Cecil, 'if what we hear is correct. I wish to know, sir, whether the case you are conducting against his uncle is one you have communicated to Captain Beauchamp. I repeat, I am here to inquire if he is privy to it. You may hold family ties in contempt—Now, sir! I request you abstain from provocations with me.'

Dr. Shrapnel had raised his head, with something of the rush of a rocket, from the stooping posture to listen, and his frown of non-intelligence might be interpreted as the coming on of the fury Radicals are prone to, by a gentleman who believed in their constant disposition to explode.

Cecil made play with a pacifying hand. 'We shall arrive at no understanding unless you are good enough to be perfectly calm. I repeat, my cousin Captain Beauchamp is more or less at variance with his family, owing to these doctrines of yours, and your extraordinary Michael-Scott- the-wizard kind of spell you seem to have cast upon his common sense as a man of the world. You have him, as you say. I do not dispute it. I have no, doubt you have him fast. But here is a case demanding a certain respect for decency. Pray, if I may ask you, be still, be quiet, and hear me out if you can. I am accustomed to explain myself to the comprehension of most men who are at large, and I tell you candidly I am not to be deceived or diverted from my path by a show of ignorance.'

'What is your immediate object, sir?' said Dr. Shrapnel, chagrined by the mystification within him, and a fear that his patience was going.

'Exactly,' Cecil nodded. He was acute enough to see that he had established the happy commencement of fretfulness in the victim, which is equivalent to a hook well struck in the mouth of your fish, and with an angler's joy he prepared to play his man. 'Exactly. I have stated it. And you ask me. But I really must decline to run over the whole ground again for you. I am here to fulfil a duty to my family; a highly disagreeable one to me. I may fail, like the lady who came here previous to the Election, for the result of which I am assured I ought to thank your eminently disinterested services. I

do. You recollect a lady calling on you?'

Dr. Shrapnel consulted his memory. 'I think I have a recollection of some lady calling.'

'Oh! you think you have a recollection of some lady calling.'

'Do you mean a lady connected with Captain Beauchamp?'

'A lady connected with Captain Beauchamp. You are not aware of the situation of the lady?'

'If I remember, she was a kind of confidential housekeeper, some one said, to Captain Beauchamp's uncle.'

'A kind of confidential housekeeper! She is recognized in our family as a lady, sir. I can hardly expect better treatment at your hands than she met with, but I do positively request you to keep your temper whilst I am explaining my business to you. Now, sir! what now?'

A trifling breeze will set the tall tree bending, and Dr. Shrapnel did indeed appear to display the agitation of a full-driving storm when he was but harassed and vexed.

'Will you mention your business concisely, if you Please?' he said.

'Precisely; it is my endeavour. I supposed I had done so. To be frank, I would advise you to summon a member of your household, wife, daughter, housekeeper, any one you like, to whom you may appeal, and I too, whenever your recollections are at fault.'

'I am competent,' said the doctor.

'But in justice to you,' urged Cecil considerately.

Dr. Shrapnel smoothed his chin hastily. 'Have you done?'

'Believe me, the instant I have an answer to my question, I have done.'

'Name your question.'

'Very well, sir. Now mark, I will be plain with you. There is no escape for you from this. You destroy my cousin's professional prospects—I request you to listen—you blast his career in the navy; it was considered promising. He was a gallant officer and a smart seaman. Very well. You set him up as a politician, to be knocked down, to a dead certainty. You set him against his class; you embroil him with his family . . .'

'On all those points,' interposed Dr. Shrapnel, after dashing a hand to straighten his forelock; but Cecil vehemently entreated him to control his temper.

'I say you embroil him with his family, you cause him to be in everlasting altercation with his uncle Mr. Romfrey, materially to his personal detriment; and the question of his family is one that every man of sense would apprehend on the spot; for we, you should know, have, sir, an opinion of Captain Beauchamp's talents and abilities forbidding us to think he could possibly be the total simpleton you make him appear, unless to the seductions of your political instructions, other seductions were added . . . . You apprehend me, I am sure.'

'I don't,' cried the doctor, descending from his height and swinging about forlornly.

'Oh! yes, you do; you do indeed, you cannot avoid it; you quite apprehend me; it is admitted that you take my meaning: I insist on that. I have nothing to say but what is complimentary of the young lady, whoever she may turn out to be; bewitching, no doubt; and to speak frankly, Dr. Shrapnel, I, and I am pretty certain every honest man would think with me, I take it to be ten times more creditable to my cousin Captain Beauchamp that he should be under a lady's influence than under yours. Come, sir! I ask you. You must confess that a gallant officer and great admirer of the sex does not look such a donkey if he is led in silken strings by a beautiful creature. And mark—stop! mark this, Dr. Shrapnel: I say, to the lady we can all excuse a good deal, and at the same time you are to be congratulated on first-rate diplomacy in employing so charming an agent. I wish, I really wish you did it generally, I assure you: only, mark this—I do beg you to contain yourself for a minute, if possible—I say, my cousin Captain Beauchamp is fair game to hunt, and there is no law to prevent the chase, only you must not expect us to be quiet spectators of your sport; and we have, I say, undoubtedly a right to lay the case before the lady, and induce her to be a peace-agent in the family if we can. Very well.'

'This garden is redolent of a lady's hand,' sighed Palmet, poetical in his dejection.

'Have you taken too much wine, gentlemen?' said Dr. Shrapnel.

Cecil put this impertinence aside with a graceful sweep of his fingers.
'You attempt to elude me, sir.'

'Not I! You mention some lady.'

'Exactly. A young lady.'

'What is the name of the lady?'

'Oh! You ask the name of the lady. And I too. What is it? I have heard two or three names.'

'Then you have heard villanies.'

'Denham, Jenny Denham, Miss Jenny Denham,' said Palmet, rejoiced at the opportunity of trumpeting her name so that she should not fail to hear it.

'I stake my reputation I have heard her called Shrapnel—Miss Shrapnel,' said Cecil.

The doctor glanced hastily from one to the other of his visitors. 'The young lady is my ward; I am her guardian,' he said.

Cecil pursed his mouth. 'I have heard her called your niece.'

'Niece—ward; she is a lady by birth and education, in manners, accomplishments, and character; and she is under my protection,' cried Dr. Shrapnel.

Cecil bowed. 'So you are for gentle birth? I forgot you are for morality too, and for praying; exactly; I recollect. But now let me tell you, entirely with the object of conciliation, my particular desire is to see the young lady, in your presence of course, and endeavour to persuade her, as I have very little doubt I shall do, assuming that you give me fair play, to exercise her influence, on this occasion contrary to yours, and save my cousin Captain Beauchamp from a fresh misunderstanding with his uncle Mr. Romfrey. Now, sir; now, there!'

'You will not see Miss Denham with my sanction ever,' said Dr. Shrapnel.

'Oh! Then I perceive your policy. Mark, sir, my assumption was that the young lady would, on hearing my representations, exert herself to heal the breach between Captain Beauchamp and his family. You stand in the way. You treat me as you treated the lady who came here formerly to wrest your dupe from your clutches. If I mistake not, she saw the young lady you acknowledge to be your ward.'

