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A TRUE REFORMER



A

TRUE REFORMER



IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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A TRUE REFORMER.



CHAPTER I.

THE ENGLISH MAIL.

As we pass along the road of life, it often happens that some quite trivial circumstances that have occurred to us become printed on our memory, and this as if by chance—at any rate without our being able to account for the reason why we should be able to recollect them so vividly while forgetting so much that is more important. Some passing remark made by a brother or sister as we sat when children talking by the evening fire, years and years ago, or the chance observation of some visitor at the house, neither wise nor witty, these motley records of past life are ticketed off as if by random to be indelibly branded on the memory, while whole years of events are but indistinctly blurred upon it, and the very names and faces of later acquaintances have passed away out of remembrance.

It is not surprising, then, that I have a very vivid recollection of a scene which occurred at the turning point of my life, although itself quite without any influence over my fortunes, the event which brought about the change in them having happened some weeks before.

We were resting, a party of five, under the shade of a clump of acacia-trees in the lowlands bordering the great river, one or two lying at length, the others leaning on their elbows, all smoking, with the air of men who had earned a cigar and the breakfast of which some turbaned servants a few yards off were clearing away the fragments. A little further off some grooms with cloths round their waists for clothing were rubbing down the same number of horses with that hissing accompaniment supposed to be soothing to these animals in all climes, while as many more fresh steeds stood picketed by; the nature of our occupation was further explained by a bundle of spears resting against a tree, and in the background the carcass of a boar, with a cluster of villagers sitting by it, passing a hookah of primitive form round for each to take a pull in turn.

"Yes," said Middleton, adjusting his pith helmet for a pillow, and again assuming a recumbent position, with his hands behind his head to soften the cushion, and his two knees and one muddy jack-boot in the air, "that last pig was game, and so was that pie, and this cup would have been cooler if it

had been iced. Blunt, you lazy fellow, you're not half a caterer, to bring us into camp without any ice."

"I never saw such a fellow as Blunt," said Wynne, also recumbent, and with a handkerchief over his face to keep off the flies; "no green peas with the ducks last night, and no ice this morning."

"Too bad," chimed in Howell; "we must reprimand Blunt publicly if this sort of thing occurs again."

"The inefficiency of the commissariat department stands explained," continued Wynne, "when we know that young Blunt is considered rather by way of being an ornament to that branch of the service. Some one ought to write a sensation pamphlet: The Commissariat unveiled, or how Lieutenant Blunt forgot to order any ice."

"There's no pleasing some people," retorted the good-tempered man attacked; "I do all the work, and you do all the grumbling. Perhaps when you've all done talking you'll allow me to explain that I gave a positive order for twenty pounds of ice to be sent out every night with the bread. I dare say the runner has stopped on the way, and is coming up with the tents."

"Very likely, the lazy beggar," said Wynne; "and the ice will arrive just in time to be all melted. And those blessed tents ought to have been up before this. Why, I declare it's nearly nine o'clock, and the hot winds setting in like fury. Pig-sticking may

.

be very good fun, gentlemen, which I don't deny; but we're in for the hot weather, and no mistake. It strikes me that we ought to bring our brief but glorious campaign to a conclusion. We've done enough for honour. Thirteen pigs in four days is not bad."

"All very well for you to talk, my good sir," said Middleton, "with a six months' campaign in the hills before you; but think of us poor beggars who have to stop behind all the hot weather. I'd rather be out here in a tent any time, hot winds or no, with a good gallop to look forward to every morning, than be stewing all day in a stuffy kutcherry, listening to Ram Buksh & Co. perjuring themselves till they are nearly white in the face. You ought to have your leave stopped for your selfishness."

"You bloated civilians are never satisfied," retorted the other: "do you want to be paid an enormous salary and do nothing for it? Why should you grudge us poor soldiers our hard-earned holiday? Besides, we're of no use if we do stay. Idleness is the root of all evil, my good Middleton; think what a blessing a zealous joint-magistrate is to his country, and you'll find virtue will be its own reward."

"But then there's West here, who has to stop behind also without even being paid for it. Have you no bowels of mercy for him, that you send him back to stable duty and orderly-room before his time?"

"At any rate," broke in Howell, "I hope if we are

to stay out much longer in camp that we shan't be kept without our letters all the time. There never was such a forgetful fellow as you are, Blunt, to bring us out into camp and not lay a proper dawd for us."

"Wrong again," said the imperturbable Blunt; "a runner was to start from Sirdhanna last night; and in fact," he added, "if some gentlemen were blessed with eyes they might see him coming now."

All faces were turned in the direction indicated by Blunt's cigar, where, a few hundred yards off, a man was descried coming at a shambling run along the village path over the plain, a long stick over his shoulder, with a small bundle at the end of it. He was soon in front of our party, and after salaaming, squatted down on his haunches, and, untying his bundle, delivered the contents to the nearest of the recumbent group.

"One 'Englishman,' four 'Pioneers,' lots of letters for those who don't deserve them," said Wynne, to whom the office of sorter had fallen; "and, I do declare, here's the English mail too."

"A dun for you, West," said Howell, passing on a small letter to me, the red wafer on which, almost as large as the envelope, told its own tale. I did not need to open the letter to know that the manager of the Bank of Central India, Limited, begged to inform dear sir that the last monthly instalment on his loan was not yet paid, and that "his faithfully" requested

the favour of an early remittance. The missive conveyed almost as accurate information to the rest of the company.

"This looks like another," added Howell, as he handed me a large envelope with a big seal and the English postmark. "Retribution comes fast on your hoary young head, old West."

"West has got the lawyers down on him this time," said Middleton; "at any rate he finds his letter very interesting. But I wish the English papers had come on as well as the letters. I believe Blunt has been in league with that confounded postmaster, who keeps them back on purpose."

"Well, here's a 'Pioneer' 'extra,'" said Wynne, with a summary of the news; "but there doesn't appear to be much in it. Colonel Pyke has moved for a return of the cost of amalgamating the Indian army, distinguishing the proportion due to each branch of the service, and taking into account the substitution of breeches for overalls, as well as the increased revenue derived from the postage on soldiers' letters. Mr Jawset gives notice that he will move a resolution in the House at an early date for the establishment of representative government in India with equal electoral districts. It is understood that the Secretary of State for India is engaged upon a treatise on differential equations and the quantification of the predicate, which is to appear in monthly parts in the 'Sunday Story-Book.' A pamphlet has ap-

peared which is generally attributed to the leader of the Opposition, to prove the identity of interests between the Conservative party and The International. Mr Merrifield has addressed the electors of Woolwich at a public meeting. In a speech of five and a quarter hours he explained that his sentiments regarding the Irish question have lately undergone some modification, and now announced himself as in favour of a moderate scheme for the introduction of Home Rule into that country. The right honourable gentleman added that it was also open to consideration whether by disbanding our army we might not induce other nations to follow our example of forbearance, and thus inaugurate a system of mutual trust, opening the way for a reign of peace and goodwill on earth. We regret to announce the death of Lieutenant-General Sir Hector Jones, G.C.B., at the advanced age of 86 years. The gallant officer now deceased belonged to the Madras establishment of the East India Company's forces, and bore a distinguished part in many of the great achievements of that army, including the celebrated march into the Ceded Districts under the Collector of Canara, and the campaign against the Zemindars of Madura. Well, this is interesting, but brief. Details in our next, I suppose the old dawdler would say. Hay, old gentleman?"

The old peasant thus appealed to, who had remained hitherto squatting on his haunches just outside our

circle, raised his hands before him in the attitude of prayer, and with a deprecating smile muttered a remark in the vernacular to the effect that Captain Wynne was his father and his mother. This interlude reminded our caterer Blunt that the courier had not been paid, so his bearer was summoned from the distance; and the old man, made happy with eighteenpence, or sixpence more than his proper fare, made his salaam to the company, and, shouldering his stick, set off to shamble back over the thirty miles he had just traversed.

The tents, which had come up while we were discussing the papers, were now pitched, the servants had got our dressing-things ready, and the water-carriers stood ready with their sheepskins of water on their shoulders, ready to pour the grateful contents over their masters when divested of their hunting-clothes.

"Now then," said Middleton, "a bath and a nap before it gets too hot to sleep, and let us have the horses ready at five. It's no good thinking of lunch in this roaring hot wind that's getting up, so we shall all be light and fresh for another shy at the pigs this afternoon. So, Blunt, mind you let us have a good dinner, and while we are asleep you might as well cool some soda-water."

I then announced my intention of returning at once to Sirdhanna.

Every one understood that my sudden resolution

must be due to the news contained in my English letter, and the announcement was received without comment, but they all protested against my starting off in the middle of the day. "You'll be smothered by the dust, man, not to mention the sun," said Howell, "if you don't wait till the wind goes down. Besides, you can't ride one horse all the way. Send on your fresh horse in the afternoon half-way, and ride mine for the first stage out, and then you can get into the station well before dark." And this plan seemed too good not to follow.

A day passed during the hot winds in a small tent on the sandy banks of the Ganges is never likely to be of the shortest, but on this day reading and sleep were alike impossible, nor could I even sit still; and as a room ten feet square hardly admits of walking, I was obliged to seek the best shelter I could in the plain outside, and pace up and down restlessly through the long hours. But even the longest day must come to an end; and at five o'clock, when the horses were saddled for the evening's sport, I too mounted for my ride to cantonments.

"I did not like to disturb you," said Wynne, who, although he shared my tent, passed the day in Blunt's, "but I saw that name in the list of deaths in the English summary, and thought you might like to be alone. I hope it's not a very near relative, old fellow; but you seemed a good deal cut up about it."

Had I then been acting like a hypocrite? for assuredly

grief was not among the emotions which possessed me. It *was* a near relation, I replied, but we had not been intimate. It was not this had startled me so much as other news received by letter, and which required me to return to cantonments. The fact was, if the news now received was confirmed by subsequent mails, it would appear that I should benefit very largely by the death of this relation. Would he take an opportunity of mentioning this to the rest of the party, asking them not to let it go farther at present, as I did not know how far the news was authentic? And wishing them all good-bye and good sport I rode off. Except Blunt, I never saw any of them again. Middleton sleeps in an Indian cemetery; Wynne was killed two years later in a skirmish on the frontier; Howell was a passenger in a steamer which left Calcutta for Rangoon the day before the great cyclone, and was never heard of afterwards. It would take even a greater change of life or fortunes than befell me to efface the sense of loss their deaths have caused. For although our intimacy was brought about more by the chance which throws people together for a brief season in that land of change and movement, than by any special affinity of taste, who could help growing to like such men as these, so brave, so generous, so light-hearted, two of them at least so clever? Theirs, too, was the really engaging age, when the selfishness and conceit of youth have worn off, and before we get to be crusted over with

the hardness and cynicism of middle age. And, alas! as we grow older, the capacity for forming new friendships no longer remains with us. We cannot, even if we would, fill up the ever-increasing gaps time makes in the ranks of those we have learned to love.

CHAPTER II.

OPENS UP A NEW SCHEME OF LIFE.

THE contents of the English letter had indeed been sufficient to startle and excite; and as I had plenty of leisure to read it over and over again, both during that day and afterwards, I can even now give its contents *verbatim* from memory. It ran as follows:—

“GRACECHURCH STREET, E.C.,

“*March 18th.*

“DEAR SIR,—We write to apprise you that your uncle, Mr James West, of Old Broad Street, and The Retreat, Twickenham, died at the latter place on Tuesday last the 15th instant, of bronchitis. By his last will, dated the 20th November, Mr West bequeathed the whole of his property, after payment of certain legacies, to you, his only surviving nephew—appointing his friend, our Mr Paterson, executor to the estate. Mr Paterson will accordingly proceed to take out a probate in due course, as well as to carry out the other measures necessary under the circumstances; but as he will have to obtain your

early instructions on various points, we think it is extremely desirable that you should return home as quickly as possible. We beg to add that, in case you should be in immediate want of funds, we have instructed the Asiatic Bank to authorise their Calcutta Branch to honour your drafts to the extent of five hundred (£500) pounds.

“We write in haste by the first outgoing mail. Mr Paterson will communicate further particulars in due course, and we will therefore merely add that your late uncle’s property consists principally of house property near Twickenham, and railway and miscellaneous stock, producing a present income of about three thousand (£3500) five hundred pounds per annum.

“Awaiting your further commands, we are, dear sir, your faithful and obedient servants,

“PATERSON, HERRIES, & CROUCH.”

“To Captain CHARLES WEST,
Royal Horse Artillery,
Sirdhanna, East Indies.”

A suspicion that the letter might be a hoax was refuted by the genuine appearance of the English post-mark, still more by the fact that none of my present acquaintance were aware of my having an uncle, whose existence indeed had almost escaped my recollection for many years. My father and he had had some serious difference which kept them apart, and after my father’s death the breach ex-

tended to my poor mother. I remember to have seen my uncle only once, when he invited me down to Twickenham once for a couple of days when I was at school, but apparently I did not take his fancy, for he never renewed the invitation, and the only notice he ever after took of me was to send my mother a hundred guineas for my outfit when I got my commission, with a cold letter that discouraged any advances on our part. I had heard nothing more of him until now. But any doubt remaining on the subject was finally set at rest by a telegram from the Asiatic Bank the following day, in reply to one despatched on my arrival at Sirdhanna, which announced that the five thousand and odd rupees, the equivalent of £500, were actually at my disposal.

A thirty-mile ride was needed to cool down my brain after the excitement created by this news; but even this exercise, and the succeeding bath and dinner, did not suffice for the purpose. The cantonment air seemed stuffy compared with that of the open plain by the river, and my little bungalow was hot and close for sleeping in after a tent awning, and I lay tossing about all night revolving in my mind this strange turn of fortune. It was not that I cared for money more than other men, and few soldiers were more devoted to their profession; it was not the money to spend, but what it freed me from, and the possibilities it opened

up to view, that filled my brain with excitement, and made swallowing difficult. The youngest captain in the regiment of those posted to the horse artillery, and just now in temporary command of a crack battery, my lot must have appeared a thoroughly enviable one to every youngster in the regiment; and although I had nothing but my pay, most of my brother officers were in the same case, and Indian horse-artillery allowances suffice with prudence and good management for all ordinary wants. But then, as happened with so many others, the whole of this income was not available. A couple of chargers bought, a new outfit on joining my battery, an illness which drove me on six months' leave to the hills the previous year; and I found myself five thousand rupees in debt, which, to get rid of the worry of numerous duns, I had paid off in the usual fashion by a loan from a local bank, that existed mainly by lending money to officers on slight security and high interest. Twelve per cent for the loan, and six per cent for an assurance on double the amount, made an annual charge of nearly a thousand rupees a-year; and while the bond specified, according to the usual formula, that the loan was to be repaid in three years by monthly instalments, the equally common result came about, that I was paying eighty rupees a-month, the utmost I could with difficulty spare out of my pay, while the capital debt remained undiminished, and was

likely to continue so. The only chance of ever clearing it off appeared to be by leaving my regiment and obtaining some appointment which would admit of reduced present expenditure, with the prospect of eventually rising to a higher income than could be earned in the artillery—in other words, to give up my profession, for an Indian Staff Corps officer employed as a magistrate, or on the canals, or in the multifarious departments of government, is a soldier merely in name. But even this move would not bring all the relief I sought. The visit to the Himalayas of the previous year had wrought the change which comes over every man at some time of his life. Soldiering, study, or sport, the things which had before made the business of life, were now hardly distractions. Behind all remained the one unsatisfied longing, the dream always present of happiness that could not be mine. Genteel poverty is well enough for a bachelor, but I had seen enough of its effect on married life in India to know what in this predicament was my real duty. My resolve might be put down to cold-blooded prudence, but it would be really a bad form of selfishness to take advantage of the unreflecting impulse to self-sacrifice which so often actuates a woman, and to condemn the one I loved to poverty in the tropics. From the first day of marriage the difficulty makes itself felt; and even if love is strong enough to conquer the daily and hourly struggles and calls for self-

denial, when two people have to live on what is meant for only one, no love can stave off the inevitable loss of refinement which must take place if the family grows larger while the little purse stands still. There are degrees in these things; but a captain's wife in a marching regiment, with a large family, can no more remain what she was, than can Polly Jones the pretty little gunner's wife, who has to sleep in the same barrack-room with a couple of dozen soldiers, and merely a bit of curtain round her bed. Some people, happily for them, have no imagination; but for my part I could not help looking forward into the future; and old Tony Dawson, one of our senior captains, who commanded a field-battery at Sirdhanna, always appeared to me typical of what my fate might be if I plunged into matrimony on four hundred rupees a-month. Everybody said Dawson had been a capital soldier in his day, and he was a good soldier now; but he could hardly be said to belong to the regiment. He certainly "took it out" of the mess as much as he could without running up a bill there, being obliged to subscribe to it; but he had never been known to dine there, and he was obliged to get off all subscriptions, even that for the annual Christmas treat to the soldiers' children. Then he drove his charger in his old buggy, a venerable beast, which the inspector of artillery, if he had done his duty, would have condemned long ago as unfit for even a field-battery;

and the poor old fellow had not taken a day's leave for ten years. His income was not such a bad one now that he commanded a battery, and his promotion was due in a few years; but he had got into debt early in life and had been "in the banks" ever since. But his case was nothing to that of his wife. Mrs Dawson had been the belle of Calcutta, it was said, before she married, and she would have looked a handsome woman even now if she had ever been decently dressed; and rumour had it that she had been a fine player and singer—although, as she had never had the chance of touching a piano for many years, there were no means of verifying this ancient tradition; but the stray visitors who had penetrated to the interior of Dawson's bungalow had never seen her otherwise than in a dirty-looking wrapper, her rather full figure apparently devoid of any physical support in the way of stays, and with her thick black hair tied up in a knot at the back of her head. The said bungalow swarmed with children, the eldest a longlegged hobbledehoy who had been brought up at a school in the hills, and was now hanging about Sirdhanna, waiting for some chance appointment in the uncovenanted service which should involve no examination, competitive or otherwise; then came a girl said to be only fifteen, but who looked like a woman, whom her father occasionally of an evening took for a drive on the mall in the old buggy, and who, it was generally supposed, could not write her

own name; after her followed an indefinite number of boys and girls, who might be seen any morning by the passer-by playing about the desolate strip of gravel round the house which had once been a flower-garden, half-dressed, chattering in Hindustani, and attended by a sweeper-looking fellow with a dirty skull-cap on his head, who did duty for child's bearer. Poor old Dawson! the only happy time he ever seemed to have was when his battery marched on relief from one station to another. He then joined the camp mess and lived like a bachelor, sending his family on by dawk, and was said to be quite a different man during his short respite from domestic cares, taking his glass of gin-and-water after dinner, and chatting about the days of Aliwal and Chillianwallah, where he had served as a smart subaltern in the horse artillery.