Dr. Shrapnel flashed back: 'I acknowledge? Mercy and justice! is there no peace with the man? You walk here to me, I can't yet guess why, from a town where I have enemies, and every scandal flies touching me and mine; and you—' He stopped short to master his anger. He subdued it so far as to cloak it in an attempt to speak reasoningly, as angry men sometimes deceive themselves in doing, despite the good maxim for the wrathful—speak not at all. 'See,' said he, 'I was never married. My dear friend dies, and leaves me his child to protect and rear; and though she bears her father's name, she is most wrongly and foully made to share the blows levelled at her guardian. Ay, have at me, all of you, as much as you will! Hold off from her. Were it true, the cowardice would be not a whit the smaller. Why, casting a stone like that, were it the size of a pebble and the weight of a glance, is to toss the whole cowardly world on an innocent young girl. And why suspect evil? You talk of that lady who paid me a visit here once, and whom I treated becomingly, I swear. I never do otherwise. She was a handsome woman; and what was she? The housekeeper of Captain Beauchamp's uncle. Hear me, if you please! To go with the world, I have as good a right to suppose the worst of an attractive lady in that situation as you regarding my ward: better warrant for scandalizing, I think; to go with the world. But now—'

Cecil checked him, ejaculating, 'Thank you, Dr. Shrapnel; I thank you most cordially,' with a shining smile. 'Stay, sir! no more. I take my leave of you. Not another word. No "buts"! I recognize that conciliation is out of the question: you are the natural protector of poachers, and you will not grant me an interview with the young lady you call your ward, that I may represent to her, as a person we presume to have a chance of moving you, how easily—I am determined you shall hear me, Dr. Shrapnel! —how easily the position of Captain Beauchamp may become precarious with his uncle Mr. Romfrey. And let me add—"but" and "but" me till Doomsday, sir!—if you were—I do hear you, sir, and you shall hear me—if you were a younger man, I say, I would hold you answerable to me for your scandalous and disgraceful insinuations.'

Dr. Shrapnel was adroitly fenced and over-shouted. He shrugged, stuttered, swayed, wagged a bulrush-head, flapped his elbows, puffed like a swimmer in the breakers, tried many times to

expostulate, and finding the effort useless, for his adversary was copious and commanding, relapsed, eyeing him as an object far removed.

Cecil rounded one of his perplexingly empty sentences and turned on his heel.

'War, then!' he said.

'As you like,' retorted the doctor.

'Oh! Very good. Good evening.' Cecil slightly lifted his hat, with the short projection of the head of the stately peacock in its walk, and passed out of the garden. Lord Palmet, deeply disappointed and mystified, went after him, leaving Dr. Shrapnel to shorten his garden walk with enormous long strides.

'I'm afraid you didn't manage the old boy,' Palmet complained. 'They're people who have tea in their gardens; we might have sat down with them and talked, the best friends in the world, and come again to-morrow might have called her Jenny in a week. She didn't show her pretty nose at any of the windows.'

His companion pooh-poohed and said: 'Foh! I'm afraid I permitted myself to lose my self-command for a moment.'

Palmet sang out an amorous couplet to console himself. Captain Baskelett respected the poetic art for its magical power over woman's virtue, but he disliked hearing verses, and they were ill-suited to Palmet. He abused his friend roundly, telling him it was contemptible to be quoting verses. He was irritable still.

He declared himself nevertheless much refreshed by his visit to Dr. Shrapnel. 'We shall have to sleep tonight in this unhallowed town, but I needn't be off to Holdesbury in the morning; I've done my business. I shall write to the baron to-night, and we can cross the water to-morrow in time for operations.'

The letter to Mr. Romfrey was composed before midnight. It was a long one, and when he had finished it, Cecil remembered that the act of composition had been assisted by a cigar in his mouth, and Mr. Romfrey detested the smell of tobacco. There was nothing to be done but to write the letter over again, somewhat more briefly: it ran thus:

'Thinking to kill two birds at a blow, I went yesterday with Palmet after the dinner at this place to Shrapnel's house, where, as I heard, I stood a chance of catching friend Nevil. The young person living under the man's protection was absent, and so was the "poor dear commander," perhaps attending on his bull. Shrapnel said he was expecting him. I write to you to confess I thought myself a cleverer fellow than I am. I talked to Shrapnel and tried hard to reason with him. I hope I can keep my temper under ordinary circumstances. You will understand that it required remarkable restraint when I make you acquainted with the fact that a lady's name was introduced, which, as your representative in relation to her, I was bound to defend from a gratuitous and scoundrelly aspersion. Shrapnel's epistle to "brave Beauchamp" is Church hymnification in comparison with his conversation. He is indubitably one of the greatest ruffians of his time.

'I took the step with the best of intentions, and all I can plead is that I am not a diplomatist of sixty. His last word was that he is for war with us. As far as we men are concerned it is of small importance. I should think that the sort of society he would scandalize a lady in is not much to be feared. I have given him his warning. He tops me by about a head, and loses his temper every two minutes. I could have drawn him out deliciously if he had not rather disturbed mine. By this time my equanimity is restored. The only thing I apprehend is your displeasure with me for having gone to the man. I have done no good, and it prevents me from running over to Holdesbury to see Nevil, for if "shindy letters," as you call them, are bad, shindy meetings are worse. I should be telling him my opinion of Shrapnel, he would be firing out, I should retort, he would yell, I should snap my fingers, and he would go into convulsions. I am convinced that a cattle-breeder ought to keep himself particularly calm. So unless I have further orders from you I refrain from going.

'The dinner was enthusiastic. I sat three hours among my Commons, they on me for that length of time—fatiguing, but a duty.'

Cecil subscribed his name with the warmest affection toward his uncle.

The brevity of the second letter had not brought him nearer to the truth in rescinding the picturesque accessories of his altercation with Dr. Shrapnel, but it veraciously expressed the sentiments he felt, and that was the palpable truth for him.

He posted the letter next morning.

CHAPTER XXXI

SHOWING A CHIVALROUS GENTLEMAN SET IN MOTION

About noon the day following, on board the steam-yacht of the Countess of Menai, Cecil was very much astonished to see Mr. Romfrey descending into a boat hard by, from Grancey Lespel's hired cutter. Steam was up, and the countess was off for a cruise in the Channel, as it was not a race- day, but seeing Mr. Romfrey's hand raised, she spoke to Cecil, and immediately gave orders to wait for the boat. This lady was a fervent admirer of the knightly gentleman, and had reason to like him, for he had once been her champion. Mr. Romfrey mounted the steps, received her greeting, and beckoned to Cecil. He carried a gold-headed horsewhip under his arm. Lady Menai would gladly have persuaded him to be one of her company for the day's voyage, but he said he had business in Bevisham, and moving aside with Cecil, put the question to him abruptly: 'What were the words used by Shrapnel?'

'The identical words?' Captain Baskelett asked. He could have tripped out the words with the fluency of ancient historians relating what great kings, ambassadors, or Generals may well have uttered on State occasions, but if you want the identical words, who is to remember them the day after they have been delivered? He said:

'Well, as for the identical words, I really, and I was tolerably excited, sir, and upon my honour, the identical words are rather difficult to....' He glanced at the horsewhip, and pricked by the sight of it to proceed, thought it good to soften the matter if possible. 'I don't quite recollect . . . I wrote off to you rather hastily. I think he said— but Palmet was there.'

'Shrapnel spoke the words before Lord Palmet?' said Mr. Romfrey austerely.

Captain Baskelett summoned Palmet to come near, and inquired of him what he had heard Shrapnel say, suggesting: 'He spoke of a handsome woman for a housekeeper, and all the world knew her character?'

Mr. Romfrey cleared his throat.

'Or knew she had no character,' Cecil pursued in a fit of gratified spleen, in scorn of the woman. 'Don't you recollect his accent in pronouncing housekeeper?'

The menacing thunder sounded from Mr. Romfrey. He was patient in appearance, and waited for Cecil's witness to corroborate the evidence.

It happened (and here we are in one of the circles of small things producing great consequences, which have inspired diminutive philosophers with ironical visions of history and the littleness of man), it happened that Lord Palmet, the humanest of young aristocrats, well-disposed toward the entire world, especially to women, also to men in any way related to pretty women, had just lit a cigar, and it was a cigar that he had been recommended to try the flavour of; and though he, having his wits about him, was fully aware that shipboard is no good place for a trial of the delicacy of tobacco in the leaf, he had begun puffing and sniffing in a critical spirit, and scarcely knew for the moment what to decide as to this particular cigar. He remembered, however, Mr. Romfrey's objection to tobacco. Imagining that he saw the expression of a profound distaste in that gentleman's more than usually serious face, he hesitated between casting the cigar into the water and retaining it. He decided upon the latter course, and held the cigar behind his back, bowing to Mr. Romfrey at about a couple of yards distance, and saying to Cecil, 'Housekeeper; yes, I remember hearing housekeeper. I think so. Housekeeper? yes, oh yes.'

'And handsome housekeepers were doubtful characters,' Captain Baskelett prompted him.

Palmet laughed out a single 'Ha!' that seemed to excuse him for lounging away to the forepart of the vessel, where he tugged at his fine specimen of a cigar to rekindle it, and discharged it with a wry grimace, so delicate is the flavour of that weed, and so adversely ever is it affected by a breeze and a moist atmosphere. He could then return undivided in his mind to Mr. Romfrey and Cecil, but the subject was not resumed in his presence.

The Countess of Menai steamed into Bevisham to land Mr. Romfrey there. 'I can be out in the

Channel any day; it is not every day that I see you,' she said, in support of her proposal to take him over.

They sat together conversing, apart from the rest of the company, until they sighted Bevisham, when Mr. Romfrey stood up, and a little crowd of men came round him to enjoy his famous racy talk. Captain Baskelett offered to land with him. He declined companionship. Dropping her hand in his, the countess asked him what he had to do in that town, and he replied, 'I have to demand an apology.'

Answering the direct look of his eyes, she said, 'Oh, I shall not speak of it.'

In his younger days, if the rumour was correct, he had done the same on her account.

He stepped into the boat, and presently they saw him mount the pier- steps, with the riding-whip under his arm, his head more than commonly bent, a noticeable point in a man of his tall erect figure. The ladies and some of the gentlemen thought he was looking particularly grave, even sorrowful.

Lady Menai inquired of Captain Baskelett whether he knew the nature of his uncle's business in Bevisham, the town he despised.

What could Cecil say but no? His uncle had not imparted it to him.

She was flattered in being the sole confidante, and said no more.

The sprightly ingenuity of Captain Baskelett's mind would have informed him of the nature of his uncle's expedition, we may be sure, had he put it to the trial; for Mr. Romfrey was as plain to read as a rudimentary sum in arithmetic, and like the tracings of a pedigree-map his preliminary steps to deeds were seen pointing on their issue in lines of straight descent. But Cecil could protest that he was not bound to know, and considering that he was neither bound to know nor to speculate, he determined to stand on his right. So effectually did he accomplish the task, that he was frequently surprised during the evening and the night by the effervescence of a secret exultation rising imp-like within him, that was, he assured himself, perfectly unaccountable.

CHAPTER XXXII

AN EFFORT TO CONQUER CECILIA IN BEAUCHAMP'S FASHION

The day after Mr. Romfrey's landing in Bevisham a full South-wester stretched the canvas of yachts of all classes, schooner, cutter and yawl, on the lively green water between the island and the forest shore. Cecilia's noble schooner was sure to be out in such a ringing breeze, for the pride of it as well as the pleasure. She landed her father at the Club steps, and then bore away Eastward to sight a cutter race, the breeze beginning to stiffen. Looking back against sun and wind, she saw herself pursued by a saucy little 15-ton craft that had been in her track since she left the Otley river before noon, dipping and straining, with every inch of sail set; as mad a stern chase as ever was witnessed: and who could the man at the tiller, clad cap-A-pie in tarpaulin, be? She led him dancing away, to prove his resoluteness and laugh at him. She had the powerful wings, and a glory in them coming of this pursuit: her triumph was delicious, until the occasional sparkle of the tarpaulin was lost, the small boat appeared a motionless object far behind, and all ahead of her exceedingly dull, though the race hung there and the crowd of sail.

Cecilia's transient flutter of coquettry created by the animating air and her queenly flight was over. She fled splendidly and she came back graciously. But he refused her open hand, as it were. He made as if to stand across her tack, and, reconsidering it, evidently scorned his advantage and challenged the stately vessel for a beat up against the wind. It was as pretty as a Court minuet. But presently Cecilia stood too far on one tack, and returning to the centre of the channel, found herself headed by seamanship. He waved an ironical salute with his sou'wester. Her retort consisted in bringing her vessel to the wind, and sending a boat for him.

She did it on the impulse; had she consulted her wishes she would rather have seen him at his post, where he seemed in his element, facing the spray and cunningly calculating to get wind and tide in his favour. Partly with regret she saw him, stripped of his tarpaulin, jump into her boat, as though she had once more to say farewell to sailor Nevil Beauchamp; farewell the bright youth, the hero, the true servant of his country!

That feeling of hers changed when he was on board. The stirring cordial day had put new breath in him.

'Should not the flag be dipped?' he said, looking up at the peak, where the white flag streamed.

'Can you really mistake compassion for defeat?' said she, with a smile.

'Oh! before the wind of course I hadn't a chance.'

'How could you be so presumptuous as to give chase? And who has lent you that little cutter?'

Beauchamp had hired her for a month, and he praised her sailing, and pretended to say that the race was not always to the strong in a stiff breeze.

'But in point' of fact I was bent on trying how my boat swims, and had no idea of overhauling you. To-day our salt-water lake is as fine as the Mediterranean.'

'Omitting the islands and the Mediterranean colour, it is. I have often told you how I love it. I have landed papa at the Club. Are you aware that we meet you at Steynham the day after to-morrow?'

'Well, we can ride on the downs. The downs between three and four of a summer's morning are as lovely as anything in the world. They have the softest outlines imaginable . . . and remind me of a friend's upper lip when she deigns to smile.'

'Is one to rise at that hour to behold the effect? And let me remind you further, Nevil, that the comparison of nature's minor work beside her mighty is an error, if you will be poetical.'

She cited a well-known instance of degradation in verse.

But a young man who happens to be intimately acquainted with a certain 'dark eye in woman' will not so lightly be brought to consider that the comparison of tempestuous night to the flashing of those eyes of hers topples the scene headlong from grandeur. And if Beauchamp remembered rightly, the scene was the Alps at night.