Everybody, it is true, need not be overrun by children and debt as was this grey-headed old captain; but such was the ideal towards which it seemed to me marriage and debt always more or less tended, and I would not drag down the girl I loved in this fashion even should she be ready to make the sacrifice. True, there was the possibility of civil employment: every man in India could get the appointment he wanted if he only took trouble enough, and I was what little Jones, one of our battery subalterns used to call a "dab" at the language; but even then one must begin on a small salary and

wait. It would take me three or four years merely to get out of debt; and even if the parents would agree, could I in fairness ask a young girl to wait that time, wearing out her first freshness for such an uncertain future? And then to have the affair discussed circumstantially at every dinner-table in Sirmoori, and to be ticketed off as a sort of artillery Jacob, on probation for four or five years, while my Rachel would be reminded every hour by Laban how foolish she was to throw herself away in a long engagement with such a poor match for the climax. And then the professional sacrifice! A captain of horse artillery without encumbrances is a man of some consideration: an assistant commissioner or junior commissariat officer is a very different sort of personage, especially if he enters a department late in life as junior to much younger men.

Such thoughts as these had occupied many an hour at Sirmoori in the previous summer. More than once, when under the sweet spell of Eva's presence, was I tempted to throw prudence aside: at such moments it seemed as if all calculation were but selfish meanness, and that love was the only thing worth living for; but with separation came back the whisperings of caution, and in the solitude of one still starlight night, after a meeting where she seemed more charming and winning than ever, and I was vain enough to think I had only to say one word to be sure of this sweet prize, the resolution

was formed, as I looked from the balcony of my room over the mountain-slopes to the nook where nestled the cottage that made her home, to carry self-denial into love. But now all was possible. Love and marriage, without sacrifice or remorse, and what is more, a vision of a future, which hitherto had seemed an idle dream, began now to take a tangible shape.

It was not a difficult matter to obtain a month's leave, for although the notion of a man going to the hills on "urgent private affairs" was ordinarily regarded as a joke, the fact that a needy captain was ready to renounce such a piece of luck as the command of his battery for six months, was sufficient evidence of his being in earnest. The colonel and brigadier were both propitious; and making over charge to the senior subaltern, who, never having been in command of the battery before, was quite unable by his profession of regrets at losing my company to conceal the pleasure he felt, I started off by the night train. For a wonder there was no breakdown on the line that night, and I reached the foot of the mountains by breakfast-time next morning. It being early in the season, the stage ponies over which the next forty miles had to be traversed still possessed four legs apiece, and the vestiges of saddles and bridles; and without exhibiting extreme cruelty I managed to climb the last great hillside

soon after sunset, and to excite the poor beast I bestrode into what did duty for a canter along the wooded crest of the mountain ; and, passing in the twilight through the main road of the sanitarium and various groups of residents returning from their evening walks and rides, found myself sitting down in boots and breeches at the eight o'clock *table d'hôte* dinner of the Himalaya Club.

There was to be a ball that night, given by the residents of Sirmoori to the wife of the Lord High Commissioner, to which of course everybody was going. I could not go from want of an invitation, and because, moreover, the porters had not arrived with my baggage. For the same reason I could not go to bed, for the furniture of the club-rooms did not include bedding ; and while awaiting the arrival of my own, I joined a party of old stagers who preferred whist to dancing. They were men who were ready to go on playing for ever, and my taste for the moment fitted in with theirs, for I was still too excited to want sleep. Thus we all played on till the early morning, when the ball-goers began to return, a few of whom looked in at the public rooms, calling for "pegs," and declaring that they were quite fresh, and ready to cut in for a hand before going to bed.

Some three or four fell to smoking in easy chairs in the balcony, discussing jerkily between puffs of tobacco the events of the evening. It was the best ball of the season ; the best of any season ; the

Marchioness was evidently pleased with her reception. There were more pretty girls than usual at Sirmoori.

"Yes," said some one, "and the divine Eva looked more beautiful than ever. In my humble opinion, the spins of last year cut out the new importations hollow."

"Yes; and did you see the expression of old Brooke's face when she danced with him? There was a sickly grin of self-satisfaction on it which was positively awful. We shall see him dancing round dances soon if he meets with so much encouragement."

"That's not a 'case,' depend on it," said the first speaker; "there are limits beyond which no woman can sell herself."

"Limits not reached there, my dear boy, so far as mamma is concerned. I thought she looked particularly pleased last night, and the young lady herself did not appear very unhappy. She responded very affably to old Brooke's grins."

"Oh," rejoined the other, "that's merely her good-nature; she looks sweet all round. Like her mother, she has a kind word for everybody."

Now, Sir William Brooke was the governor of a province upon leave at Sirmoori; a man with a good private fortune, and a salary of ever so many thousand rupees a-month. Moreover, he was only about ten years older than myself, and had not more than half-a-dozen children. But these encumbrances were at home and out of sight, and he was to all intents

and purposes a bachelor, at any rate until his eldest daughter should be grown up and come out to him ; meanwhile he was a confirmed flirt, always dangling after some pretty girl, and giving sumptuous archery and croquet parties, with splendid prizes of jewellery to be shot or played for ; but whether he meant never to do more than flirt, or whether it was that even a governor's salary, with the conditions attached to it, was not sufficiently attractive, certain it was that, although year after year he found some excuse for coming up to Sirmoori—now a proposal for a tax on bangles, now a scheme for a new mode of Hindustani pronunciation, to be discussed with the Lord High Commissioner—the croquet-parties and the prize-giving went on, and he still remained a bachelor, or rather a widower.

Yet this loose talk was quite enough to disconcert me. It was broad daylight when I got to my room, and the crests of the hills were lighted up with the rosy hues of coming day, as I looked from the balcony over to the mountain-side opposite, dotted with pine-roofed cottages peeping out among the trees. It was on such a morning that I quitted the sanitarium last autumn, armed with self-denial, leaving hope behind me. Now everything seemed possible. But the conversation just repeated was tingling in my ears, and came to throw its horrid doubts over the future—I might be too late.

My luggage had arrived during the night, and my

old servant had unpacked my things and made my bed, and now lay coiled up in his blanket on the floor of the balcony, sleeping the sleep of the just man who has walked forty miles over the mountains. I tried for some time to follow his example; but, notwithstanding two almost sleepless nights before, and the ride and the whist, sleep was still hard to woo; turn which way I might, the image of Sir William pulling the long points of his mustaches and grinning over the croquet-balls rose before me, with a bevy of young ladies playing for a bracelet, and one face surpassing all. "She smiled sweetly at him," said the club gossips. I fancied her smiling now, sweetly of course; she could not look otherwise. What if my change of fortune came too late? Well, there still remained the other dream to realise. Thus passed the hours, bringing their torture of doubts; it is needless to detail them; every lover can understand what I underwent without description. At last nature came to the rescue, and I fell asleep.

CHAPTER III.

I TRY MY LUCK AT AN OLD GAME.

IT was nearly two o'clock when I awoke, and the Marchioness of Killarney's garden-party at Vallombrosa was to take place at four: there was little more than sufficient time to obtain the needful invitation, through a note despatched to a friendly equerry-in-waiting, and to dress, breakfast, and set off on a hired pony to the place of meeting.

The little glen which had been dubbed with the name of Vallombrosa by the English residents at the sanitarium, was one of the few valleys to be met with in the Himalaya, and lay several hundred feet below the crest of the ridge, almost hidden in its setting of lofty cedars with which the mountain-sides were clothed. At the bottom were a few acres of what by comparison might almost be called level ground, occupied by a straggling jungle dignified by the title of botanical garden, and a piece of green turf available for cricket and lawn games, the whole surrounded by a gravel path which did duty for a race-

course, with a hill in one part, suggestive of the further end of Epsom below the starting-point as seen under the influence of nightmare. Here, where the wooded heights gave a sunset at two o'clock, a broad strip of shade, the true Indian luxury, was already spread across the turf, and under its grateful shelter were scattered groups of visitors engaged in the various strife of archery, bowls, and croquet, or looking on at the players. The whole panorama, viewed as the visitor descended from the mountain-path above it, formed as pretty a picture as could well be conceived, the fresh summer dresses of the ladies on the green lawn, set off by the scarlet tunics of the attendants serving refreshments, with the noble forest background of the mountain-side. But this was not what occupied my thoughts at the time. First paying my respects to the Marchioness, I passed on, exchanging greetings with acquaintances scattered over the grounds, in search of the one person I had come to see. There is Mrs Barton talking to the Lord High Commissioner; and I stepped up to speak to them. His lordship greeted me in his usual genial fashion, and the lady was polite, and even kindly, as was her fashion, although I thought she gave a little start which was hardly of surprise; but the presence of the Lord High Commissioner was a sufficient excuse for passing on, and I hurried away after shaking hands. Ah! there she is; only one woman in the world could walk with that grace.

The arrows had been fired, and the fair archers were moving across to the targets, a dozen of them, perhaps, with as many men, and a sprinkling of other ladies, and among them a young girl, gentle and modest, yet who moved like a queen. An escort of gentlemen accompanied her, of whom one was Brooke, carrying the quiver. Does she smile sweetly on him, as those young rascals said? Yes, there can be no doubt of that; but the other danglers seem to come off just as well. Eva could not frown at anybody.

“Now then, Miss Barton, this is the critical point; you know you were allowed fifty points in consideration of your—ahem—your youth and inexperience, so you’ve only to hit the target once to win.”

“Oh, Sir William Brooke, it’s no use giving advice, for I haven’t the strength of a mouse; it’s quite impossible to shoot these long distances; at Toghluabad they always allow me to stand half-way up to the target.”

“Ah! Miss Barton, we are horribly strict up here, and I’m afraid we couldn’t break through the rules to that extent even for you. Do you know, I really wish we could, though, upon my word.”

So much I heard, and then joined the party. What means that little start, and that blush? Pleasure? or shame at detection? At any rate this evening shall solve the problem.

First greetings over, I fell back among the spec-

tators, and the shooting went on. There were civil nothings to be said all round, for to arrive at the hills as May begins is fair matter of congratulation, and even from Sirdhanna the traveller brings some news. But, looking on between the intervals of talking, it was easy to see that Miss Barton's depreciation of her shooting powers was not exaggerated, at any rate on the present occasion. Her slender fingers seemed hardly able to hold the bow, and the arrows went in any direction but the right one, and scarce half-way across the course. Even Brooke found it difficult to pay appropriate compliments.

But the longest party that ever took place must have an end ; already a string of returning visitors was dotting the path up the mountain-side, ladies in their sedans, gentlemen on horseback ; and the particular group whose proceedings I was watching began to prepare for departure. At this moment I discovered that my pony and its attendant were missing, and I had to search for some time through the garden before finding them, when all the party had started. It was easy to overtake them, however ; the bearers could not carry their fair burdens very fast up that steep path, and the exigencies of limited width involved considerable straggling and slackening of speed of those in rear. One person after another was soon passed : a solitary horseman enjoying his evening cigar ; a couple of ladies in confidential chat, their chairs side by side ; groups

of twos and threes were overtaken in turn, when, before the object of my search was reached, I beheld at a turn in the path just in front of me a blaze of red. It was the scarlet liveries of the Lord High Commissioner's runners, four of them carrying the Marchioness, while half-a-dozen more, headed by a big fellow with a mace, surrounded the chair. Here was a difficulty. Etiquette forbade my riding past, and these scoundrels in red blocked up the path, and prevented my riding up alongside of the chair. This post was occupied by a stout Member of Senate, who preferred his own legs to those of a pony in the neighbourhood of these precipices. He was holding on to the side of the chair, and his part of the conversation seemed to be carried on with difficulty in consequence of the pace; and indeed four miles an hour at a gradient of one in seven will try the wind of most stout middle-aged gentlemen. A sharp turn in the path brought me into view of her ladyship as I rode behind, and a salutation was the signal for riding up and occupying the other side of the sedan. Scarcely a minute had passed before the conversation led up to an opportunity. What a pretty bracelet that was Sir William Brooke gave as his prize, said the Marchioness. She wondered if he had ordered it from home or had got it at the jeweller's here. She wanted to ask him.

"He's just in front, your ladyship; I'll send him back to you to answer the question," I cried; and

without waiting for any response I rammed my spurs into the old pony, and pushed through the red attendants. Almost the next sedan I overtook, not fifty yards in advance, was that I was in search of, and riding beside it, sure enough, was Brooke. I pushed up to the other side.

Now just at this spot there was room for the two horses as well as the sedan ; but immediately ahead the path narrowed ; and as Brooke, like a sensible fellow, had taken the inside, I should either have to give way or run a good chance of going over the precipice. There was no time to be lost. "Sir William Brooke," I said, "the Marchioness wants particularly to speak to you ; she's just behind : " and Sir William, unsuspecting of my treachery, made a temporary adieu, and, reining up, turned his pony round and moved down the path again. Now then came my chance, and there was not a moment to spare. Already half the hill was accomplished. A short way ahead was a cluster of riders and sedans, in one of which I thought I could distinguish even in the dusky twilight Mrs Barton's pretty bonnet, while the red men with their burden must be coming up hand over hand. Every moment was precious. Yet the situation was not favourable for a love-scene. The sedans affected by the ladies of Sirmoori are like a lounging-chair suspended on the centre of a pair of shafts which are carried by four men. These simple rustics understand not a word of English, but the

language of love is not always spoken ; and a lover might well desire some other conditions for a declaration. Why then not wait? Was it that I feared for myself lest presence might weaken the impression absence had formed on her imagination? or did some inward whispering of conscience say that fancy was leading where reason could not follow? If this young heart could really be mine for the asking, would it be for the happiness of both to take the gift? Was it in my nature to make this gentle, simple girl really happy? Some such uneasy questionings passed through my mind, but I was too reckless, too selfish if you will, to listen to them. One look at that sweet face was enough to banish prudence. Another moment and the die was cast.

A minute passed in silence, broken only by the low grunting of the bearers as they shuffled along with their burden. Then Eva spoke first:—My coming up to the hills was unexpected, surely. She had heard that I intended to stay down in the plains this season. This in a low voice, and looking straight before her.

“So I did,” I replied, “but I could not keep to my resolution. And you must know why I have come. Because I could not stay away from you.”

No answer followed, and, for a few seconds, bearers and all, we moved on in silence.

One little hand rested on the shaft of the sedan — the left hand, the one nearest me. Stooping

down, I placed my own on it, and it was not withdrawn.

“Look at me, Eva!” I said, “and let me see that I am the happiest man alive.”

Then Eva looked round, blushing, with half-averted face and downcast eyes, and the slender fingers gave an answer to my question. I dared not raise them to my lips, strong though the temptation was to forget our company.

A few moments more, as it seemed, brought us to the top of the hill, where our path joined the main road, and there was room for a large party to keep together; and here Mrs Barton was waiting for Eva to join her; but this was not before Lady Killarney and Brooke had overtaken us. What explanations had passed regarding my message I know not, but I thought her ladyship looked slyly at us as she came up. Brooke showed no signs of vexation; he was always on too good terms with himself to be put out at anything. “Good evening, Miss Barton,” he said, as we came to the point where the road to his house turned off. “We’ve had a delightful evening, I’m sure; I only hope that next time you’ll be more successful. Upon my word, you really only want practice to shoot very well, I assure you.”

“You’ll come the first thing to-morrow, won’t you?” whispered Eva, as we reached the point where the path led up to her mother’s house. “Mamma will be dreadfully angry, I know; you must come

and speak to her first." And with this understanding I rode off to the club.

Strangely enough, there was not even a carpet dance that evening at Sirmoori, and after dinner the card-room was filled with whist-players. Contrary to my usual habit, I joined one of the tables where high points were in force, and cut in for a game, the other players being an old colonel of a line regiment who lived on his whist, an assistant-surgeon who intended to do the same but had so far not succeeded, and two youngsters spending their first season in the hills, one of whom promised to be a fine player by-and-by, the other hopelessly bad. But I was in luck on this evening : whichever way we cut, my partner and I always won ; and by midnight the colonel had come out quits ; the assistant-surgeon had gone to bed, the night being evidently unpropitious for his fortunes, leaving an I O U for about a month's pay behind him in my pocket ; the other two between them owed me about seventy pounds. The poor lads hid their chagrin under good-natured congratulations at my success, naturally thinking the gain was of as much consequence to me as the loss was to them ; while I went off to bed, puzzled to think how, without giving offence, I might let them off a debt they certainly had not the present means of paying. Now that the matter was of little personal consequence, I was struck as I had never been before with the folly of the custom which permits these high stakes, so

far beyond the means of the players, and this prostitution of a noble game to mere gambling. The amount of the points does not matter, say some men, because at whist luck is equalised in the long-run. But then this cycle sometimes takes ten or fifteen years to accomplish, and everybody cannot afford to wait so long. At any rate, my short run, and the lugubrious hilarity of the youngsters who had contributed to it, made such an impression on me that I have never played for money since.

CHAPTER IV.

DIPLOMATIC.

NEXT morning at half-past ten I rode up the path which led to Mrs Barton's cottage. Her drawing-room would certainly be crowded with visitors from eleven till two, some of whom would be sure to stay for lunch and remain pottering about all the afternoon; so my only chance of securing a few words alone lay in coming early. In a few minutes she entered the room.

"Good morning, Captain West," she said; "this is very kind of you to come so soon to see us." But it was easy to infer from her voice that my early visit was not particularly agreeable, while I thought I could detect a sort of good-natured pity mingled with apprehension, as much as to say that she saw through my little game, and that it was no good trying it on.

There was no time to be lost, for another visitor might arrive at any moment. "Mrs Barton," I said, "I have come so early because I have something im-

portant to say. Last night I proposed to your daughter, and she accepted me."

The announcement evidently took the good lady by surprise. That she had suspected me as a possible lover was evident, but I don't think I was regarded as a dangerous one, perhaps because of my long face and nose, and because I never danced. That I should have gone to the length of making an offer, and a successful one—this revelation evidently came like a shock. She sank down on the sofa behind her trembling and speechless, looking mutely in my face.

I knew what was coming; the simple stock phrases that would be used as soon as the power of words returned; and it would save time to anticipate objections no longer applicable. I therefore added abruptly that I had another communication to make. Private business of a rather pressing nature required my presence in England, and therefore I had further to ask that an early day might be fixed for the wedding, so that we might start off homewards as soon as I could obtain furlough.

This announcement had just the effect I desired. Taking furlough signifies, for a married man, the possession of at least three or four hundred pounds in hard cash. I could perceive that my position was accordingly at once shifted in the good lady's estimation out of the category of complete ineligible. To talk about starting on furlough in this confident

manner was almost the next thing to laying down a bag of money on the floor as evidence of financial respectability, for such affairs as specific marriage settlements had never come within her experience. Still I could see traces of incredulity lingering in her face. How as to the rumours of my being "in the banks"? Had not Morrison, who was one of the directors of the Central India, told her that I had borrowed five thousand rupees from it only last year, to get away from Sirmoori, Roberts and Williamson of my regiment going security, and that Williamson had simultaneously raised the same amount from the Great Mogul Bank on the joint security of Roberts and myself? Had she not heard these accounts from the most authentic of gossips? yet, if I was not a thorough impostor, they must be untrue.

Such questions as these I could read in the conflict of doubt displayed on Mrs Barton's face, as she sat opposite to me, trying to gain time with unmeaning nothings for making up her mind.

Just then was heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs coming up the pathway. If another visitor entered just now, the battle would have to be fought over again from the beginning. I stepped toward the door, and calling for a servant was answered by the domestic tailor, who was sitting in the verandah employed upon a ball-dress for Eva, holding one end of the skirt down to the floor between his toes while he stitched away at the other. I told him to say the

door "was closed," which vernacular message—the Indian equivalent for our more euphemistic "not at home"—he communicated to the visitor, and shortly returned with his card, while the sound of the retiring horse soon died away in the distance.

Mrs Barton remained sitting on the sofa while this interlude was enacted: my move was so sudden that she had not time to stop it, and the battle was now as good as won. There remained merely the commonplace objections to be raised—Eva's youth, the suddenness of the affair, and so forth. No girl, she said, ought to be married till she was nineteen. Now, as Emma, an elder sister, had been married before she was eighteen, and Sophy, another sister, only a month or two after she reached this age, I had no misgiving on that score; and as our conversation went on it was evident that my future mamma-in-law was divided between the desire to indulge in the most interesting of gossip, while plunging into the delicious excitement of another wedding, and the fear lest, in her good-nature and too easy trustfulness, she should be doing badly for her daughter. Such anxiety was reasonable, for Sophy and her husband had a regular struggle to live; and if Mary had done well in marrying a chief-court judge, and Emma a well-to-do civil engineer, and Fanny a civilian high up in the civil service, there was poor Harriet on the other hand, whose husband, although also in the civil service and a full collector, had turned out to be

deeply in debt, and was such a screw that he would not let her come up to the hills, or even allow her a decent carriage. Two of the prettiest girls that ever came to India had thus been literally thrown away from want of caution ; it was only natural she should be careful now.

At last a hint rather more strongly expressed than what had gone before gave me the opportunity of playing my last card. "Then, Captain West," she said, "you know one has to think of the expense of marriage, so that I really hardly know what to say."

"Exactly so," I replied. "I know how much expense you and Mr Barton have been put to in this way, and therefore I should take it as a particular favour if he would allow me to defray, or at any rate to advance, whatever amount might be needed for this occasion."

I had quite misunderstood her, she answered—as indeed I had pretended to ; she referred to the cost of married housekeeping for young couples: besides, Joe would never hear of such a thing as any one else paying for his daughter's wedding outfit. This I knew perfectly well, but my bolt had hit the mark. I could see that the easy way in which I had proposed my account should be drawn upon had removed any lingering doubt as to the authenticity of the gossip about my bank debts. Finally Mrs Barton got out of her dilemma by a compromise, which in fact assured my victory. "Well, Captain West," she

said at last, looking up smiling through her tears as I stood before her, "I really hardly know what to say. Eva is so young, and the whole thing is so sudden; and although I don't want to say anything against the Artillery, which I know is a very fine service, and your character stands so high that I am sure my dear girl will be quite safe with you; at any rate I must ask her father's consent. It would not be proper, as you must see, to let my girl engage herself without her father's approval. So if I bring Eva to you, you will understand it is not to be a regular engagement, won't you?" So saying, and giving me a still very pretty hand, smiling in deprecating fashion, and wiping her eyes, and repeating this caution, Mrs Barton got up and left the room, to return presently followed by the prettiest girl in the world, and never looking prettier than in this robe of blushes, the timid downcast eyes beneath the gentle brow and soft brown wavy hair.

That three persons make no company was never better exemplified than on this occasion. In her mamma's presence Eva was shy and I felt awkward, while Mrs Barton was at best somewhat incoherent in attempts to explain her definitions of a "regular engagement." She soon withdrew, however, to go through the form of consulting "Joe," an operation which fortunately lasted till lunch-time, and gave Eva the opportunity of overcoming the first shyness which every woman must feel on first meeting an

affianced lover who is yet almost a stranger to her. What made my darling take a fancy to my long melancholy face I cannot tell, and I think she was still half-frightened at me ; but by the time our *tête-à-tête* was interrupted we were on better terms. And then was seen the first intimation of the confidential footing my reception had assumed ; for at luncheon bitter beer replaced the light wines which had appeared on the previous occasions of my lunching here. I had never seen Eva drink beer before, but we all preferred it to anything else. It was a very cosy meal. Eva said little, but her mamma was a good talker, and possessed the true politeness of amiability, a desire to please. Besides, here was a new-comer who had only just arrived, and had heard none of the Sirmoori gossip. I think this alone would have reconciled Mrs Barton to the engagement ; so good a listener was not to be found in the place, and now I should be available at all hours as a recipient of her confidences.

At four o'clock I had to go away and write letters for the post ; it was agreed, too, that, under present circumstances, it would be properer to meet as mere ordinary acquaintances in the evening than to set out together for our walk. Accordingly we met again on the road which winds round the crest of the mountain, and is dignified by the title of The Mall. Here, instead of walking separately with Eva, I walked between the two sedans, at any rate in the

beginning. Eventually Mrs Barton dropped behind to chat with another lady, and Eva and I pushed on ahead, and of course were joined by half-a-dozen dangles, the Mall being very crowded at this season. People, however, for the most part, looked askance at us, and at night a friend at the club took the liberty of hinting the cause. Sundry visitors who called at Rhododendron Lodge during the day having found the door "closed," and my pony standing before the house,—the brute being a white-nosed piebald with an evil eye, and in constant requisition at the club, was unmistakable—there could, he hinted, be only one inference.

But the next day was decisive. On the previous evening Mrs Barton and Eva were engaged to dine out; and the following day I had to attend a levee, and various cross engagements kept us apart till the evening, when I joined them again for their promenade, and managed to lag behind with Eva; and this time everybody avoided us as if we had the plague. There could be no mistake about the meaning of this. We were clearly marked off as an engaged couple, and all Mrs Barton's precautions and injunctions had come to nought. I put this down at first to the piebald pony, but wondered that even Sir-moori gossip should travel so fast; it soon came out, however, that there was a simpler explanation. I might have known, indeed, that the keeping such a secret was quite beyond Mrs Barton's powers. A

secret with her was apparently only valuable as giving you priority of news: what was the good of having something to tell, if you are not to tell it? Hence it was that the residents at Toghluhabad, where the family passed the cold season, Mr Barton being the commissioner of that important place, were almost as well acquainted with "Joe's" little weaknesses as the wife of his bosom; the difficulty of getting him to remit money home for the children's schooling; how Mary, from this cause, came out a year later than was intended, after her outfit and everything was procured, her aunt in England being unable to pay for her passage; how the English horse died of inflammation because he would not be at the trouble of giving it a dose of physic; how, in short, he was the most dilatory and good-tempered of men. Nay, more, the interesting confidences which Emma, whose husband was Resident Railway-Engineer at Timoorgunj, found occasion to impart to her mamma, by letter, under the seal of secrecy, a circumstance which happened regularly every year, were invariably straightway communicated to all the ladies of Toghluhabad, whence, through the medium of the post, a throb of sympathy was duly diffused through each matronly bosom at the former station; so that poor Emma discounted the interest due to these revelations long before there was any visible reason for claiming it. Just the same thing had happened now; and while Eva and I in that first

evening's walk had preserved our good faith by trying to look unconcerned and indifferent, her mamma, as it turned out, had communicated the whole morning's events in detail to Mrs Lawrie, wife of the general commanding at Sikhistan ; and when the latter, while offering her congratulations, asked whether it was not rather a poor match for Eva, since Captain West had nothing but his pay, and was known to be in debt ; then Mrs Barton was able to describe my plethora of ready money in such glowing and circumstantial terms as made me, when I heard of it, heartily congratulate myself on my foresight in withholding all particulars about my good fortune. This communication was of course made to the other lady under the pledge of confidence, and equally of course was all over Sirmoori the following day. Hence our plague-stricken aspect in the evening. But the climax was reached later in the day, when Eva and her mamma dined at The Castle, and the Lord High Commissioner was kind enough to apologise to the latter for my not having been invited also, as the Marchioness had only just heard of Captain West's great good fortune. Thereon Mrs Barton admitted the impeachment, adding, however, that it was not a "regular" engagement at present, everything being contingent on Joe's giving his consent, while there was no knowing how her husband would act under the circumstances, or how long he would take to decide upon the matter ; after which his lordship was

treated, possibly not for the first time, with sundry instances of that eccentric man's perversities: how he lost the opium agency at Ahimpoor because he would not take the trouble to write and accept the governor's offer of the appointment; how he had lost his deposit in the Bundelcund Bank because he neglected to register his claim when the bank smashed; and how, finally, Mary (now Mrs Abbot) had been kept at home a year after her proper time, until she was nineteen, because he put off remitting the passage-money till after the cold season. All which incidents of the dinner she related to me the following morning at breakfast, whereupon I considered myself set free from all conditional promises. But indeed Mr Barton had received by implication less than justice on this occasion; for he had sent an answer to his wife's letter by return of post, which arrived the succeeding day, and, as I had expected, he raised no sort of objection to the affair. Young people, he said, in so much of a brief note as we were able between us to decipher, were the best judges what was most desirable for their own happiness, and he had no desire to control his daughter's affections. As to means, the young couple would, of course, weigh well the pros and cons of the step, and not think of marrying until they saw their way to a competency. Press of business prevented his saying more.

This settled the matter so far as papa was con-

cerned ; but I have no doubt that " Joe's decision " was being freely discussed in Sirmoori drawing-rooms the previous day, although those who knew him would pronounce that it was a foregone conclusion. Joseph Barton, of the Civil Service, and at present Commissioner of Toghluhabad, had the reputation of being the best racket-player and most indolent man in India. Punctual, but slow, in his official business, steady in his attendance at the station racket-court, he allowed every other description of business to take care of itself. He had never been known to read a book in his life, and very seldom to write a private letter. It was supposed, when he first came out, that he had some relations in England ; but after efforts in vain to keep up a correspondence with him, the latter, when he had been a few years in India, had perforce dropped their communication with him, which was reopened by his wife on his marriage. This event took place after he had been about six years in the service, whereupon, simultaneously with entering on matrimony, he gave up field-sports, for which he had been famous as a bachelor, and took to rackets. From this time his wife, who was an indefatigable letter-writer, became a constant correspondent with his eldest sister, Miss Barton, in England ; and when the time arrived for the first instalment of children to be sent home, they were naturally consigned to the care of their aunt, now lapsing into old maidhood, to whom the charge formed

an agreeable occupation, and the remittances attaching to it an important addition to her slender income. After the first six years of their married life, Mrs Barton made her first expedition to Calcutta to send off the two eldest children, and similar consignments of one or two daughters followed at intervals; till at last, when dead low-water was reached in the Indian nursery, the tide homeward ceased to ebb, and was soon followed by a return flow. Mary came first, then Emma, and so on about every year. Eva was the last importation, and one younger sister still remained in England. Their stay under the home roof was never long. All the girls were pretty and nice, and soon found homes of their own, more or less prosperous and comfortable, there being usually not much more time between the return to and final departure from the parental nest, than sufficed to get out the wedding-dress from England, *vid* the Cape; and already the worthy man bid fair to rival the patriarchs of old in his progeny of grandchildren, born in various parts of the presidency, and most of whom the grandpapa had never seen.

Barton himself had never revisited England, or taken leave of any sort, his only moves having been from one station to another as he obtained his promotion through the different grades of assistant, magistrate, collector, and judge, till now finally he was landed as Commissioner of Toghluhabad, beyond which post it was generally understood he would not

be promoted. And for many years his wife had never been parted from him, except for the above-mentioned journeys to Calcutta. But when the girls began to arrive from home, and Emma got a fever in her first hot season, Mrs Barton took them up to the hills, and had followed the practice ever afterwards, always occupying the same house at Sirmoori from April till the beginning of November each year, when her household and its attractions were transferred to Toghluhabad for the winter months. Barton himself, however, could never be induced to visit the hills. There were no swimming-baths there, he said, and no fish for breakfast, and he could not play rackets in a covered court. In reality he was probably too lazy to attempt the journey, and rather liked the independence of bachelor life for a time. He could then dine without a coat, and smoke in the drawing-room. However, he was always very glad indeed to see his wife and children when they returned from the hills, and readily agreed to the entertainments which Mrs Barton was famous for giving, when he appeared in a venerable dress-coat of twenty years' service, and usually slipped away to bed when the gentlemen left the dining-room. He always presented each of his daughters in turn on her arrival with an Arab horse, and a handsome watch and chain on her marriage. All other domestic arrangements were conducted by his wife. He never was known to write to any of his children ;

but when Sophy lost her eldest boy he shut himself up in his dressing-room with the 'Delhi Gazette' for a whole afternoon, and did not go to the racket-court for a couple of days.

My only personal acquaintance with Mr Barton had occurred several years before, when I was a subaltern with my battery at Mustaphapoor and he was judge of that favourite station; and I had often played rackets with him, and partaken of Mrs Barton's frequent hospitalities. Those were in the days of low tide, when only Eva's younger sister remained at home, a little, pale, fair-haired thing, talking Hindustani and broken English with a peculiar accent. But, coupling what I had seen of the man with what I had since heard—especially from Mrs Barton, who last season used to pour her complaints about Joe's perversity and indolence by the hour together into my sympathetic ear—I had not anticipated any opposition on his part, and his letter was pretty much what I had expected.