He was prepared to contest Cecilia's judgement. At that moment the breeze freshened and the canvas lifted from due South the yacht swung her sails to drive toward the West, and Cecilia's face and hair came out golden in the sunlight. Speech was difficult, admiration natural, so he sat beside her, admiring in silence.

She said a good word for the smartness of his little yacht.

'This is my first trial of her,' said Beauchamp. 'I hired her chiefly to give Dr. Shrapnel a taste of salt air. I 've no real right to be idling about. His ward Miss Denham is travelling in Switzerland; the dear old man is alone, and not quite so well as I should wish. Change of scene will do him good. I shall land him on the French coast for a couple of days, or take him down Channel.'

Cecilia gazed abstractedly at a passing schooner.

'He works too hard,' said Beauchamp.

'Who does?'

'Dr. Shrapnel.'

Some one else whom we have heard of works too hard, and it would be happy for mankind if he did not.

Cecilia named the schooner; an American that had beaten our crack yachts.
Beauchamp sprang up to spy at the American.

'That's the Corinne, is she!'

Yankee craftiness on salt water always excited his respectful attention as a spectator.

'And what is the name of your boat, Nevil?'

'The fool of an owner calls her the Petrel. It's not that I'm superstitious, but to give a boat a name of bad augury to sailors appears to me . . . however, I 've argued it with him and I will have her called the Curlew. Carrying Dr. Shrapnel and me, Petrel would be thought the proper title for her isn't that your idea?'

He laughed and she smiled, and then he became overcast with his political face, and said, 'I hope—I believe—you will alter your opinion of him. Can it be an opinion when it's founded on nothing? You know really nothing of him. I have in my pocket what I believe would alter your mind about him entirely. I do think so; and I think so because I feel you would appreciate his deep sincerity and real nobleness.'

'Is it a talisman that you have, Nevil?'

'No, it's a letter.'

Cecilia's cheeks took fire.

'I should so much like to read it to you,' said he.

'Do not, please,' she replied with a dash of supplication in her voice.

'Not the whole of it—an extract here and there? I want you so much to understand him.'

'I am sure I should not.'

'Let me try you!'

'Pray do not.'

'Merely to show you…'

'But, Nevil, I do not wish to understand him.'

'But you have only to listen for a few minutes, and I want you to know what good reason I have to reverence him as a teacher and a friend.'

Cecilia looked at Beauchamp with wonder. A confused recollection of the contents of the letter declaimed at Mount Laurels in Captain Baskelett's absurd sing-song, surged up in her mind revoltingly. She signified a decided negative. Something of a shudder accompanied the expression of it.

But he as little as any member of the Romfrey blood was framed to let the word no stand quietly opposed to him. And the no that a woman utters! It calls for wholesome tyranny. Those old, those hoar-old duellists, Yes and No, have rarely been better matched than in Beauchamp and Cecilia. For if he was obstinate in attack she had great resisting power. Twice to listen to that letter was beyond her endurance. Indeed it cast a shadow on him and disfigured him; and when, affecting to plead, he said: 'You must listen to it to please me, for my sake, Cecilia,' she answered: 'It is for your sake, Nevil, I decline to.'

'Why, what do you know of it?' he exclaimed.

'I know the kind of writing it would be.'

'How do you know it?'

'I have heard of some of Dr. Shrapnel's opinions.'

'You imagine him to be subversive, intolerant, immoral, and the rest! all that comes under your word revolutionary.'

'Possibly; but I must defend myself from hearing what I know will be certain to annoy me.'

'But he is the reverse of immoral: and I intend to read you parts of the letter to prove to you that he is not the man you would blame, but I, and that if ever I am worthier . . . worthier of you, as I hope to become, it will be owing to this admirable and good old man.'

Cecilia trembled: she was touched to the quick. Yet it was not pleasant to her to be wooed obliquely, through Dr. Shrapnel.

She recognized the very letter, crowned with many stamps, thick with many pages, in Beauchamp's hands.

'When you are at Steynham you will probably hear my uncle Everard's version of this letter,' he said. 'The baron chooses to think everything fair in war, and the letter came accidentally into his hands with the seal broken; well, he read it. And, Cecilia, you can fancy the sort of stuff he would make of it. Apart from that, I want you particularly to know how much I am indebted to Dr. Shrapnel. Won't you learn to like him a little? Won't you tolerate him?—I could almost say, for my sake! He and I are at variance on

certain points, but taking him altogether, I am under deeper obligations to him than to any man on earth. He has found where I bend and waver.'

'I recognize your chivalry, Nevil.'

'He has done his best to train me to be of some service. Where's the chivalry in owning a debt? He is one of our true warriors; fearless and blameless. I have had my heroes before. You know how I loved Robert Hall: his death is a gap in my life. He is a light for fighting Englishmen—who fight with the sword. But the scale of the war, the cause, and the end in view, raise Dr. Shrapnel above the bravest I have ever had the luck to meet. Soldiers and sailors have their excitement to keep them up to the mark; praise and rewards. He is in his eight-and- sixtieth year, and he has never received anything but obloquy for his pains. Half of the small fortune he has goes in charities and subscriptions. Will that touch you? But I think little of that, and so does he. Charity is a common duty. The dedication of a man's life and whole mind to a cause, there's heroism. I wish I were eloquent; I wish I could move you.'

Cecilia turned her face to him. 'I listen to you with pleasure, Nevil; but please do not read the letter.'

'Yes; a paragraph or two I must read.'

She rose.

He was promptly by her side. 'If I say I ask you for one sign that you care for me in some degree?'

'I have not for a moment ceased to be your friend, Nevil, since I was a child.'

'But if you allow yourself to be so prejudiced against my best friend that you will not hear a word of his writing, are you friendly?'

'Feminine, and obstinate,' said Cecilia.

'Give me your eyes an instant. I know you think me reckless and lawless: now is not that true? You doubt whether, if a lady gave me her hand I should hold to it in perfect faith. Or, perhaps not that: but you do suspect I should be capable of every sophism under the sun to persuade a woman to break her faith, if it suited me: supposing some passion to be at work. Men who are open to passion have to be taught reflection before they distinguish between the woman they should sue for love because she would be their best mate, and the woman who has thrown a spell on them. Now, what I beg you to let me read you in this letter is a truth nobly stated that has gone into my blood, and changed me. It cannot fail, too, in changeing your opinion of Dr. Shrapnel. It makes me wretched that you should be divided from me in your ideas of him. I, you see—and I confess I think it my chief title to honour—reverence him.'

'I regret that I am unable to utter the words of Ruth,' said Cecilia, in a low voice. She felt rather tremulously; opposed only to the letter and the writer of it, not at all to Beauchamp, except on account of his idolatry of the wicked revolutionist. Far from having a sense of opposition to Beauchamp; she pitied him for his infatuation, and in her lofty mental serenity she warmed to him for the seeming boyishness of his constant and extravagant worship of the man, though such an enthusiasm cast shadows on his intellect.

He was reading a sentence of the letter.

'I hear nothing but the breeze, Nevil,' she said.

The breeze fluttered the letter-sheets: they threatened to fly. Cecilia stepped two paces away.

'Hark; there is a military band playing on the pier,' said she. 'I am so fond of hearing music a little off shore.'

Beauchamp consigned the letter to his pocket.

'You are not offended, Nevil?'

'Dear me, no. You haven't a mind for tonics, that's all.'

'Healthy persons rarely have,' she remarked, and asked him, smiling softly, whether he had a mind for music.

His insensibility to music was curious, considering how impressionable he was to verse, and to songs of birds. He listened with an oppressed look, as to something the particular secret of which had to be reached by a determined effort of sympathy for those whom it affected. He liked it if she did, and said he liked it, reiterated that he liked it, clearly trying hard to comprehend it, as unmoved by the swell and

sigh of the resonant brass as a man could be, while her romantic spirit thrilled to it, and was bountiful in glowing visions and in tenderness.

There hung her hand. She would not have refused to yield it. The hero of her childhood, the friend of her womanhood, and her hero still, might have taken her with half a word.

Beauchamp was thinking: She can listen to that brass band, and she shuts her ears to this letter:

The reading of it would have been a prelude to the opening of his heart to her, at the same time that it vindicated his dear and honoured master, as he called Dr. Shrapnel. To speak, without the explanation of his previous reticence which this letter would afford, seemed useless: even the desire to speak was absent, passion being absent.

'I see papa; he is getting into a boat with some one,' said Cecilia, and gave orders for the yacht to stand in toward the Club steps. 'Do you know, Nevil, the Italian common people are not so subject to the charm of music as other races? They have more of the gift, and I think less of the feeling. You do not hear much music in Italy. I remember in the year of Revolution there was danger of a rising in some Austrian city, and a colonel of a regiment commanded his band to play. The mob was put in good humour immediately.'

'It's a soporific,' said Beauchamp.

'You would not rather have had them rise to be slaughtered?'

'Would you have them waltzed into perpetual servility?'

Cecilia hummed, and suggested: 'If one can have them happy in any way?'

'Then the day of destruction may almost be dated.'

'Nevil, your terrible view of life must be false.'

'I make it out worse to you than to any one else, because I want our minds to be united.'

'Give me a respite now and then.'

'With all my heart. And forgive me for beating my drum. I see what others don't see, or else I feel it more; I don't know; but it appears to me our country needs rousing if it's to live. There 's a division between poor and rich that you have no conception of, and it can't safely be left unnoticed. I've done.'

He looked at her and saw tears on her under-lids.

'My dearest Cecilia!'

'Music makes me childish,' said she.

Her father was approaching in the boat. Beside him sat the Earl of Lockrace, latterly classed among the suitors of the lady of Mount Laurels.

A few minutes remained to Beauchamp of his lost opportunity. Instead of seizing them with his usual promptitude, he let them slip, painfully mindful of his treatment of her last year after the drive into Bevisham, when she was England, and Renee holiday France.

This feeling he fervently translated into the reflection that the bride who would bring him beauty and wealth, and her especial gift of tender womanliness, was not yet so thoroughly mastered as to grant her husband his just prevalence with her, or even indeed his complete independence of action, without which life itself was not desireable.

Colonel Halkett stared at Beauchamp as if he had risen from the deep.

'Have you been in that town this morning?' was one of his first questions to him when he stood on board.

'I came through it,' said Beauchamp, and pointed to his little cutter labouring in the distance. 'She's mine for a month; I came from Holdesbury to try her; and then he stated how he had danced attendance on the schooner for a couple of hours before any notice was taken of him, and Cecilia with her graceful humour held up his presumption to scorn.

Her father was eyeing Beauchamp narrowly, and appeared troubled.

'Did you see Mr. Romfrey yesterday, or this morning?' the colonel asked him, mentioning that Mr. Romfrey had been somewhere about the island yesterday, at which Beauchamp expressed astonishment, for his uncle Everard seldom visited a yachting station.

Colonel Halkett exchanged looks with Cecilia. Hers were inquiring, and he confirmed her side-glance at Beauchamp. She raised her brows; he nodded, to signify that there was gravity in the case. Here the signalling stopped short; she had to carry on a conversation with Lord Lockrace, one of those men who betray the latent despot in an exhibition of discontentment unless they have all a lady's hundred eyes attentive to their discourse.

At last Beauchamp quitted the vessel.

When he was out of hearing, Colonel Halkett said to Cecilia: 'Grancey Lespel tells me that Mr. Romfrey called on the man Shrapnel yesterday evening at six o'clock.'

'Yes, Papa?'

'Now come and see the fittings below,' the colonel addressed Lord Lockrace, and murmured to his daughter:

'And soundly horsewhipped him!'

Cecilia turned on the instant to gaze after Nevil Beauchamp. She could have wept for pity. Her father's emphasis on 'soundly' declared an approval of the deed, and she was chilled by a sickening abhorrence and dread of the cruel brute in men, such as, awakened by she knew not what, had haunted her for a year of her girlhood.

'And he deserved it!' the colonel pursued, on emerging from the cabin at Lord Lockrace's heels. 'I've no doubt he richly deserved it. The writer of that letter we heard Captain Baskelett read the other day deserves the very worst he gets.'

'Baskelett bored the Club the other night with a letter of a Radical fellow,' said Lord Lockrace. 'Men who write that stuff should be strung up and whipped by the common hangman.'

'It was a private letter,' said Cecilia.

'Public or private, Miss Halkett.'

Her mind flew back to Seymour Austin for the sense of stedfastness when she heard such language as this, which, taken in conjunction with Dr. Shrapnel's, seemed to uncloak our Constitutional realm and show it boiling up with the frightful elements of primitive societies.

'I suppose we are but half civilized,' she said.

'If that,' said the earl.

Colonel Halkett protested that he never could quite make out what Radicals were driving at.

'The rents,' Lord Lockrace observed in the conclusive tone of brevity. He did not stay very long.

The schooner was boarded subsequently by another nobleman, an Admiral of the Fleet and ex-minister of the Whig Government, Lord Croyston, who was a friend of Mr. Romfrey's, and thought well of Nevil Beauchamp as a seaman and naval officer, but shook an old head over him as a politician. He came to beg a passage across the water to his marine Lodge, an accident having happened early in the morning to his yacht, the Lady Violet. He was able to communicate the latest version of the horsewhipping of Dr. Shrapnel, from which it appeared that after Mr. Romfrey had handsomely flogged the man he flung his card on the prostrate body, to let men know who was responsible for the act. He expected that Mr. Romfrey would be subjected to legal proceedings. 'But if there's a pleasure worth paying for it's the trouncing of a villain,' said he; and he had been informed that Dr. Shrapnel was a big one. Lord Croyston's favourite country residence was in the neighbourhood of old Mrs. Beauchamp, on the Upper Thames. Speaking of Nevil Beauchamp a second time, he alluded to his relations with his great-aunt, said his prospects were bad, that she had interdicted her house to him, and was devoted to her other great-nephew.

'And so she should be,' said Colonel Halkett. 'That's a young man who's an Englishman without French gunpowder notions in his head. He works for us down at the mine in Wales a good part of the year, and has tided us over a threatening strike there: gratuitously: I can't get him to accept anything. I

can't think why he does it.'

'He'll have plenty,' said Lord Croyston, levelling his telescope to sight the racing cutters.