All, then, was now happily settled; the engagement might be announced as a fact without qualification; and Eva and I were free to come and go without the exigencies of propriety demanding that her mamma should be following at an indefinite distance in the rear; while everybody who met us in our afternoon walks passed by without interruption, according to the approved custom in such cases. And now my horses arrived from Sirdhanna, and the tedi-

ous sedan could be exchanged for the saddle. Akbar was somewhat too impetuous for Eva's little hands to manage well ; but Selim, my second charger, was the perfection of a lady's horse, docile, high-couraged, and with a mouth that might be held by a ribbon. I had never given way to the practice which the too easy ways of our regimental inspector rendered possible, of keeping up only one respectable charger, and passing off any old hack or buggy-horse as a second or third. My debts, indeed, were partly due to a sense of what the service demanded from a right-thinking horse-artilleryman, for Arabians at a hundred and fifty guineas apiece are not readily paid for out of one's allowances ; but my imprudence in this respect now seemed like wisdom. Selim was only less beautiful than his mistress ; and as the little horse arched his glossy neck and bounded up the mountain-paths which at Sirmoori do duty for roads, snorting and champing his bit as if laughing to think what a feather-weight he carried, he seemed to know as well as his master how well a riding-habit set off Eva's slight figure, and what a graceful picture the two made together. That charming mountain landscape had surely never a prettier foreground.

Then came a ball, to which of course everybody went. Eva wanted to teach me to dance for the occasion, and being no ways loath to receive instruction from such a mistress, we had sundry practisings in

the drawing-room, the round table and sofa being wheeled out into the verandah ; but notwithstanding the favourable circumstances, the clumsy pupil did not make sufficient progress to warrant an appearance in public ; Eva declared she must not dance with anybody else, and although I begged her to reconsider her decision, and we had almost a little quarrel about it, she refused all partners except for quadrilles ; and while longing, I could see, for a waltz, rather hugged the idea of preserving her engagement dignity.

CHAPTER V.

I PRESS MY ADVANTAGES.

By the end of the week the next English mail came in, and my state of expectation for further news was turned into grave anxiety when it brought not the promised letter from Mr Paterson. I did not know then that he was the most indolent of lawyers, or I should have been less uneasy at his silence; but it was the more inconvenient to receive no confirmation of the first tidings of my fortune, in that it was necessary to settle the arrangements for an early marriage without more loss of time. So far nothing had been said on this point, but I could see that Mrs Barton had tacitly embraced the idea that the wedding would take place in the cold season at Toghluhabad, four or five months hence. This had been the practice on previous occasions; for as Mr Barton would not come to the hills, and the exigencies of domestic etiquette required that he should give away the bride, none other was feasible, since fortunately the idea of an engagement running

over the year was not likely to occur to either parent, such long probations being quite beyond the range of their experience.

When I first broached the subject to Eva herself, I think she hardly took in the idea. To be engaged was apparently a great happiness, now that she had overcome the first timidity and strangeness of her position; she enjoyed, too, the sense of my presence about the place for the greater part of the day, and our little confidences after lunch, when visitors took their departure, and we had the drawing-room to ourselves, for Mrs Barton always retired during the afternoon to write letters to her numerous correspondents all over India. At such times, when we had said all that we had to say, which was not often, there was music, besides the dancing-lessons before mentioned, to fall back upon. Eva played waltzes and a variety of little pieces, *pensées, souvenirs, échos*, and so forth, with a touch and taste which not even her country music-master had been able to spoil; and English songs—songs by Claribel, songs by Gabriel, ballads by M. N. with words by P. Q., &c. &c.—sung by her appeared almost to contain some melody, and which so sung, with pretty timid glances cast back at the listener, I thought I should never tire of hearing. Then when the sun got low we mounted our horses and rode round the crest of the mountain, or strolled down to the woody glades of Vallombrosa; while invitations to any evening

entertainments included, as a matter of course, the whole of our little party. Thus in these few days we saw more of each other than in all our previous acquaintance. Can I say that we had come to know each other better? The first shyness was wearing off, and Eva would now venture to express her love in a hundred pretty little ways, and I think was perfectly happy; while it was a true delight to find, as I came to know her more fully, that her open unaffected manner truly reflected the guileless innocence of her mind, and that the slight archness of bearing, which gave an additional charm to every movement, covered no coquetry of disposition. My love wore her character openly, and there were no reserves, no faults of taste or feeling below the surface to jar the senses on their discovery. But yet, can I say that we were really intimate?—that I had found the opportunity for confiding my aspirations and projects—wise or foolish—for the future to a congenial mind? I fear, had Eva known how occupied I often was with other matters—how I felt myself even grudging the time so pleasantly spent, although thoroughly angry with myself all the while for entertaining such a feeling; how eager I was for what I found myself, against my will, regarding as a mere interlude to be finished, and the way cleared for the serious business of life,—had Eva guessed this, I fear she would have thought me wanting in the proper intensity of devotion to the claims of an

engagement in its early days. At any rate, seeing that revelations of this sort would not be received with the needful interest, I put off making them till a more convenient season; nor did I open a book, or occupy myself with aught but love-making, even to the extent of reading the English papers. May I venture to confess that, like other pursuits which people follow because they are conventional, these few days were just a little fatiguing?

The announcement that private affairs involved our starting for England very soon, did not, I say, evoke any expression of interest on Eva's part to share my confidence as to the nature of the business in question. Business of any kind was beyond the range of her simple ideas, while even the prospect of reaching home in time for the London season failed to excite the enthusiasm which I had expected. Eva's experience of England was limited to life with her two maiden aunts in a small country town; after which, the delights of a season of Sir-moori, with its endless round of picnics, croquet, and balls, seemed to comprise all that could be desired in the way of excitement: and even the more subdued dissipation of a cold season at Toghlukabad, where the military invariably gave a ball to the civilians, and the latter returned the compliment, to say nothing of her mamma's little dancing-parties, and at least a couple of picnics at Mogul Bey's mau-soleum, had seemed like a new revelation of life.

But when I broached the subject to Mrs Barton, the announcement gave her quite a shock. No mother could part more resignedly with her daughters, unaffectedly fond of them though she was, or keep on better terms with her numerous sons-in-law, a still more difficult matter. But then marriage was a thing to be undertaken decently and in order, and how were these conditions to be obtained if no time were allowed for preparation? Not that the need was deemed to extend to the gentleman's arrangements. When Sophy married young Morris of the native infantry, flinging herself away as the infatuated girl did on that penniless subaltern, all the preparation Morris made was to turn away the chum who shared his little bungalow, and to have his old buggy done up by Meeta Lall, the native coach-builder. The officers of his regiment—Morris being a general favourite—subscribed to buy the young couple a set of crockery, and a plated tea and coffee service (got up by dawk banghee from James Uncle & Co., the well-known Calcutta firm, at not more than two hundred per cent in advance of the English price), and the Bartons supplied all the household linen, so that the young couple were set up at once in all things needful; for as to furniture, the regiment was down in the relief to march for the Maghada frontier next cold season, and, as Mrs Barton truly observed, it would be absurd for a married subaltern to be lugging about half-a-dozen cartloads of wardrobes

and tables ; so, during the brief season between the wedding and the march, the young couple lived in the primitive style known as "camp fashion," and did not furnish. Then again, when Fanny married Martin, the Collector of the same station, everything was ready provided, for Martin had never sold off after his poor first wife's death the previous year, and he had one of the best furnished houses in the place, with a Europe barouche, and one of Ditch's new palki-gharrees ; and so, after the wedding breakfast, Fanny simply crossed over to her new home, and sat down to the late Mrs Martin's neat walnut-wood writing-table (a wedding-present to that unfortunate lady) to despatch her wedding-cards, while the happy bridegroom no doubt stood behind and drew comparisons between the former and present employers of that serviceable piece of furniture, much to his own gratulation, for the first Mrs Martin was not very good-looking, and was reputed to have a temper of her own. But my proposal conflicted altogether against Mrs Barton's sense of propriety, for there would not be time even to get a wedding-dress from England, nor could Eva's sisters be present if we did not wait till the cold season ; besides, she could not, of course, be married without papa being present, and he certainly would not be prevailed on to come up to Sirmoori : there was clearly nothing for it but to wait till the cold weather, when we could all go down to the plains. All this and

more poor Mrs Barton urged in favour of delay, and I could only reply that private affairs demanded my immediate departure. The proposal, half hinted, that the marriage should be deferred till after I had disposed of my business, and could return to claim Eva, was at once given up on the announcement that it might occupy even two or three years; for, fond as Mrs Barton was of her daughters, the notion that one of them should remain for an indefinite period under the paternal roof after she was as good as married, was quite opposed to her ideas of the proper course of things. So she was now at last driven into a corner, and obliged to admit that there was no alternative to a speedy wedding; and as soon as this conclusion was come to, the final obstacle of Joe's absence was happily got over. A letter I sent him had not much effect; but in the mean time Mrs Barton had written privately to the doctor of the station to enlist his aid in the matter; and our accomplice, taking advantage of the effect of a slight attack of fever which opportunely came to our aid, so effectually frightened her husband about staying in the plains, that a few days afterwards we received the announcement that he had determined to take a couple of months' leave, and would start as soon as he had packed up his things, or in other words, as soon as he could screw himself up to the unwonted effort. Immediately on receipt of this intelligence, Mrs Barton wrote to her only sister, living in Cal-

cutta, wife of a Member of the Bengal Board of Revenue, to send up forthwith the garments necessary for constituting a reputable marriage. Her own wish would have been, although a better-dressed girl than Eva was not to be seen in Sirmoori, to order her a complete new outfit, without which none of her daughters had ever been married before—even Sophy, when she supplanted Morris's chum in the subaltern's bungalow, having entered that modest tenement with a *trousseau* fit for the bride of a Suddur judge; but to await all these preparations might obviously have delayed the event, and I succeeded in overcoming her scruples by arguing that it would in this case be surely much better for Eva to get what she wanted in England, and thus appear in the latest fashion. So the order sent to Calcutta was limited to a wedding-dress only, with appurtenances; but to lose the opportunity of buying clothes was beyond Mrs Barton's power of abstention, and the local tradespeople benefited accordingly. The sedan of a certain Mrs Jones—who had been lady's-maid to a former Lord High Commissioner's wife, and having married a drunken clerk in one of the public offices, was soon thrown back on the millinery resources of her days of spinsterhood for a living—seemed permanently to block up the entrance to the door; while half-a-dozen hired men-tailors sat squatting daily in the veranda, engaged on various mysterious articles of apparel.

But although I had successfully carried my point, a certain coolness arose on Mrs Barton's part towards me, partly that I was going to carry off her daughter so quickly, although I think she would not have minded the rapidity with which matrimony was to follow courtship if both had come later in the season. As it was, I disturbed a pleasant sort of life; for I doubt if she had ever more enjoyed a season in the hills, than the time which followed the first preliminaries of the engagement: the mystery and the excitement; the congratulation and receiving and issuing of notes which took place; last, but not least, the pleasure of securing a new listener always at hand. I was a capital hand at listening, if not great at talking, and the good lady took advantage of the opportunity to the full. Before I had been a week about the house, I felt that I knew all the little weaknesses of my future brothers-in-law a good deal better than if I had been brought up with them all my life. Abbott's reserve, Garrett's harshness to the natives, Finch's narrowness about money matters, Morris's improvidence, Martin's queer temper,—all these little foibles were dwelt on with a minuteness and circumstantial diffuseness which made me very sensible how accurately my own weak points would be portrayed for their edification in turn by this acute if kind-hearted observer. Joe's delinquencies, however, were the favourite topic; how he allowed the policy of assurance to lapse by neglecting to pay

his premiums ; how she could never get him to dine out anywhere ; how when the Lieutenant-Governor came to Toghluhabad he stopped away altogether from the ball given by the residents to that exalted functionary ; how he had not written to his sisters for twenty years ; how (as before mentioned) Mary's coming out from England had been delayed for a season, because he would not remit the passage-money in time ; how, finally, he lost the opium agency at Ahfinghur, which would have given him five hundred rupees a-month more than he drew now, and an upper-storied house with the best drawing-room in India, rent-free, because he put off writing to accept the offer. All this and more had been poured into my receptive ears during the trio lunches and dinners that took place in the first days of our engagement, or while Eva was getting ready for riding or for an evening party, till I felt perfectly qualified to write the family biography ; while I could not avoid reflecting that it was fortunate my father-in-law's lot had been cast in the civil service, for that he certainly would never have been able to earn his livelihood in any other calling. But under my plan his wife would now lose her patient listener in the middle of the season, and generally her scheme of life for the time was upset, and this caused some slight resentment, although no woman could live less by method or think less of her individual comfort than Mrs Barton ; but the main grievance was clearly my silence as to

the nature of my private affairs ; and although she abstained from asking direct questions, I could see that her unsatisfied curiosity occasioned more real disquietude than the prospect of parting with her daughter ; hence a sort of estrangement replaced the cordiality with which I had first been received.

In one respect, however, my silence yielded its own gratification, for I felt sure that a great part of the lengthy letters posted daily to one or other of the married daughters was occupied with surmises and conjectures as to the nature of my English business. One thing, at any rate, she did not suspect. That a person, least of all a son-in-law expectant, should come into a fortune and say nothing about it, was quite beyond the limits of her experience.

At first it was feared that none of the married sisters would be able to come up to the wedding. Harriet (Mrs Finch) wrote that her husband said his health was so delicate he might be ordered off to England at any moment, and did not want her to be absent at such a time—the true reason being, Mrs Barton declared, that he was too stingy to pay her dawk. Sophy would have come gladly, and her husband too, notwithstanding the tremendous journey from the Maghada frontier, but for certain interesting reasons which rendered travelling just then impracticable. A similar cause prevented Fanny (Mrs Martin) from coming up. But Mary (Mrs Abbott), the eldest sister, although averse to parting from her husband, de-

termed that the importance of the occasion demanded her presence, and resolved to make the long journey from Mahrattapoor for the purpose ; while Emma, whose husband (Mr Garrett) was on the railway near Timoorgunj, took the opportunity to give her children the change to the Hills they stood so much in need of. These additions to the family involved considerable alterations in the distribution of the household, and commensurate squeezing of the inmates, for Mrs Barton's house, like most of those at Sirmoori, was a mere cottage on one floor. The second bedroom, hitherto occupied by Eva, was appropriated to Emma and three of her children. Mary (Mrs Abbott) was to have the spare one, not generally used. Eva was transferred to a small place, not much larger than a cupboard, taken off the back veranda, with about nine inches of space between the window and the cliff against which the house was built. A similar recess was fitted up with a hired bed for the two elder children ; while another corner of the veranda was separated off by matting into a temporary dressing-room for Mr Barton. These arrangements made, and the occupants in possession of their rooms, the appearance of the little house, hitherto so neat and well-ordered, underwent a considerable change. Mr Barton was the first to arrive, himself coming up the hill in one sedan, his bearer and a quantity of ice and soda-water in another ; a day or two afterwards came Mrs Abbott ; then

Emma and her children, with three ayahs, two bearers, and at least a dozen coolie-loads of pillows, cotton quilts, biscuits, feeding-bottles, Benares toys, dolls, Brown and Polson's corn flour, tea-pots, and other appliances. We soon began to find that the household was rather put to it for space. The two eldest children could be taken into their bedroom only to sleep, by reason of its size, and so passed their time for the most part in the strip of terrace between the house and the precipice which did duty for a garden, trying their best to fall over the edge, and one of the bearers trying to prevent them. The twins also had an objection to remaining in their mamma's room during the day, as well as an antipathy to contiguity with each other, manifested by loud squalls on the part of one or the other whenever they were brought together. It was found desirable, therefore, to keep them apart; and one might generally be seen in the arms of a wet-nurse squatting on the veranda floor, partaking of natural refreshment, while the other was performing a similar operation with respect to another ayah in the dining-room. The two eldest, as I have said, were engaged in being kept from falling down the precipice; number three was usually in course of being pursued by a bearer about the drawing-room, a proceeding which he resented in pithy but strong vernacular phraseology. Poor little lanky things, they were all very pale, except where the prickly-heat had come out in red blotches, and

looked thoroughly in need of the change they had got to this climate ; but between the children, the six job-tailors in the veranda, and a miscellaneous assemblage of pedlars, shawl-men from Parbutti, and jewellers from Shahjehanabad, whose trays covered all the available space remaining, and whose object in life it appeared to be to sit there on the floor all day displaying their wares without selling anything, it will readily be understood that even a lover found the atmosphere rather oppressive ; and as Eva could seldom be spared at these times, I am bound to say that business just now kept me a good deal at the club. Eva's sisters, I was glad to find, were both very nice-looking and well-mannered ; Mary, the eldest, who had no family, the younger-looking of the two, and somewhat the neater and better dressed. Emma was disposed to be a little untidy, and indeed there was every excuse for her, as between the ayahs, the twins, and the other three children, she seemed never to have a moment to herself. Both sisters were disposed to make a great deal of Eva, whom Mary had scarcely ever seen before, since she came out to India just as Eva went home ten years ago. Eva was better acquainted with Emma, having paid her a visit at Timoorgunj last cold season.