Cecilia fancied she descried Nevil's Petrel, dubbed Curlew, to Eastward, and had a faint gladness in the thought that his knowledge of his uncle Everard's deed of violence would be deferred for another two or three hours.

She tried to persuade her father to wait for Nevil, and invite him to dine at Mount Laurels, and break the news to him gently. Colonel Halkett argued that in speaking of the affair he should certainly not commiserate the man who had got his deserts, and saying this he burst into a petty fury against the epistle of Dr. Shrapnel, which appeared to be growing more monstrous in proportion to his forgetfulness of the details, as mountains gather vastness to the eye at a certain remove. Though he could not guess the reason for Mr. Romfrey's visit to Bevisham, he was, he said, quite prepared to maintain that Mr. Romfrey had a perfect justification for his conduct.

Cecilia hinted at barbarism. The colonel hinted at high police duties that gentlemen were sometimes called on to perform for the protection of society. 'In defiance of its laws?' she asked; and he answered: 'Women must not be judging things out of their sphere,' with the familiar accent on 'women' which proves their inferiority. He was rarely guilty of it toward his daughter. Evidently he had resolved to back Mr. Romfrey blindly. That epistle of Dr. Shrapnel's merited condign punishment and had met with it, he seemed to rejoice in saying: and this was his abstract of the same: 'An old charlatan who tells his dupe to pray every night of his life for the beheading of kings and princes, and scattering of the clergy, and disbanding the army, that he and his rabble may fall upon the wealthy, and show us numbers win; and he'll undertake to make them moral!'

'I wish we were not going to Steynham,' said Cecilia.

'So do I. Well, no, I don't,' the colonel corrected himself, 'no; it 's an engagement. I gave my consent so far. We shall see whether Nevil Beauchamp's a man of any sense.'

Her heart sank. This was as much as to let her know that if Nevil broke with his uncle, the treaty of union between the two families, which her father submitted to entertain out of consideration for Mr. Romfrey, would be at an end.

The wind had fallen. Entering her river, Cecilia gazed back at the smooth broad water, and the band of golden beams flung across it from the evening sun over the forest. No little cutter was visible. She could not write to Nevil to bid him come and concert with her in what spirit to encounter his uncle Everard at Steynham. And guests would be at Mount Laurels next day; Lord Lockrace, Lord Croyston, and the Lespels; she could not drive down to Bevisham on the chance of seeing him. Nor was it to be acknowledged even to herself that she so greatly desired to see him and advise him. Why not? Because she was one of the artificial creatures called women (with the accent) who dare not be spontaneous, and cannot act independently if they would continue to be admirable in the world's eye, and who for that object must remain fixed on shelves, like other marketable wares, avoiding motion to avoid shattering or tarnishing. This is their fate, only in degree less inhuman than that of Hellenic and Trojan princesses offered up to the Gods, or pretty slaves to the dealers. Their artificiality is at once their bane and their source of superior pride.

Seymour Austin might have reason for seeking to emancipate them, she thought, and blushed in thought that she could never be learning anything but from her own immediate sensations.

Of course it was in her power to write to Beauchamp, just as it had been in his to speak to her, but the fire was wanting in her blood and absent from his mood, so they were kept apart.

Her father knew as little as she what was the positive cause of Mr. Romfrey's chastisement of Dr. Shrapnel. 'Cause enough, I don't doubt,' he said, and cited the mephitic letter.

Cecilia was not given to suspicions, or she would have had them kindled by a certain wilfulness in his incessant reference to the letter, and exoneration, if not approval, of Mr. Romfrey's conduct.

How did that chivalrous gentleman justify himself for condescending to such an extreme as the use of personal violence? Was there a possibility of his justifying it to Nevil? She was most wretched in her reiteration of these inquiries, for, with a heart subdued, she had still a mind whose habit of independent judgement was not to be constrained, and while she felt that it was only by siding with Nevil submissively and blindly in this lamentable case that she could hope for happiness, she foresaw the likelihood of her not being able to do so as much as he would desire and demand. This she took for the protest of her pure reason. In reality, grieved though she was on account of that Dr. Shrapnel, her captive heart resented the anticipated challenge to her to espouse his cause or languish.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE FIRST ENCOUNTER AT STEYNHAM

The judge pronouncing sentence of condemnation on the criminal is proverbially a sorrowfully-minded man; and still more would he be so had he to undertake the part of executioner as well. This is equivalent to saying that the simple pleasures are no longer with us; it must be a personal enemy now to give us any satisfaction in chastising and slaying. Perhaps by-and-by that will be savourless: we degenerate. There is, nevertheless, ever (and let nature be praised for it) a strong sustainment in the dutiful exertion of our physical energies, and Mr. Everard Romfrey experienced it after he had fulfilled his double office on the person of Dr. Shrapnel by carrying out his own decree. His conscience approved him cheerlessly, as it is the habit of that secret monitor to do when we have no particular advantage coming of the act we have performed; but the righteous labour of his arm gave him high breathing and an appetite.

He foresaw that he and Nevil would soon be having a wrestle over the matter, hand and thigh; but a gentleman in the right engaged with a fellow in the wrong has nothing to apprehend; is, in fact, in the position of a game-preserver with a poacher. The nearest approach to gratification in that day's work which Mr. Romfrey knew was offered by the picture of Nevil's lamentable attitude above his dirty idol. He conceived it in the mock-mediaeval style of our caricaturists:—Shrapnel stretched at his length, half a league, in slashed yellows and blacks, with his bauble beside him, and prodigious pointed toes; Nevil in parti- coloured tights, on one leg, raising his fists in imprecation to a nose in the firmament.

Gentlemen of an unpractised imaginative capacity cannot vision for themselves exactly what they would, being unable to exercise authority over the proportions and the hues of the objects they conceive, which are very much at the mercy of their sportive caprices; and the state of mind of Mr. Romfrey is not to be judged by his ridiculous view of the pair. In the abstract he could be sorry for Shrapnel. As he knew himself magnanimous, he promised himself to be forbearing with Nevil.

Moreover, the month of September was drawing nigh; he had plenty to think of. The entire land (signifying all but all of those who occupy the situation of thinkers in it) may be said to have been exhaling the same thought in connection with September. Our England holds possession of a considerable portion of the globe, and it keeps the world in awe to see her bestowing so considerable a portion of her intelligence upon her recreations. To prosecute them with her whole heart is an ingenious exhibition of her power. Mr. Romfrey was of those who said to his countrymen, 'Go yachting; go cricketing; go boat-racing; go shooting; go horseracing, nine months of the year, while the other Europeans go marching and drilling.' Those occupations he considered good for us; and our much talking, writing, and thinking about them characteristic, and therefore good. And he was not one of those who do penance for that sweating indolence in the fits of desperate panic. Beauchamp's argument that the rich idler begets the idling vagabond, the rich wagerer the brutal swindler, the general thirst for a mad round of recreation a generally-increasing disposition to avoid serious work, and the unbraced moral tone of the country an indifference to national responsibility (an argument doubtless extracted from Shrapnel, talk tall as the very demagogue when he stood upright), Mr. Romfrey laughed at scornfully, affirming that our manufactures could take care of themselves. As for invasion, we are circled by the sea. Providence has done that for us, and may be relied on to do more in an emergency.—The children of wealth and the children of the sun alike believe that Providence is for them, and it would seem that the former can do without it less than the latter, though the former are less inclined to give it personification.