Mrs Barton appeared unaffectedly glad to see her daughters, and bore without a sign of complaint the discomfort occasioned by Emma's little family ; but even thoroughly sensible women have the art of

quarrelling with each other, and the management of the children was the cause of small occasional outbreaks. Mrs Barton—and who could speak with more authority from experience?—had a strong opinion of the efficacy of a bottle given once a-day to infants of tender age, in addition to their normal supply of natural food. Emma, on the other hand, was disposed to place reliance for the twins' nourishment on the resources of nature as developed in the two sturdy Mussulmani women who acted as her substitutes, and stoutly resented the proposal to supplement this from extraneous resources, and equally to have recourse to a certain elixir which was said to be infallible in staving off convulsions during teething. This at least I gathered inferentially to be the cause of discord, from such scraps of conversation as reached me when I came suddenly upon the scene, when the dispute immediately subsided into a sort of sniffing, as well as from a remark of Eva's that her mamma did not get on with Emma a bit.

In all these matters Mr Barton took no part. He arrived, as I have said, a day or two before his daughters; and I found him to be a florid, well-preserved man, inclined to be stout, and looking many years younger than his real age, indeed very little changed since we had met in my early subaltern days. He was very courteous and pleasant in manner, but made not the smallest allusion to the matter which had brought him up, being full of the novelty

of life in the mountains, which he now saw for the first time. I took the first opportunity of being alone with him to express my gratification at the prospect of becoming a member of his family, and my regret at not having been able to provide any immediate settlement for his daughter, although (I meant to add) I hoped to be able to make a satisfactory arrangement on this head immediately on our arrival in England.

“Pray don’t mention it, my dear fellow,” he interrupted me by saying. “I have nothing to give my daughters, and I don’t expect anything for them. They’ve got the fund to look to, and that’s quite enough.”

I explained that, as an artillery officer, I did not subscribe to the fund, and that, until I got home, I was unable to make any permanent provision for Eva, adding some expressions as to my anxiety until the business should be finally settled. “Oh, as to that,” said my future father-in-law, “there is no need for anxiety; young people can’t expect to start in life without risks of some sort, but it is to be hoped nothing will happen to either of you.” With the utterance of this wish he seemed perfectly satisfied, and I really had not another opportunity of explaining the provisional arrangements I had endeavoured to make for Eva’s comfort in case of accidents.

In the morning, Mr Barton used to take a long walk about the hill, attired in knickerbockers and a

suit of ticking, in company with an alpenstock of prodigious size, which he had managed to pick up in the bazaar. The walk was followed by an elaborate toilette behind the matting in the veranda, the only apparent result of which was the changing of one set of knickerbockers and ticking for another, but which did not come to an end till long after the ladies had breakfasted, and the twins waking up from their second sleep were distributed about the house for purposes of vicarious refreshment. By the time his own breakfast was over, and the morning paper read through, it was time to repair to the racket-court, where he used to astonish the younger men by his play, only young Greenlaw of the civil service, who won the University match while at Oxford, having a chance against him. The rackets involved another bath and toilette behind the mat, which prevented his accompanying the ladies for their evening walk; half an hour after the late dinner was finished he disappeared from the drawing-room, when shortly afterwards a portentous snore from the recesses of Mrs Barton's bedroom, which our music and conversation were quite unable to drown, announced to the company that the labours of the day had come to a happy termination.

During this time I saw less of Eva than in the earlier days of our engagement, for, as I have explained, the exigencies of her wardrobe and the milliner's visits kept her very much at home; indeed,

from the preparations Mrs Barton deemed it necessary to make, one might have thought we were bound to some frontier settlement, instead of on a month's trip home. I too had a good deal to arrange before starting; leave to be obtained, bills to be paid, battery business to settle, and so forth; while, even with my humble bachelor establishment, the accumulations of thirteen years' residence in the country had to be got rid of, and numerous were the letters interchanged with the good-natured Blunt, who acted as my agent, on the subject. The result was, that as Eva and I seldom met more than twice a-day, a considerable number of servants found employment in the exchange of notes between Rhododendron Lodge and the club. Sweet little notes hers were, with not much in them, and written in a pretty, but not very legible, running hand; but they were especially gratifying, because I knew she detested writing, and that answers to invitations and all other business letters from that house always fell to be undertaken by her mamma. I have them every one preserved, down to the tiniest three-cornered scrap, in a little packet tied up with a blue ribbon which I begged from a pretty little head-dress that she was wearing one afternoon.

"Two o'clock.—Dearest Charlie, five o'clock will do very well, and I will be ready dressed for riding by that time. But do come sooner if you can.—Your own loving Eva." And another: "My own dear

Charlie, I thought we were never going to hear 'from you again! Mamma says, Yes! we shall be quite alone this evening at dinner, and she hopes you will go afterwards with us to the Seymours. Papa says he can't go.—Your own Eva." Or again: "Your dear note just received. I am afraid there will be no riding this evening, for that horrid Mrs Jones says she cannot *possibly* come before six o'clock to try on the things. It is so provoking, but you will come down all the same, won't you?—Your ever-loving E." And so on. And one little envelope contains only a long lock of the pretty soft brown hair, cut, how well I remember it! after a little scuffle that arose during one of the dancing-lessons, and bestowed afterwards with a sweet kiss of forgiveness. How the faded notes bring back the happy days, "der ersten Liebe goldne Zeit!"

All this time I was in some perplexity about money matters. The sum in the Asiatic Bank was more than sufficient to take us home, but I could not leave the country without an understanding with the Bank of Central India (Limited), and to pay my debt to it would absorb all my funds. The matter might at once be managed by communicating my English news to the latter, when the management would be only too happy to let the amount stand over indefinitely, and to advance as much more as I wanted into the bargain; for to have a creditor on their books with a loan covered by anything better

than personal security, would be an altogether unaccustomed feature in their business. But then the transaction would never be kept quiet, more especially as Mr Morison, the manager of the Central India, happened just then to be up at Sirmoori himself, and was a notoriously leaky vessel. I might just as well tell the story to Mrs Barton herself. However, I got over the difficulty by applying to the Asiatic, enclosing at the same time Messrs Paterson & Co.'s letter privately to the manager; and the doubts which I was beginning to feel as to the genuineness of that document, in the absence of any farther communication from the firm, were effectually dispelled by the answer. The manager advised me by return of post that the five thousand and odd rupees, the balance of my debt to the Central India, had been paid in to my credit at their Calcutta agents. Old Morison, who had evidently been dying to ask me every time we met on the club stairs how I was going to manage to make my way home, appeared now more curious than ever, but he never mustered courage or impertinence to put any direct question about it; he probably thought that I had paid him and raised my passage-money by taking out a larger loan in the other bank, a sort of financial operation quite within his experience. A day or two before the wedding my mind was further relieved by the expected letter from Mr Paterson. It was very brief, and contained no reference, or apology for its

tardy appearance, being merely to the effect that my uncle's property was all in good order, and that he would have the will duly proved, but that as he presumed I should be coming home immediately, it would be needless to enter into details. The letter ended quaintly enough by a remark that the Queen's health was better, and that the new street in the City was to be opened by the Lord Mayor next week—a remark put in possibly to indicate that the communication was not to be regarded wholly as a business one. Somehow, notwithstanding its brevity, it conveyed a not unpleasing impression of the writer.

CHAPTER VI.

A MARRIAGE IN HIGH LIFE.

AT last the wedding-day arrived ; the wedding-dress, almost to the last the cause of deep anxiety to the occupants of Rhododendron Lodge, reached its destination the evening before, and fortunately proved perfect ; but no milliner could fail to fit Eva's figure, and Carvalho was famous for her wedding-garments and her prices. A day or two earlier arrived the magic ring, and with it the necklace of opals and diamonds which formed my wedding-present. I saw it on my bride's neck for the first time when we met at the church, and surely never did jewels shine upon a fairer setting. The ceremony was fixed for three o'clock, and twenty minutes before that time the bride's party left Rhododendron Lodge in their sedans with the curtains up—for the May sun shines with power even at seven thousand feet above the sea—a procession of ten : Eva and her six bridesmaids, four of them young lady friends, and the two eldest little Garretts, these last two occupying a

sedan together—Mrs Barton, Mary, and Emma ; Barton bringing up the rear in a sedan carried by a double allowance of bearers, with a prodigious shirt-frill, never worn except on these occasions, and a single-breasted blue frock-coat of wondrous cut, and several sizes too large even for him. It need hardly be said that all Sirmoori was assembled at the church, for everybody knew Mrs Barton and had received an invitation ; while the sprinkling of scarlet among the various coloured dresses of the sedan-bearers clustered outside the church-door, betokened that the Lord High Commissioner and Lady Killarney had honoured the occasion with their presence. This part of the ceremony I cannot say I saw myself, my place being at the altar-rails, attended by Blunt as best man, who had with his usual good-nature abandoned his intention of taking leave later in the season, in order to be present now. My first view this day of my bride was as she entered the church with her father, and advanced with downcast eyes to where I stood. She went through the ceremony with perfect self-possession ; for happily none of the misgivings which at times rose unbidden in my mind troubled her gentle heart, and she looked as happy and serene as beautiful.

The marriage concluded, the whole party adjourned to the house in a procession of sedans and horse-men, which must have covered nearly the whole of the narrow road between it and the church. This

spectacle again, however, I did not myself witness, as of course my bride and I headed the procession, so the account is merely inferential. It has always struck me that the bridegroom looks rather out of place at a wedding, being, so to speak, an awkward although perhaps a necessary ingredient in the affair ; but nowhere does he appear more so than at a wedding in the Himalaya. The bride must of course return in her sedan, for, to say nothing of the sun, the dust would utterly spoil her dress were she to walk ; so the bridegroom must perforce either walk or ride by her side—and most men would prefer the latter alternative, since it is not every one who can keep up gracefully with the pace of four shuffling sedan-bearers in the prime of condition. But even then, ride he never so well, the general effect is a good deal marred by the need which arises every minute either to push on in front or drop behind, at the numerous points where the narrow road affords room for only the sedan to pass, and on such occasions he hardly looks as if he belonged to the bride, or the bride to him. However, the short journey was soon accomplished, and all the visitors assembled, as many as could find standing-room, in the drawing-room, where the wedding-presents were on view—the rest in the veranda and narrow space in front of it above the precipice. The gifts were handsome and numerous, for Mrs Barton was very popular, and Eva not less so. Her papa had contributed his customary

watch and chain ; Lord and Lady Killarney a handsome bracelet ; while vases of every variety covered the table, and promised to form an alarming addition to our travelling luggage. Nor was Sir William Brooke wanting to the occasion or his reputation for gallantry. He had been absent during the last week or so on a tour to visit the Bhamáni diamond-fields, and after spending nearly forty-eight hours in an inspection of that important locality, had returned to elucidate the subject in an exhaustive report of two hundred and forty-seven paragraphs, wherein he showed conclusively, in his usual picturesque style, that if the diamonds should prove to be plentiful it might be a remunerative business to the Government to engage in, but that if they were scarce the affair would be carried on at a loss ; and having thus stated his candid opinion, left it to the wisdom of the Lord High Commissioner and Senate to determine what should be done. Sir William was now present, radiant with white waistcoat, and contributed a superb album with a *carte* of himself on the fly-leaf, his elbow resting gracefully on a copy of his celebrated report on the Doolees of the Chabootra.

And now, after receiving the felicitations of her friends, the bride disappeared for a while, and presently her sister Mary made a sign to me to come into the back passage, where stood Eva in her riding-habit. The horses were ready up a by-path at the back of the house ; and before the guests had fin-

ished their ices and champagne, and the Lord High Commissioner by leaving had given the signal for the party to break up, we had got beyond the inhabited part of the hill on our way to a little cottage a few miles further in the mountains, on the margin of a noble forest, and much affected by young couples as a starting-point for their honeymoon trip.

Time pressing, our tour lasted but a few days, when we returned to Rhododendron Lodge to make our final preparations for departure. Emma, whose husband was coming up on three months' leave later in the season, had meanwhile moved into a house of her own, and only Mary remained with her mother, so there was now plenty of room; and I am bound to say the absence of the children added considerably to the comfort of the remaining occupants—so much so, that Mr Barton was occasionally to be found sitting in the drawing-room talking to visitors, and would even return from rackets of an evening in time to take a walk with his wife and Mary before dinner. He had discovered, indeed, that after all a covered court was not such a bad thing to play in; and his morning walks with the big alpenstock for a companion having developed into a habit, the notion of a change of life was getting to be distasteful, and he began to throw out mysterious hints about applying for a year's leave and spending the winter up here, which it could be seen already caused Mrs Barton some uneasiness.

And now the days flew apace as our brief stay drew to an end. We could not loiter. As it was, we should probably come in for the south-west gales in the passage from Bombay, and all their attendant discomforts, and the heat in the plains was reported to be very great, so that every day's delay would make our land journey worse. We had one or two rides before parting with the horses, and, looking at Eva as, dressed in the riding-habit as of yore, she galloped along with the little grey bounding under her, it was difficult to realise the greatness of the change that had come over our lives, and that the girl with whom I had barely a speaking acquaintance a month ago was now really my wife. In fact, except that I had given up my club chambers, things seemed to be quite unchanged, and everything at Sirmoori went on just the same as ever. Akbar, by the way, was bought by a general officer who had lately come out from England to take up a division; Selim was accepted by Blunt as a parting present, and he promised it should never be allowed to fall into bad hands; but its young mistress almost cried as the pretty creature was led away.

We went to one ball at the Castle before starting. Eva again wanted not to dance, because she could not dance with me, but I overruled her; and I am sure a prettier or more graceful ornament to a ball-room was never seen than this young bride, who evidently enjoyed the dancing for its own sake, without much reference to her partners.

“You are to be envied your good fortune, Captain West,” said the Lord High Commissioner, as he came up behind me, “in winning so sweet a bride; but we shall not readily forgive you for carrying off our brightest ornament in such a hurry.”

I daresay some of the people, as they saw my long face above the collar of my full-dress jacket, where from a corner of the room I looked on at the dancing over the shoulder of little Tommy Cuffles, of the Civil Service, who also was not a dancing man, thought that I looked gloomy and ill-tempered; but, in truth, I was unaffectedly pleased to see Eva so happy and so admired; and having won my prize, I could afford to be free from jealousy. But I could not help thinking whether the pretty bloom on Eva's cheek would withstand the ordeal of heat she was about to undergo. She, poor child, having never spent a hot season in the plains, had no conception of what was before her; but I could not help asking myself if I were right in exposing her to this risk in pursuit of a mere phantom, and whether it would not be better and less selfish to put off starting till October. But I was too obstinate, and too much bent on my pursuit, phantom or not, to give way to these scruples.

At last the morning of our departure came. A crowd of porters stood without the veranda chattering or squabbling as the mate distributed the boxes and bundles among them. My bearer, who was to

go with us—Eva's ayah had struck at the last moment and stopped behind—had literally girt up his loins, and was loading a diminutive mule with a miscellaneous assortment of brass pots and blankets. Eva's sedan, with its porters in livery supplemented by a crew of four nearly naked additional men, stood in the veranda, and my pony waited outside—the identical piebald with the white nose and evil eye which on a former memorable occasion had stood there as a signal of my triumph. Early breakfast was eaten, the soda-water, tea, champagne, and biscuits packed, and all the family assembled to see us off. Mrs Barton was in tears: I think she was as fond of Eva as a mother could be of a daughter she had seen during only one year of the last twelve; and, to add to her trouble, "Joe" was beginning to put forth more pronounced and ominous hints about the superiority of covered courts, and she was in evident fear, not without cause, that now he had once found his way to the Hills she should never get him back to Toghluabad again. Barton himself made no reply to the running fire of predictions that his wife threw out of the melancholy fate in store for her, but stood leaning on his alpenstock, a pair of stout legs enclosed in knickerbockers, and a good-natured obstinate smile on his face. He said little at parting, but gave sufficient evidence of his depth of feeling by putting off his morning walk till after our departure, a good two hours later than his usual time.

CHAPTER VII.

A TRYING JOURNEY.

It is difficult to believe in the existence of the Indian heat in the plains below, when living on the cool mountain-top; but we had not long to wait before being reminded of what was in store for us, and what the ordinary lot of the less fortunate majority of our fellow-countrymen in the East. For the last few days the usually clear air of the mountains had been succeeded by a haze obscuring the prospect, and even at Sirmoori the heat came up to the level of a very hot English summer; and if at seven thousand feet above the level of the sea the thermometer stands at 85° the heat at lower altitudes may be inferred by a simple rule of three. The end of the mountain-ridge reached, the beautiful woods of Sirmoori come to a sudden termination, and we plunged down the steep mountain-side, the treeless, shrubless, sun-baked slope, down for two thousand feet of ugliest mountain landscape to the hot shadeless valley beneath. Thence the way lies for forty miles over a succession

of minor mountains which intervene between Sirmoori and the plains, bare and steep without being grand, over which the path rises and falls with a fine contempt for gradients. Midway, about noon, we halted for breakfast at a little shed dignified by the name of hotel, and towards the afternoon we mounted the last crest, which rises immediately above the plains. This, like Sirmoori, is a European settlement; the top of the ridge is dotted with cottages, and the barracks of the convalescent depot of British troops occupy nearly the highest point of the hill. The breeze rustled through the pines on the crest, cool and grateful after the sultry air of the valley we had passed. The residents beginning to bestir themselves for their evening walks and rides; a few soldiers working in the barrack-gardens; some children playing in the square,—such, as we plunged down the hill-side, was our last glimpse of the healthy European life in cool air, not to be met with again till the journey should be ended.