This year, however, the array of armaments on the Continent made Mr. Romfrey anxious about our navy. Almost his first topic in welcoming Colonel Halkett and Cecilia to Steynham was the rottenness of navy administration; for if Providence is to do anything for us it must have a sea-worthy fleet for the operation. How loudly would his contemptuous laughter have repudiated the charge that he trusted to supernatural agency for assistance in case of need! But so it was: and he owned to believing in English luck. Partly of course he meant that steady fire of combat which his countrymen have got heated to of old till fortune blessed them.

'Nevil is not here?' the colonel asked.

'No, I suspect he's gruelling and plastering a doctor of his acquaintance,' Mr. Romfrey said, with his nasal laugh composed of scorn and resignation.

'Yes, yes, I've heard,' said Colonel Halkett hastily.

He would have liked to be informed of Dr. Shrapnel's particular offence: he mentioned the execrable

letter.

Mr. Romfrey complacently interjected: 'Drug-vomit!' and after an interval: 'Gallows!'

'That man has done Nevil Beauchamp a world of mischief, Romfrey.'

'We'll hope for a cure, colonel.'

'Did the man come across you?'

'He did.'

Mr. Romfrey was mute on the subject. Colonel Halkett abstained from pushing his inquiries.

Cecilia could only tell her father when they were alone in the drawing- room a few minutes before dinner that Mrs. Culling was entirely ignorant of any cause to which Nevil's absence might be attributed.

'Mr. Romfrey had good cause,' the colonel said, emphatically.

He repeated it next day, without being a bit wiser of the cause.

Cecilia's happiness or hope was too sensitive to allow of a beloved father's deceiving her in his opposition to it.

She saw clearly now that he had fastened on this miserable incident, expecting an imbroglio that would divide Nevil and his uncle, and be an excuse for dividing her and Nevil. O for the passionate will to make head against what appeared as a fate in this matter! She had it not.

Mr. and Mrs. Wardour-Devereux, Sir John and Lady Baskelett, and the Countess of Welshpool, another sister of Mr. Romfrey's, arrived at Steynham for a day and a night. Lady Baskelett and Lady Welshpool came to see their brother, not to countenance his household; and Mr. Wardour- Devereux could not stay longer than a certain number of hours under a roof where tobacco was in evil odour. From her friend Louise, his wife, Cecilia learnt that Mr. Lydiard had been summoned to Dr. Shrapnel's bedside, as Mrs. Devereux knew by a letter she had received from Mr. Lydiard, who was no political devotee of that man, she assured Cecilia, but had an extraordinary admiration for the Miss Denham living with him. This was kindly intended to imply that Beauchamp was released from his attendance on Dr. Shrapnel, and also that it was not he whom the Miss Denham attracted.

'She is in Switzerland,' said Cecilia.

'She is better there,' said Mrs. Devereux.

Mr. Stukely Culbrett succeeded to these visitors. He heard of the case of Dr. Shrapnel from Colonel Halkett, and of Beauchamp's missing of his chance with the heiress from Mr. Romfrey.

Rosamund Culling was in great perplexity about Beauchamp's prolonged absence; for he had engaged to come, he had written to her to say he would be sure to come; and she feared he was ill. She would have persuaded Mr. Culbrett to go down to Bevisham to see him: she declared that she could even persuade herself to call on Dr. Shrapnel a second time, in spite of her horror of the man. Her anger at the thought of his keeping Nevil away from good fortune and happiness caused her to speak in resentment and loathing of the man.

'He behaved badly when you saw him, did he?' said Stukely.

'Badly, is no word. He is detestable,' Rosamund replied.

'You think he ought to be whipped?'

She feigned an extremity of vindictiveness, and twisted her brows in comic apology for the unfeminine sentiment, as she said: 'I really do.'

The feminine gentleness of her character was known to Stukely, so she could afford to exaggerate the expression of her anger, and she did not modify it, forgetful that a woman is the representative of the sex with cynical men, and escapes from contempt at the cost of her sisterhood.

Looking out of an upper window in the afternoon she beheld Nevil Beauchamp in a group with his uncle Everard, the colonel and Cecilia, and Mr. Culbrett. Nevil was on his feet; the others were seated under the great tulip-tree on the lawn.

A little observation of them warned her that something was wrong. There was a vacant chair; Nevil took it in his hand at times, stamped it to the ground, walked away and sharply back fronting his uncle, speaking vehemently, she perceived, and vainly, as she judged by the cast of his uncle's figure. Mr. Romfrey's head was bent, and wagged slightly, as he screwed his brows up and shot his eyes, queerly at the agitated young man. Colonel Halkett's arms crossed his chest. Cecilia's eyelids drooped their, lashes. Mr. Culbrett was balancing on the hind-legs of his chair. No one appeared to be speaking but Nevil.

It became evident that Nevil was putting a series of questions to his uncle. Mechanical nods were given him in reply.

Presently Mr. Romfrey rose, thundering out a word or two, without a gesture.

Colonel Halkett rose.

Nevil flung his hand out straight to the house.

Mr. Romfrey seemed to consent; the colonel shook his head: Nevil insisted.

A footman carrying a tea-tray to Miss Halkett received some commission and swiftly disappeared, making Rosamund wonder whether sugar, milk or cream had been omitted.

She met him on the first landing, and heard that Mr. Romfrey requested her to step out on the lawn.

Expecting to hear of a piece of misconduct on the part of the household servants, she hurried forth, and found that she had to traverse the whole space of the lawn up to the tuliptree. Colonel Halkett and Mr. Romfrey had resumed their seats. The colonel stood up and bowed to her.

Mr. Romfrey said: 'One question to you, ma'am, and you shall not be detained. Did not that man Shrapnel grossly insult you on the day you called on him to see Captain Beauchamp about a couple of months before the Election?'

'Look at me when you speak, ma'am,' said Beauchamp.

Rosamund looked at him.

The whiteness of his face paralyzed her tongue. A dreadful levelling of his eyes penetrated and chilled her. Instead of thinking of her answer she thought of what could possibly have happened.

'Did he insult you at all, ma'am?' said Beauchamp.

Mr. Romfrey reminded him that he was not a cross-examining criminal barrister.

They waited for her to speak.

She hesitated, coloured, betrayed confusion; her senses telling her of a catastrophe, her conscience accusing her as the origin of it.

'Did Dr. Shrapnel, to your belief, intentionally hurt your feelings or your dignity?' said Beauchamp, and made the answer easier:

'Not intentionally, surely: not . . . I certainly do not accuse him.'

'Can you tell me you feel that he wounded you in the smallest degree? And if so, how? I ask you this, because he is anxious, if he lives, to apologize to you for any offence that he may have been guilty of: he was ignorant of it. I have his word for that, and his commands to me to bear it to you. I may tell you I have never known him injure the most feeble thing—anything alive, or wish to.'

Beauchamp's voice choked. Rosamund saw tears leap out of the stern face of her dearest now in wrath with her.

'Is he ill?' she faltered.

'He is. You own to a strong dislike of him, do you not?'

'But not to desire any harm to him.'

'Not a whipping,' Mr. Culbrett murmured.

Everard Romfrey overheard it.