It was dark when the foot of the mountains was reached at the little town of Palki, a desolate hamlet composed of stones and diminutive hostelries, where the sedan is exchanged for a post carriage. We had hurried through the mountains in order to make the next portion of the journey to the railway by night; but Eva was dreadfully tired with the forty miles of jolting in a sedan, and was quite unfit for further travelling, yet to stay seemed worse than to go on.

The happy travellers who are bound upwards revel in the barrenness of this little town, whose purgatorial wretchedness seems but to enhance the expectation of the mountain paradise awaiting them above; but even they never stay longer than they can help: accordingly a brief meal was partaken of while the carriage was packed, and the old bearer mounting on the roof, we started for Sikhistan. The night was close and sultry beyond anything I remember even in Upper India at the end of May. The miserable ponies, performing their stage for the fourth time that day, could scarcely be goaded out of a walk; the Mussulman coachman was making his second return journey since the previous night, and, overpowered with his eighty miles of labour on the box, flogged the unhappy beasts with less than customary gusto. No stars were to be seen; a sort of tangible cloud seemed to settle down over the earth; our motion, such as it was, produced no sense of air. Eva lay back exhausted while I fanned her. At last she appeared to be asleep, and I fell into an uneasy doze, from which I was awakened by the jabbering of the coachman and others changing horses. We had reached the wide sandy bed of a river, now dry, and bullocks were being yoked in the shafts to drag us across. The night was as dark as before, but suddenly through its stillness could be heard a low murmuring like distant thunder, increasing every instant. It was a sand-storm coming up, which,

before there was time to turn back and find a better place to meet it in, burst upon us. It was evidently going to be a severe one, and I helped Eva out of the carriage, not apparently too soon. So violent a storm I had never experienced before, and the sandy expanse of a dry river-bed was a bad place to meet it in. To stand upright was impossible, equally so to turn towards the wind, which pelted the face with an avalanche-like shower of burning, suffocating sand. Where the earth ended and the air began, could not be told; the whole bed of the river seemed in motion. I pulled Eva to the ground, and we sat there to prevent being blown away. To speak was impossible for the choking dust, and to hear equally so for the roar of the earth-laden wind. What had become of the rest of the party we knew not; I could not see my hands held up before my face. It was a darkness that might be felt. I held Eva firmly, for if we separated there would be no chance of finding each other again, and we sat thus for a time which seemed interminable, but which may have been an hour. At one time there was a lull for a few seconds, and the old bearer answered my hail from a few yards off; then the storm came on again as badly as ever, and a bank of sand fast forming behind us had just compelled our changing positions when the violence of the wind began to abate. The storm did not, however, end abruptly, as I hoped it might, nor was it followed by hail, as often happens; and it was not

until the dawn succeeded to the weary night that we were able to stir. Then at last, as it gradually became light, we were able to discern dimly the carriage lying overturned, behind which the old bearer was crouching, while beyond it various mounds of sand indicated the luggage which had fallen off the roof. The coachman had been sitting on the ground a few yards further off; the bullocks and driver had disappeared.

Our first business was to lift up the luggage till we came to the basket of soda-water, which, although quite hot, went some way towards restoring Eva, who appeared in an alarming state of exhaustion. Meanwhile the coachman, who had gone back to the last stage, whither the bullocks had found their way, returned with some people, by whose united efforts we got the carriage up on its wheels, and soon after sunrise we had recovered most of our effects; the bulk of the dust, which was a good foot deep in the carriage, was got rid of, and we were able to resume our journey. But our progress was slow, for it still blew very hard, and the road was obstructed by fallen trees, the number of which showed that it was fortunate we had been caught by the storm in a more open place. Meanwhile the heat continued intense, although the sun was entirely obscured by the dust; and it was not until nearly twelve o'clock that, as we crawled along, something like human habitations loomed through the hazy air. They were the bar-

racks of Sikhistan, and shortly afterwards we reached the hotel, and I lifted Eva seemingly more dead than alive out of the carriage.

This was a bad beginning for our long journey, and I would fain have stayed and given my poor little wife some rest, for the hotel was clean and comfortable, and comparatively cool ; but the whisperings of conscience which counselled a return to the mountains were silenced by the pride which refused to confess its selfish promptings, and if the journey were to be continued we should be too late for the steamer at Bombay unless we pushed on ; so we started by rail the same night. We had of course a whole compartment to ourselves—for there were no travellers downwards at this season—and were able to make up comfortable beds on the seats ; but there were plenty of third-class native passengers, and the noise they made at each station effectually prevented Eva, whose nerves were upset by last night's storm, from getting any sleep. The train stopped at a station about every half-hour, and there seemed always to be more persons awaiting to go on than there was room for, and a desperate struggle ensued on every occasion for the places, with an indescribable babel of voices ; old men, young men, women and children, wandering jabbering about the platform, staggering under the bundles they one and all carried,—the railway officials belabouring everybody, and trying to solve the pro-

blem of stowing away two persons in a place where there was only room for one. Not without many orders and ringing of bells is the train got under way; and the clamour of the unfortunate third-class passengers has hardly subsided into a more suppressed murmur before the next station is reached, and the babel of sounds and ringing of bells begins over again. This with the heat—the thermometer stood at 95° at midnight, happily there was no renewal of the storm—and the jolting on this roughest of railways, rendered sleep impossible; and when, before five o'clock, the sun came up, Eva was less refreshed than when she started.

And now the day goes wearily on, marked only by the change in the sun's shadow, the rising of the day wind and its accompaniment of dust, and the ever-increasing heat. The country is everywhere the same—a perfectly flat, desert-looking plain of reddish-brown hue, with here and there a village, its walls of the same colour. It looks a desert, for there are no signs of crops, which were reaped two months ago, and no hedgerows, but perhaps here and there an acacia-tree. Not a traveller is stirring on the road, not a soul to be seen in the fields, but an occasional stunted bullock is standing in such shade as the thin trees afford. At about every ten miles a station is reached, each exactly like the previous one and the next following, and with the same set of expectant travellers crowding the platform, each with

his bundle on the end of a staff, converted by the arrival of the train into the same excited, noisy, belaboured seekers for room as the travellers of the night. At twelve o'clock the thermometer in the carriage rose to 110° ; at three it stood at 114° . At the Shahjehanabad Junction we stopped for an hour and found a meal prepared of sodden cutlets and curry, with a decoction of tea, the whole plentifully garnished with flies; but Eva was past taking anything but soda-water and biscuits, and I was not much more hungry myself, so the tempting viands were put away to serve for the passengers by the next day's train. At the Akbarabad Junction there was another halt and the same bill of fare. Gradually the sun went down, and the wind and the dust subsided, and another stifling night succeeded, with uneasy slumbers, broken by the ever-recurring hub-bub of the half-hourly stoppages. But the short summer night is soon ended, and the fiery enemy makes his appearance again, this time on the left: we have passed the Prág Junction in the night, and the train has now changed its course and is working across the peninsula to the western coast. Now followed another long day much the same as the previous one, except that the thermometer showed a little less degree of heat; that the carriage, the seats, and everything within, were rather more dusty than before; and that instead of the everlasting plain, hills can be seen on either side in the distance

through the haze. But if the heat was less, the fair traveller was less able to bear it. All this day she was hot and feverish, and lay almost speechless on the couch I had made of the seat. Wet towels hung up to the windows made the carriage a little cooler, but it was difficult to keep them moist under the rapid evaporation caused by our motion through the parching air. Happily we had plenty of ice, otherwise I think Eva would not have lived through the day, so utterly prostrated did she seem by the heat. Not a single European traveller had joined the train since we started, two days ago; and here even the third-class carriages were almost deserted, for we were passing through a poorer, less thickly-peopled country. Almost the only persons in the train were the engine-driver and guard; the latter, a burly ruddy-looking man, evidently an old soldier, came frequently to the door of our carriage to exchange a few words, and inquire after Eva, whose prostrate condition excited his compassion. "The lady seems to feel the heat a great deal, sir," he said, as he stood at our carriage-door at one halting-place, and partook of some claret and ice. "Yes," I replied; "this long journey, too, tries her. But you must have a hot time of it going up and down in this way." "Yes," said he, "I ought to be pretty well accustomed to it by this time, but this last week beats everything within my experience. The engine-driver, you see, he gets changed every eighty miles or so, but I have to go

right through. That's where it is, you see. I declare I feel almost dazed and done up." And dazed and done up he began to look as the day wore on. At last I noticed at one station that we were stopping longer than usual, and, looking out, observed the station-master with several persons staring in at the guard's carriage, so got out to see what was the matter. The poor fellow was dead on the floor—dead from the heat! We could not leave him in this jungle; so, covering the body with a cloth, we went on till, an hour or two later, a place was reached where the station-master in charge was a European, and a doctor and other officials were living in the neighbourhood; and the corpse was made over for interment with a written statement of the circumstances, which the engine-driver signed as well as myself. The poor fellow, it appears, had a wife and children two hundred miles up the line; the station-master promised to send a subordinate to them by the next up-train to tell the poor woman all that there was to tell; and there seemed no more to be done. I did not let Eva know what had happened, and she was too unwell to notice that anything was the matter; and I confess to being too much concerned with her condition to think long about this poor fellow, except so far as that his death shadowed forth the likelihood of a greater calamity.

A third night succeeded this terrible day, and when morning came the fever and continued shaking

of the carriage together had greatly aggravated my wife's prostrate condition. She complained that all her limbs ached, and every jolt of the train seemed to cause her agony. She was quite unable to lift her head; and but for the ice, of which there was happily abundance, and the champagne I mixed with it, I don't think she would have reached the end of the journey alive. As it was, I counted anxiously the tedious minutes between the stations, which seemed to be ever farther and farther apart as we went on. And conscience heightened my distress at witnessing her suffering, brought about by my selfish impetuosity, and I felt my conduct to be the more shameful that my poor gentle sufferer never reproached me so much as by a look for bringing her this journey, but accepted her condition with perfect resignation. That persons should make journeys of indefinite length at any season of the year in the way of business, on promotion, or even to take up a short lease of acting appointments, she knew to be of common occurrence, and at mention of the word business her curiosity ended. I could not venture to tell her what I now felt to be the case, that my business, seen under the sobering influence of her alarming state, seemed now to be the merest pretence of reality, that it could have been easily deferred for a few months, and that the real object of our hurried journey was a possible fool's errand. How bitterly I regretted now, as the endless mile-

stones seemed to come up ever and ever more slowly, that I had not turned back at Sikhisthan, when return was possible! It was too late, however, to think of going back now; there was nothing for it but to push on to the coast, watching my poor sweet patient in an agony of anxiety.

When the third morning arrived, there was a change in the weather. The sun was hidden, but this time by clouds, not dust, and a cool breeze was blowing from the westward, and soon we ran into a violent storm of thunder and lightning with torrents of rain. It was the first burst of the monsoon on the Western Ghauts. The change acted at once like magic on Eva, and she was so revived during her long halt at the top of the great incline, that I began to hope her prostration might be due to the heat and fatigue she had undergone, and not to any serious illness. The rain felt cold and chilly after the heat, and a warm shawl was grateful in the waiting-room whither I had carried her; while I took the opportunity of our stay here to get the carriage cleared of its three days' accumulation of dust and engine-ashes. The train now started again on its progress down the great incline, wrapped in mist and rain which obscured all view; but at one time the fog rolled away for a few minutes, and we could see the line winding down what seemed to be the perpendicular face of the hill for hundreds of feet, while below was stretched a wide expanse of flat country, all clothed

in green, fringed with fantastic mountains, with winding rivers and what seemed to be lakes glistening in the morning sunshine, the sea visible in the far distance. Then the mist rolled over again and blotted out the view which, after the desert of heat and dust we had passed through, seemed like a glimpse of Paradise; while the sensation I felt at witnessing my wife's restoration only those can appreciate who have begun to lose hope when watching by some dear one stricken with illness.

The bottom of the great incline reached, we entered again upon the sunshine, and Eva, half sitting up on a couch of cushions and pillows, was able to breathe the fresh sea gale which rattled against the carriage-blinds, and to enjoy in languid fashion the beauty of the changing view, as we rushed past woods, wild hills, and lakes set in mountains, till, running through a flat expanse of rice-fields in all the greenness of the early season, we arrived at last at our journey's end, two days before the date for departure of the mail-steamer.

Unfortunately, we were too late for a calm passage. Eva was a bad sailor, and seeing how knocked up she was before starting, I bitterly repented anew of my selfish rashness which had torn her away from her comfortable mountain home at such a season. But regrets were vain. To return was out of the question; the doctor whom I called in said the change to England would now be better than stop-

ping at Bombay; and the second day after our arrival there we started on our voyage.

It was blowing very fresh that morning, and the little tug which took us off to the "Beejapoor" bobbed up and down in the short cross sea of the harbour, thoroughly drenching all the passengers and luggage, and giving us a foretaste of what might be expected outside. There was a respite when the deck of the steamer was reached, for the great vessel lay motionless at her anchor, as if defying the wind which rattled through her rigging, and preparing for the conflict awaiting her. This soon arrived; the mails came on board, and the few persons who had braved the harbour waves to see the last of their friends returned to the tug—among these my old bearer. Dear old man! he had been in my service for a dozen years, during which time we had exchanged perhaps half-a-dozen words a-day, yet I believe he was as attached to me as I was to him. I have seldom felt more keenly the benefit of being well off than when it enabled me to leave this faithful old fellow independent of further service, and to spend the rest of his days with the wife and children to whom he used to remit about two-thirds of his wages, and whom he had been accustomed to see during a brief visit every third or fourth year.

The mails on board, we got under way immediately, and I had hardly time to see Eva made comfortable in her cabin when the harbour entrance was

reached, and the Beejapoor made her first pitch downwards, as if saluting her adversary, and commenced to fight her way across the Indian Ocean in the teeth of the south-west monsoon. Then the dance began;—first a great plunge down which seemed as if there was to be no recovery, and found a responsive vibration at the bottom of the stomach; then a great roll to the right till the boats on the davits were rushing through the water, and it looked as if a very little more were needed to turn her over altogether; but she is up again, and makes a corresponding roll to the left, as if preferring to capsize on that side. This evidently must be the last roll; but no, she thinks better of it, and comes up again on her keel for a bit; and so goes on repeating the process *ad infinitum* by way of proving her stability. I could not have supposed that a two-thousand ton ship could be tossed about in this way. But the Beejapoor had no cargo to speak of, and a duck-punt or a Rob Roy canoe could hardly have danced about more. Happily there were only half-a-dozen passengers, and room for nearly two hundred, so that, although the ports were all closed, the air below was tolerably pure. Had the ship been crowded we should have been suffocated, for although it was cool enough on deck, it was stifling in the cabins. One poor fellow, an indigo planter, going home with liver complaint, and who seemed at death's door, stuck to the deck, himself and his mattress being lashed to

the saloon skylight, on which he lay drenched, with spray and occasional waves, and only less miserable than the native servant, who, rather than leave his master unattended, had broken his caste and braved the horrors of the dreaded "black water." This faithful creature staggered about, more dead than alive, to wait upon the sick man, and when the latter was asleep, lay huddled on the wet deck below him, the very personification of unselfish patience. Happily I had no time to be sea-sick, for Eva's state called for all my energies. I tried hard to get a servant at Bombay, but at this season no eligible ones offered themselves; and the only two candidates were a stout gunner's wife with a strong Milesian accent and a very red face, suggestive of country rum, and a young lady from Goa with bare feet, and a dirty petticoat which comprised apparently the whole of her wardrobe, who spoke only the unintelligible *patois* of her native district, and admitted under examination through the medium of an interpreter, that this would be her first experience of sea voyages. Fortunately the stewardess was efficient, and had no other calls on her time, there being no other ladies on board; but I could scarcely bear to leave Eva even for a moment, for her only pleasure seemed to be to hold my hand as she lay, her eyes closed, a death-like pallor on her face. I could see that the ship doctor was alarmed about her, and indeed there seemed cause for fear. Even the champagne which

was so efficacious on the railway journey seemed to fail ; solid food she could take none. Trying as that journey had been, how often I wished we were back in the train again. It really seemed as if my poor darling could not last much longer ; and I felt like a shame-stricken heartless villain for being the cause. For nine days we went on in this fashion. Sometimes it blew a little harder, with squalls of rain, sometimes a little less ; but the wind was always strong, and always nearly dead ahead. Not a vessel did we see in our course except once, when we passed the outward mail-steamer scudding along under sail at fifteen knots an hour. We were going about five. At last, on the tenth morning, both wind and sea began sensibly to abate, and by evening we were running along in perfectly calm water, with the mountains of Arabia fifty miles off on our beam. We had worked through the monsoon. The next day we arrived at Aden, scarcely an hour too soon, for without the food which Eva was now able to take, she could hardly have held out much longer.

The voyage up the Red Sea was calm, and as Eva could now keep the deck both night and day, the heat was bearable. But the passage through the Indian Ocean, added to his disease, had been too much for the sick man, who found a last resting-place about midway between Aden and Suez. His native servant sat in the waist of the ship for the rest of the voyage, hardly moving from his blanket

except to make his frugal mid-day meal of parched grain, with a drink of water from a jar he had brought with him, and the care of which had been the only thing that divided his attention to his master. The latter had been too weak at the last to specify any instructions for the payment of wages to the poor fellow, who we found possessed only a few rupees ; but we got up a subscription for him, and made him over to the agent at Suez, who promised to send him back to India by the next steamer.

Arrived at Suez, the air becoming perceptibly cooler as we approached the head of the Red Sea, a few hours' railway journey carried us into a Mediterranean climate. That sea was in its happiest mood, and as we steamed past Crete and the coast of Greece, the light northerly breeze brought life into my poor wearied darling. The weather was perfect, the steamer not too crowded, the table good, and the little red-faced Italian captain a model of good-nature, who, to oblige his passengers with a view of the scenery, took the inner course among the islands. Eva could now even join the saloon party at meals, but for the most part she would sit in an easy-chair, wrapped in a thick shawl—for European breezes struck chill after the broiling we had gone through—watching the scenery as one island and mountain after another rose into view. To see her hourly getting better, the sense of rest and freedom from the continued anxiety of the last three weeks, the delicious air, and the beauty

of the scenery, made this short voyage one of the happiest times in my life.

By the time we reached Brindisi, Eva was able to walk the deck, and the peaceful aspect of the Adriatic tempted us to continue the voyage to Venice. It would have been wiser to have tarried a while in Italy, before undertaking another long land journey ; but Eva did not feel disposed for sight-seeing, and in my selfishness I perhaps exaggerated the strength of the desire she expressed to be at home ; but the result was that we travelled steadily onwards, only stopping for a few hours here and there, and, arriving at Paris late one evening, started for Calais by the morning train. The Channel was as propitious as the Mediterranean ; and as we sped along in the mail express through Kent, England welcomed us in her freshest, brightest summer garb. Was ever grass so green before as clothes these rounded slopes ? And then the air ! No monotonous red glare or uniform dull mist, but the sunshine which lights up the country we are dashing through is set off by a background of fleecy clouds in the distance, with golden edges toward the sun and dark shadows behind ; and see, over yonder, a summer shower is falling, while here the landscape is dancing in golden light. People talk about the wonders of the East ; surely the wonders of home are greater. One must have been absent a dozen years from it to appreciate its beauties ; nor does the foretaste obtained in

passing through Italy and France dull the sense of surprise and delight at the infinite freshness and beauty of England when revisited in early summer. Are those monstrous animals which are feeding in that field tame bison, or can they be English sheep? And see! what is that wild beast crouching against the bank below the wood? Is it a wolf? or is it a donkey? No! it is an English hare, which cocks up its tail and gallops off leisurely as we pass by, too much accustomed to the phenomenon to hurry himself about express trains. Then the trim country-houses. Here is one, modern Elizabethan, with its grounds bordered by noble trees, its sunny greenhouses and shrubberies, its garden ablaze with flowers, and its trim croquet-lawn, the very spot one would select to spend a happy life in, and serene old age. Surely it is the trimmest and prettiest place in Kent. But no! we shoot through a tunnel, and here is another, Victorian Gothic, which looks if anything a trifle more comfortable and complete. Close upon it follows a third, and so the whole way through the country. How puzzling it must be to decide where to settle! Here we rush by a perfect cluster of snug places, each in apple-pie order, each representing an income of three thousand a-year at the least. Where do all these people get three thousand a-year from? They can't all of them, like myself, have had bachelor uncles to leave them that sum. Now we come to villas on a smaller scale, but still complete and com-

fortable, belonging evidently to well-to-do people who go up every day to town. The occupiers of that terrace must be able to spend quite fifteen hundred a-year. And now the houses are closer and smaller ; but still what prosperous occupations the people must have who occupy them, and what an interminable number of them there must be, descending in prosperity like the figures in a Dutch auction, as we get nearer to London, still ever so far off ! people with a thousand a-year, eight hundred, six hundred, five hundred, four hundred, and so on, till that hideous junction is reached where surely no one would live who had any income at all to speak of. And now comes a change—a bird's-eye view of smoke, squalor, poverty, and dirt, till at last, crossing the river, we are lost in a maze of walls and covered ways, and finally are shot into the station, and find a termination of our journey in the grand Belgravia Hotel.

CHAPTER VIII.

A GLIMPSE OF A SPANISH CASTLE.

As we sat down to dinner on that first summer's evening, by a window of the well-filled ladies' coffee-room in the Belgravia Hotel, which apartment we chose in preference to dining alone, and watched the carriages go by with their occupants bound to the opera or other entertainments, I think Eva, notwithstanding her fatigue, shared in my elation of feeling, induced by the bright summer weather and the liveliness of the scene both within and without, and she appeared in better spirits than at any time since we left Sirmoori. The evening dress of many of the gentlemen dining at the other tables, and the opera-cloaks of their companions, showed that they too were bound to some place of amusement, and we felt as if our honeymoon trip was about to begin. Hitherto all had been suffering on her part, and anxiety on mine: we might now look forward to a little unadulterated pleasure; and, but that she was too tired, we too should have followed the ex-

ample set all round, and then and there gone off to the opera. Eva, however, was clearly unequal to more present exertion, and retired to her room immediately after dinner, while I strolled forth to renew my acquaintance with the scenes I had not seen for so many years, and to walk down the elation of spirits which made rest impossible. And truly, if ever a man had apology for exaltation of feeling, I was that one. Relieved from a hopeless state of debt, with the ban of exile attaching to it; possessor of a handsome fortune, and the prettiest girl in the world for a wife, whose sweet face had never for an instant been clouded by a shade of ill temper, and all whose thoughts were gentle and womanly; a holiday before us so long that no thought of its end need rise to disturb the pleasure of the moment,—all these things heaped upon me in half-a-dozen weeks: as I paced the street smoking my cigar, I felt how extraordinary, and also how utterly undeserved, had been this stroke of fortune. All this good luck, too, had befallen without any drawback attached in the way of sacrifice of my military career. On the contrary, it would be easy now to exchange to a battery at home; and sweet would be garrison life in a crack troop, even at Aldershot or in Ireland, as compared with duty in a monotonous Indian cantonment. I smile now to think of the excitement produced by this arrival at a noisy London caravansera, and the prospects

of duty in the Long Valley or the Phoenix; but everything is comparative. Yet I must add that in reality rest and idleness, or even garrison life with a turn of field-days in the lovely spots just mentioned, were the last things I was actually looking forward to.

With all these feelings of exaltation, a sense of our curious loneliness came over me. My poor mother—the faithful guardian of infancy, the sympathising companion of boyhood, the enthusiastic admirer of later deeds, who thought me a miracle of talent because at Woolwich I achieved a moderate place in the artillery, and regarded my first appointment to the Horse Artillery as a special testimony to my surpassing merits as a soldier, much as if such a thing had never happened to a subaltern before—she, alas! was no longer here to partake of the good fortune which would have gratified her even more than it did me. Nor had I a single near relation. Eva's stock of that commodity in England was limited to her younger sister and the two maiden aunts in the country; and as we had come almost as fast as the mails, we had not written beforehand to announce the specific date of arrival. The first impulse with most men returning to England would have been to send for their letters, but I did not expect any; the next to go off to their club, but I did not yet belong to one. Not expecting to come home, my name had been put down at the Union Jack

only about seven years before, and so had not yet come up for ballot. In default of this attraction, I bent my steps towards Westminster, and strolled into the great hall. The portals at the end apparently lay open to the public, judging from the numbers of comers and goers; and although a policeman made at first a feint of stopping me, I was allowed to proceed up to what I had no difficulty in recognising, from a well-known engraving, as the lobby of the House of Commons. Although it was nearly ten o'clock, the place was pretty full of people pottering about—much as one would expect to see them outside a court-house while waiting for a verdict in an interesting trial. Members were coming in and out, and, thanks to photography, it was easy to distinguish several of the celebrities. Mr Merrifield, among others, passed out towards some mysterious side-room in eager conversation with another member; and shortly afterwards Mr Braham, large, solemn, mysterious, and well-dressed; but all of them looking, strange to say, much like other human beings.

I noticed what seemed an incongruous feature in this elaborately decorated hall, a shabby stall in the corner, whereon were displayed a plateful of conventional buns, some unwholesome-looking pork-pies, and portions of rice-pudding, of the kind ill affected by schoolboys, distributed in shabby tea-cups. The notion of supplying refreshments to the weary lobby-

waiters was apparently a happy afterthought, which had not suggested itself to the architect, but had been left for subsequent consideration to supply, the distinction proper between the lower order of beings for whose benefit they were furnished, and the happy mortals to whom these charmed portals are open, being properly signified by the quality of the viands. But yet, surely there is no mistaking that face, that shaggy eyebrow and sagacious mouth, of the tall short-sighted man who, having just consumed a portion of pork-pie and a tea-cup of pudding, finishes his appetising supper with a currant-bun and a pint of bottled ale. To ascertain if this be so is worth the price of a glass of sherry. "Yes," said the man who served it, "that is the Right Honourable Thomas Sinnick. Yes, of course, this is the members' refreshment stall, but any private party is allowed to make use of it likewise." Well, then, Cabinet Ministers are evidently just like ordinary mortals, except that they seem to be blessed with extraordinary digestions; and I wondered how much of the damage set down to the wear and tear of Parliamentary life must really be due to the tricks members play with their stomachs. But while pondering on the incongruity of this shabby stall in the splendid lobby, and the fact that the assembly which professes to administer all the affairs of the nation could not do better for the sustenance of its own body than supply pork-pies and currant-buns, a bell rings, there is a certain

commotion, and the onlookers are thrust unceremoniously into an outer hall.

"Only fancy," said some one by me, "a division on old Falconer's motion, and here is half-past ten; I doubt if the bill will come on to-night."

Just then I noticed a gentleman, who, having advanced confidently up the hall, was ignominiously thrust on one side by a burly policeman, and on his turning round, I recognised a personage who had lately held an exalted position in India, next only indeed to the Lord High Commissioner's, the dispenser of unlimited patronage, the confirmer of sentences on evil-doers, the preceded on public occasions by four aides-de-camp.

"Ha! Captain West," said he, on recognising me. "have you come home? Glad to meet you again. You see," said he, smiling, "Parliamentary officials are no respecter of persons. They act as if they represented the authority of the nation, and were responsible to nobody. This is the sort of thing we must expect all round when the days of a republic come upon us."

"So it seems, indeed," I replied; "but I suppose your Excellency (excuse my blunder, but I was forgetting we are not still in India) means to find a place here before long?"

"Well, I don't know," said the old gentleman; "I suspect there is not much use beginning with this sort of work at my time of life; but clearly the world

is divided into two classes—the men who are in Parliament, and the men who are not. But if a few young fellows like you, now, who know all the ins and outs of army business, were to get into the House, there would be some use in it. It's quite distressing to see the ignorance there is about military affairs. I have no doubt there will be any quantity of nonsense talked to-night."

"What, then, is the debate about?" said I, blushing at his chance allusion to my secret desires.

"The second reading of the Army Bill, to be sure (army bills are a standing dish nowadays)—that is, if there is time for it to come on to-night."

Just then the strangers began to move in again, and so Sir Philip passed on, while I, much ruminating, turned my steps homewards. Clearly there is no time to be lost, if my castle in the air is ever to become a reality, after all the risks, too, that have been run on account of it.

CHAPTER IX.

ON BUSINESS.

NEXT morning we felt inclined to dally an indefinite time over breakfast (and I am bound to say the attendance at the Grand Belgravia is competent to work up to any point of dilatoriness on the part of the visitors), the sense of rest after the journey was so great, and the pleasure of watching Eva, now beginning to look fresh and bright again, no longer oppressed and weary with travel. But business must be done. The first thing in this way was of course to visit one's tailor, the next to go to the city and make acquaintance with Messrs Paterson & Co. There was a difficulty at first as to what to do for Eva, who had never been left alone for so long since we were married; but she declared unpacking would be full occupation, and then Sybil and her aunts had to be written to; so it was agreed she should remain at the hotel while I went to the city, and that then we would go shopping together in the afternoon—for of course Eva also wanted a variety of things

—and wind up by a visit to the opera in the evening.

Ah me! There is a melancholy pleasure in recalling the sweet anxiety of these first days of our English honeymoon! Affairs of state have taken far less trouble to settle than the little details which had now to be arranged from hour to hour for my young wife's comfort and our joint pleasure. A summons to Windsor has caused less excitement than did the anticipation of this first visit to the opera.

A visit to St James's Street, where the pressing requirements had to be supplied which every man must need who has not had the run of a tailor's shop for a dozen years, and a call at a music-seller's for the opera tickets, made it noon when I got to Gracechurch Street, and I confess to feeling some perturbation as I drew near to the lawyers' chambers, and to a sensation of relief on seeing the name of Paterson, Herries, & Crouch, conspicuous on one of a number of plates, at the entrance of a large block of new offices. I had taken the precaution of sending word early in the morning by a messenger of my intended visit, and found Mr Paterson waiting to receive me; a little elderly man with a slightly Scotch accent, a shrewd face, a rather slow manner, and a very obvious wig. After a few minutes spent over inquiries about Eva's health, our voyage, and so forth, we fell at once to the business in hand, and he proceeded to explain various particulars about my uncle and

my succession to his fortune. They had been friends from boyhood, it appeared, having been articled pupils to the same firm. My uncle followed the profession for some years, but gave up practice on inheriting a fortune of thirty thousand pounds, in his case also from an uncle. From this time he retained an office in the city, but his principal employment was dabbling in shares and securities, a process which afforded him apparently constant occupation and amusement, and by which he generally made a few hundreds a-year. The increase in his fortune was, however, mainly due to the savings resulting from economical habits; and when he died it was considerably more than double the original sum, distributed among an immense variety of investments. Thus had been passed a thoroughly respectable, and, it must be added, useless life—recreations in the share market being diversified by the occupation of angling on the Thames, a pursuit to which he was almost equally devoted, and which absorbed all the time not spent in the city. This was his life for ten months of every year, broken only by an annual bout of salmon-fishing in Scotland, which, strange to say, did not have the effect of diminishing his fondness for angling in a punt. "I often," said Mr Paterson, "turned the conversation to his relatives, at times when he would be dining and sleeping at my house, or when I have been staying down at Twickenham with him, but he usually turned the

conversation to something else. Your uncle was a reserved man always, but he grew more so as he grew older, and was especially reserved on this point. Last November he had a very sharp chest attack, and sent for me to go down to Twickenham. 'I feel as if it would go hard with me, Paterson,' said he, 'and I can see my doctor looks anxious; I think I ought to make my will.' This was the first intimation he had ever given me that no will was made; and but that I knew from experience this is the one thing about which even the most business-like men are often unbusiness-like, I should have been more surprised than I was. I quite agreed with him that he should do so without loss of time, and presumed he wished me to draw the will. Yes, he desired this, but was in doubt about the disposition of his property. What, I asked, were his general ideas, as to dividing it among relatives or leaving it to one heir? Well, he said, he rather thought of bequeathing it among various charities. About this we had a good deal of discussion, and I opposed the idea strongly. After some time, when pressed on the point, he said that, so far as he knew, he had no near relations other than yourself; and he told me for the first time who you were. I then said I thought it was the natural and proper thing to specify you as his heir, as in fact you would have been if there had been no will. He did not at first seem to like the idea; and at last, when I kept him to the point, he

asked petulantly, What claim you had on him, or what you had done to deserve a fortune? I replied that your estrangement from him had been very much his own doing, and that there was no reason to suppose he would not have come to esteem you, if you had become better acquainted. You must not suppose," added Mr Paterson, drily, "that I was particularly prepossessed in your favour, for" (bowing slightly and smiling) "I had not then the pleasure of knowing you; but so far as my experience goes, money left to charities is often as good as wasted, and I think, too, it is more proper in every way, and tends to prevent trouble and litigation, that people should leave their property among their family."

I ventured, interrupting, to ask why he did not suggest that he himself should be successor to the property. He had at least as much claim on my uncle's consideration as any one else, certainly more than I had. I could not express too strongly my feeling that my succession was wholly undeserved, and I blamed myself now, when it was too late, for not having, as the younger of the two, made advances to him. But as the case stood, surely an old friend had better claims than an unknown relative?

"That is a fair question," said Mr Paterson; but I should not have liked your uncle to think that any feeling about his inheritance might have been at the bottom of our intimacy. And," he added, with

a shrewd smile, "as perhaps the assurance from an old lawyer that he has as much money as he wants may be received with suspicion, I may add that I don't think your uncle would have left me his property, even if I had proposed it. We were very good friends, but not quite so thick as that.