He had allowed Mrs. Culling to be sent for, that she might with a bare affirmative silence Nevil, when his conduct was becoming intolerable before the guests of the house.

'That will do, ma'am,' he dismissed her.

Beauchamp would not let her depart.

'I must have your distinct reply, and in Mr. Romfrey's presence:—say, that if you accused him you were mistaken, or that they were mistaken who supposed you had accused him. I must have the answer before you go.'

'Sir, will you learn manners!' Mr. Romfrey said to him, with a rattle of the throat.

Beauchamp turned his face from-her.

Colonel Halkett offered her his arm to lead her away.

'What is it? Oh, what is it?' she whispered, scarcely able to walk, but declining the colonel's arm.

'You ought not to have been dragged out here,' said he. 'Any one might have known there would be no convincing of Captain Beauchamp. That old rascal in Bevisham has been having a beating; that's all. And a very beautiful day it is!—a little too hot, though. Before we leave, you must give me a lesson or two in gardening.'

'Dr. Shrapnel—Mr. Romfrey!' said Rosamund half audibly under the oppression of the more she saw than what she said.

The colonel talked of her renown in landscape-gardening. He added casually: 'They met the other day.'

'By accident?'

'By chance, I suppose. Shrapnel defends one of your Steynham poaching vermin.'

'Mr. Romfrey struck him?—for that? Oh, never!' Rosamund exclaimed.

'I suppose he had a long account to settle.'

She fetched her breath painfully. 'I shall never be forgiven.'

'And I say that a gentleman has no business with idols,' the colonel fumed as he spoke. 'Those letters of Shrapnel to Nevil Beauchamp are a scandal on the name of Englishman.'

'You have read that shocking one, Colonel Halkett?'

'Captain Baskelett read it out to us.'

'He? Oh! then . . .' She stopped:—Then the author of this mischief is clear to me! her divining hatred of Cecil would have said, but her humble position did not warrant such speech. A consideration of the lowliness necessitating this restraint at a moment when loudly to denounce another's infamy with triumphant insight would have solaced and supported her, kept Rosamund dumb.

She could not bear to think of her part in the mischief.

She was not bound to think of it, knowing actually nothing of the occurrence.

Still she felt that she was on her trial. She detected herself running in and out of her nature to fortify it against accusations rather than cleanse it for inspection. It was narrowing in her own sight. The prospect of her having to submit to a further interrogatory, shut it up entrenched in the declaration that Dr. Shrapnel had so far outraged her sentiments as to be said to have offended her: not insulted, perhaps, but certainly offended.

And this was a generous distinction. It was generous; and, having recognized the generosity, she was unable to go beyond it.

She was presently making the distinction to Miss Halkett. The colonel had left her at the door of the house: Miss Halkett sought admission to her private room on an errand of condolence, for she had sympathized with her very much in the semi-indignity Nevil had forced her to undergo: and very little indeed had she been able to sympathize with Nevil, who had been guilty of the serious fault of allowing himself to appear moved by his own commonplace utterances; or, in other words, the theme being hostile to his audience, he had betrayed emotion over it without first evoking the spirit of pathos.

'As for me,' Rosamund replied, to some comforting remarks of Miss Halkett's, 'I do not understand why I should be mixed up in Dr. Shrapnel's misfortunes: I really am quite unable to recollect his words to me or his behaviour: I have only a positive impression that I left his house, where I had gone to see Captain Beauchamp, in utter disgust, so repelled by his language that I could hardly trust myself to speak of the man to Mr. Romfrey when he questioned me. I did not volunteer it. I am ready to say that I believe Dr. Shrapnel did not intend to be insulting. I cannot say that he was not offensive.

You know, Miss Halkett, I would willingly, gladly have saved him from anything like punishment.'

'You are too gentle to have thought of it,' said Cecilia.

'But I shall never be forgiven by Captain Beauchamp. I see in his eyes that he accuses me and despises me.'

'He will not be so unjust, Mrs. Culling.'

Rosamund begged that she might hear what Nevil had first said on his arrival.

Cecilia related that they had seen him walking swiftly across the park, and that Mr. Romfrey had hailed him, and held his hand out; and that Captain Beauchamp had overlooked it, saying he feared Mr. Romfrey's work was complete. He had taken her father's hand and hers and his touch was like ice.

'His worship of that Dr. Shrapnel is extraordinary,' quoth Rosamund.
'And how did Mr. Romfrey behave to him?'

'My father thinks, very forbearingly.'

Rosamund sighed and made a semblance of wringing her hands. 'It seems to me that I anticipated ever since I heard of the man . . . or at least ever since I saw him and heard him, he would be the evil genius of us all: if I dare include myself. But I am not permitted to escape! And, Miss Halkett, can you tell me how it was that my name—that I became involved? I cannot imagine the circumstances which would bring me forward in this unhappy affair.'

Cecilia replied: 'The occasion was, that Captain Beauchamp so scornfully contrasted the sort of injury done by Dr. Shrapnel's defence of a poacher on his uncle's estate, with the severe chastisement inflicted by Mr. Romfrey in revenge for it. He would not leave the subject.'

'I see him—see his eyes!' cried Rosamund, her bosom heaving and sinking deep, as her conscience quavered within her. 'At last Mr. Romfrey mentioned me?'

'He stood up and said you had been personally insulted by Dr. Shrapnel.'

Rosamund meditated in a distressing doubt of her conscientious truthfulness.

'Captain Beauchamp will be coming to me; and how can I answer him? Heaven knows I would have shielded the poor man, if possible—poor wretch! Wicked though he is, one has only to hear of him suffering! But what can I answer? I do recollect now that Mr. Romfrey compelled me from question to question to confess that the man had vexed me. Insulted, I never said. At the worst, I said vexed. I would not have said insulted, or even offended, because Mr. Romfrey . . . ah! we know him. What I did say, I forget. I have no guide to what I said but my present feelings, and they are pity for the unfortunate man much more than dislike.—Well, I must go through the scene with Nevil!' Rosamund concluded her outcry of ostensible exculpation.

She asked in a cooler moment how it was that Captain Beauchamp had so far forgotten himself as to burst out on his uncle before the guests of the house. It appeared that he had wished his uncle to withdraw with him, and Mr. Romfrey had bidden him postpone private communications. Rosamund gathered from one or two words of Cecilia's that Mr. Romfrey, until finally stung by Nevil, had indulged in his best-humoured banter.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Alike believe that Providence is for them
Better for men of extremely opposite opinions not to meet
Convict it by instinct without the ceremony of a jury

Cowardice is even worse for nations than for individual men
Give our courage as hostage for the fulfilment of what we hope
Good maxim for the wrathful—speak not at all
Impossible for him to think that women thought
Leader accustomed to count ahead upon vapourish abstractions
Love, that has risen above emotion, quite independent of craving
Made of his creed a strait-jacket for humanity
Mankind is offended by heterodoxy in mean attire
May not one love, not craving to be beloved?
People with whom a mute conformity is as good as worship
Prayer for an object is the cajolery of an idol
Rebellion against society and advocacy of humanity run counter
Small things producing great consequences
That a mask is a concealment
The girl could not know her own mind, for she suited him exactly
The religion of this vast English middle-class—Comfort
The turn will come to us as to others—and go
Women must not be judging things out of their sphere

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