"Well, to resume. That day nothing was settled; and the following day, which was a Saturday, I went down again to Twickenham to stay over the Sunday with him. Your uncle was still very ill, although up and dressed every day; and it seemed doubtful if he would get over the attack. We did not speak about the will till the Sunday evening, when he broached the subject himself. He had been thinking a good deal about it, he said, and considered that on the whole it would be better to leave the money in his family. He felt doubts, however, about you, knowing nothing of your history since you went out to India. You might be a spendthrift or worse. Excuse my plain speaking, but I want you to understand exactly how matters stood. Well, I said, I suppose one can find out all about him at the Horse Guards. I will make inquiries there, if you wish, on the understanding that if you are answered satisfactorily, I have your authority to prepare the will in his favour. He agreed to this, and I took a note of instructions regarding some small bequests to be included in the draft. I came up to town next morning before he was out of bed, and went straight

to the Horse Guards. They referred me there to the adjutant-general of artillery, I think was the name of the official, into whose room I was shown. This gentleman appeared to fancy I had come about some claim against you, for he was very curt at first, and said it was no part of Horse Guards' work to collect officers' debts; but I explained how matters stood, and that a rich relation desired to make a testamentary disposition in your favour, provided he should get satisfactory assurances as to your character, and the officer eventually became very frank and communicative. He did not know you personally, he said, but he was able to give a very good account of you. The best proof that you stood well with the authorities was, he said, that you were the junior captain in the regiment serving with the Horse Artillery. I asked if he could say whether you were married; and a clerk who was referred to produced a big register which replied in the negative. I thought your uncle would be pleased to know this, belonging, as we both did, to the fraternity of bachelors; but you see the register only dealt with things *in esse*, not with futurity.

“ Well, the long and short of the story is, that I took the first opportunity of going down to Twickenham with the draft; your uncle was satisfied, and the will was prepared and duly executed a few days later. Your uncle got over this attack, and might have been alive now, but for imprudence in going

out punt-fishing one cold day in the beginning of March. This brought on another attack of bronchitis, which carried him off almost in a few hours. I was down in Scotland at the time, and did not receive his housekeeper's letter till he was dead. I must talk to you more about your uncle at another time; we shall have plenty of opportunities for doing that, but you will want to know first about the will. Well, I felt a little anxious lest he should have altered it, for he was so much in the habit of constantly changing his investments from one thing to another, that there was a likelihood he might begin to play with his will in the same way; but perhaps he would scarcely have done this without consulting me, and in fact the will was found intact. There is a charge of the interest on five thousand pounds to a cousin in Scotland, a maiden lady, whom he used to visit occasionally when he went down there; and there is a bequest of a thousand pounds to me as executor, which will repay me for my trouble in the matter; and there are suitable legacies to his three servants, and the rest of the property is left absolutely to you, with, so far as I can see, no charge upon it, equitable or otherwise."

Mr Paterson then went into details. The property was being scheduled, and, so far as could be told yet, the present income considerably exceeded the sum previously advised, three thousand five hundred a-year; but a good many of the investments were of

a somewhat speculative kind, which would require constant watching ; and they were so numerous and scattered that it would take up my whole time to look after them, as it did my uncle's, if I went into the business myself, or else involve a heavy charge for agency, and very possibly result in losses. The house property at Twickenham was a good investment, the leases having long terms to run ; at any rate there was no need to be in a hurry about converting it : but Mr Paterson recommended a gradual consolidation of the scattered share investments into a few good securities, railway debentures, guaranteed India railway stock, and so forth. This would reduce the income somewhat, but would render the property secure and manageable. He had taken upon himself to let the house at Twickenham furnished for the summer, as he thought I should prefer living in London at first, or travelling. Then about the succession and residuary duties. To pay these and the probate out of the estate would cause a sensible permanent reduction of income, and although this was the way in which legatees usually settled the matter, he would nevertheless venture to suggest that the amount of the duty should be repaid to the estate by a loan, which could be easily raised at a low rate on the security available, to be paid off out of income in, say, four or five years. This would be the prudent course. " You will find it quite as easy," said Mr Paterson, " to live on two thousand

five hundred or three thousand a-year as on the larger income ; and the increase, accruing gradually as the charge is paid off, will come in very suitably should your family expenses increase by-and-by." As to the funds for present purposes, it would take some time to schedule the estate and make it over to me, but in the mean time I could of course draw what was necessary. Perhaps the best plan would be to open an account with Sturrock's, with whom the firm banked. I had already drawn a thousand pounds, but there was still a balance of dividends at credit of the current account of the estate, and of course there would be no difficulty about expenditure *ad interim*. "Only," said the old gentleman, "I hope you will allow me to take the liberty of offering a caution on this head. Of course I do not know but what my advice may be quite superfluous and out of place, but still I have always been given to understand that army officers are disposed to be rather free with their money ; anyhow, young married people are certainly given that way sometimes, so I would just venture to say that people will always find it much easier to expand in their way of living than to pull in, and that it is just as easy within certain bounds to live on any given sum as on double the amount. So far as my experience goes, the people on good incomes find just as much difficulty to keep within their means as those who are only moderately well off. In fact, if it wasn't

the well-to-do folks who get into trouble about money matters as well as the poor, we lawyers should often have a slack time of it. Everything depends on the scale on which you make a beginning."

In conversation of this kind an hour and a half passed very quickly, during which, notwithstanding its absorbing interest, I could not but be sensible of the drollery of the situation, in that a poor beggar like myself, whose connection with the banking interest had hitherto been limited to the anxious provision of the monthly quotas on my humble loan, should now be gravely discussing the comparative advantages of investing in the London and Whitehall or the Metropolitan and Provincial Bank, and other financial problems of the like sort. But although the office was a large one and full of clerks, no one came in to interrupt us, and the old gentleman did not seem to be in any hurry. I was introduced to Mr Roberts, the managing clerk—the two partners were both absent—and returned to lunch at the hotel with a very vivid sensation of regret, amid all the excitement created by this verification of the first news of my good fortune, that my uncle's strange cynicism made it impossible to feel that affection for his memory I would fain have accorded to it, and that his bequest had not come to me out of personal intimacy and regard instead of a cold sense of family duty. I confess also, and not without shame, to an uncomfortable sensation while reflecting that, until

the succession duties were paid, and his control as executor over the estate concluded, it was in Mr Paterson's power to walk off to America with the whole of my uncle's property.

That afternoon Eva and I went shopping, for, having come from India, she had of course nothing to wear; and a Bond Street milliner had accordingly the satisfaction of seeing one or two of her bonnets and other matters of ornamental apparel set off in a manner which must have made the young lady who acted as lay-figure to the establishment feel henceforward her own complete incompetence for the post. We then drove to the Park, and alighting, took seats in the drive and watched the procession of carriages. Eva had never been in London before, save for an hour or so while passing through; and except that she declared herself ashamed of her bonnet, which, having been made in India, partook of last year's fashion—an anxiety quite needless, for anything would have looked becoming on her—she greatly enjoyed the scene, which is certainly to a new-comer the most striking one in town. Simple pleasures often please most. But the result of the shopping and walking combined was that she returned to the hotel so fatigued and faint as to be unable to sit up to dinner, and the opera was out of the question. Clearly the effects of that horrid journey had not been overcome yet, and much care and rest were needed to restore my little wife to her health.

I ought of course to have called in medical aid, and an experienced physician would certainly have enjoined abstention from London amusements and the racket of hotel life ; but Eva declared she was only tired, and I was too thoughtless or self-occupied to press the point. Young people seldom understand what is prudent in these matters. They trifle with health till that treasure is lost.

Next morning she was better, and while we were discussing a late breakfast Mr Paterson called on his way to the city to make her acquaintance. His references the day before to my married state had been of the briefest, and I could guess that he was prepared for anything monstrous he might meet in the way of an Indian wife ; it was amusing therefore to see his change of expression immediately on coming into the room. In five minutes the old gentleman was thoroughly fascinated, as who would not have been by so sweet a face and such unaffected and natural refinement ? He went away having engaged us to dine at his house the following day ; and hearing Eva say that she was fond of music, the dinner was fixed for six o'clock, in order that we might all go to Covent Garden afterwards. But one little complication occurred. Mr Paterson was beginning to speak to Eva about my accession of fortune, which she, I think, took at first to be meant as a compliment to her, whereon I interrupted him by saying, " Mr Paterson, Eva, is managing some property

which has been left to me lately, about which I will speak to you by-and-by;" and he took the hint and stopped talking on this topic; but I could discern an expression of amused surprise on his face, as much as to say, how comes all this affection with so little confidence? But indeed there had been little opportunity during the journey to talk about business, Eva having been too weak and ill to take an interest in such things; and so the idea had taken root to say nothing about it then, but to keep the announcement for a little surprise on our arrival.

Accordingly, after Mr Paterson was gone, I told Eva that the property he had referred to had just come to me from an uncle, and was very considerable, and in fact had quite made a change in my position and plans in life. This indeed, I added, was the pleasant business which has brought us home. Eva was naturally delighted at this news; she had fancied, she said, that the business was something to do with the Horse Guards, which officers were always talking about. "But have you really got as much money as you want? Mamma told me that all artillery officers were dreadfully poor, and that I should have to be very careful and saving, and think about every farthing I spent on dress and everything else, and I felt horribly anxious yesterday after the shopping, when I saw what a lot of money you paid." But should I leave the army? she hoped not. She admired her husband, she was pleased to say, in his

uniform, and it was so nice having pretty chargers to ride.

I explained that there would be time enough to think about leaving the army or staying in it, a couple of years hence, when my leave would come to an end ; and that meantime we could look about us, and frame a scheme of life.

“ Oh, how charming ! ” said Eva, with two of the prettiest hands in the world resting crossed on my shoulder ; “ then it won't be wicked extravagance to go to the opera, and to get some proper dresses, and to buy Syb and my aunts and Mary Drew something nice to take down to Leatherby ? ”

“ There is nothing, my darling ” (this “ after compliments,” as they say in the preamble of an Eastern letter), “ between your wishes and your conscience. I think our purse will stand as many opera tickets as you are likely to want, and you can't dress too nicely to please your old husband ; and as for the presents for your sister and aunts, let us go out and choose them this very morning.”

But where was the property ? Eva asked ; and was there a nice house on it ? I explained that it was not landed property, but shares and suchlike investments, some of them more or less risky, and which ought to be converted as soon as possible into more substantial securities ; and, in fact, that this conversion was the principal business on hand. “ Oh ! I never shall be able to understand all about

that," said Eva ; " but I thought a property always meant a house and grounds. Mr Drew and Mr Bamfylde, and all the gentlemen of property about Leatherby, all have houses and grounds. But I suppose you will buy a house and grounds with a pretty garden, by-and-by, won't you ? It will be so nice to have a pretty flower-garden all of our own."

A dissertation was thereupon commenced, with all the authority due to my recently-acquired knowledge on the subject, regarding the loss arising in the transfer of investments from superior stocks to land, by reason of the smaller interest obtainable from the latter species of security ; but the pretty listener did not appear to follow me, and tried in vain to seem interested in the matter, so I put off initiating her further into the mysteries of my affairs till a more convenient season. It would clearly be premature to bother her little head with such matters at present.

" No letter from your sister or aunts this morning ?" I asked next day at breakfast. " What can have happened that they don't write ?"

Eva blushed, looking prettier than ever. " Oh, my dearest Charlie ! what will you say ? I'm afraid it's all my fault for never having written."

" Not written ! You don't mean to say that you've not let them know of our arrival ? I thought you wrote the first morning we were here, while I went into the city ?

" Oh yes, I fully intended to ; but then, you know

I was unpacking, and then I got so tired and had to lie down, and then you came back, and then we went out together, you know, and then I was so unwell in the evening, and all yesterday there really was not a moment. Dear little Syb, I hope she won't think me unkind. I am sure I never meant to be."

"Well, I should fear both she and your aunts may feel a little hurt, when they learn that we have been three days in England, and have never sent them even a line to tell them of it. However, the best thing to do now is to telegraph and ask Sybil to come up and join us at once."

Eva was sure her aunt would never allow her to come. Aunt Emily never let any of the girls go away from home without accompanying them. Mamma's instructions had been very strict on this point.

"Very good, then, let us ask one of your aunts to come up too. We should be delighted to see her, and why should she not enjoy a visit to town as well as her niece?"

It would indeed be charming if Aunt Emily could come up, Eva said, but she did not think either of them would go away from home just now. Aunt Honoria never went anywhere, and Aunt Emily could not leave Mary Drew. She was equally certain that they would never answer a telegram, which would only have the effect of flurrying them. However, the telegram was duly despatched, and Eva

went to her room to write her letter, resisting all my proposals that she should use the more convenient writing-table provided in our sitting-room.

That evening we dined with Mr Paterson at his house in Sackville Street, a party of six to fill the opera-box, as he said, apologising for the small number of guests to meet us ; Mr and Mrs Herries, and a young lady, a pupil of the Royal Academy of Music, who was a sort of ward of his, and reputed to be a very fine singer ; but we had not an opportunity of hearing her that evening. Herries appeared a good deal younger than his partner, and a very different sort of man, with dark hair and beard, aquiline nose, and quick active eyes mounted with spectacles. Mrs Herries was a tall handsome woman, with a refined and melancholy face. Although the dinner was for half-a-dozen persons, it would have served for twenty. There was a needless profusion of courses, wines, and waiters ; and although we sat down soon after six, it was barely over in time for the opera. The young ladies both looked tired ; Mr Herries became silent ; while I felt thoroughly angry with myself when a droll thought came into my head that possibly all this demonstration was a mere blind, that Mrs Herries was a graceful accomplice of the sort described in a sensation novel, and that the old lawyer had made his plans to start for Liverpool after the opera. Mr Paterson, however, happily unconscious of the dark suspicions entertained about

him, and who was evidently fascinated by Eva's pretty face and winning manners, did not appear to find the time at all too long, but enjoyed his party immensely, doing the honours of the table with great *empressement*, while Mrs Herries was apparently not a person with too much employment, or likely to be soon bored. However, we got to the opera at last. Mr Paterson had secured a box on the grand tier ; and although the piece happened to be one of Verdi's feeblest, Eva's gratification at this her first visit was sufficiently evident, albeit she was not given to be demonstrative in public, and I found sufficient pleasure in admiring her, and observing the admiration she created. The young lady from the Royal Academy—who, by the way, was very well looking and set off the box excellently—took a keen professional interest in the performance, informing me in confidence that Cipriani had no voice left to speak of, and shaking her head ominously at a certain doubtful shake of the prima donna. Mr Paterson, who had done justice to his good dinner, after the first half-hour went fast asleep ; while Mr Herries, discovering an acquaintance in the stalls, went down and spent the evening in an animated conversation with him apparently on business. We returned to the hotel in great spirits, but Eva was very tired and unfit for exertion next day. These amusements must evidently be indulged in with caution, if the recovery of her strength was not to be retarded.

CHAPTER X.

EXTENDS MY FAMILY ACQUAINTANCE.

As Eva had foretold, her aunt did not prove equal to the emergency of answering by telegram ; but she, as well as Sybil, wrote in reply to Eva's letter by return of post ; and, as she also foretold, Sybil was not to be allowed to join us. Her aunt did not feel at liberty to trust her away from home, nor could either of the elder ladies accept our invitation ; Aunt Honoria was not very well, and Aunt Emily could not leave her alone just at present (Aunt Emily never did leave her, Eva said) ; but would not we go down at once and stay as long as we could spare time for ? And as it appeared the estate would not be scheduled for some weeks, and there was really no urgent business to keep us in town, we started off a day or two afterwards, not, however, before we had promised to occupy Mr Paterson's house on our return, instead of stopping at the Belgravia, and also to pay Mrs Herries a visit at Bushey.

"This is a small world we live in," said the old

gentleman, as he bid us good-bye. "Only think that Mrs West should have been brought up at Leatherby, a place I know so well. The fact is that one of the members, Mr Sheepshanks, is a very old friend. A most truly excellent man he is, indeed, and owns half the town. I wish you could know him. I would send an introduction and ask him to call and see you, but that I know it would be of no use. He never visits anywhere."

I did not feel impressed with any eager longing to make the acquaintance of the excellent Mr Sheepshanks, and intimated that we could bear the deprivation with resignation; but we promised to take the opportunity to go over his factory, which Mr Pater-son said was one of the largest and most interesting in the kingdom. And we started off one fine morning by the Yewcester express.

If London was delightful in the latter days of a fresh June, what shall be said of the charms of the country, which in our brief hotel life we had almost forgotten to think about? Not that the country through which we passed was especially picturesque or interesting; nevertheless, the greenness of the grass, the splendid trees, the soft air, the mere sensation of living in such a country after so long an exile from it, was an ecstasy in itself; this ride brought back the sensation of delight given by our first journey through Kent. But it is useless to expatiate on these sensations; the long absence must be under-

gone from these sweet English scenes before the full delight of revisiting them can be understood.

Leatherby appeared at first sight to be one of those towns so common in England which exist in defiance of all principles of political economy, serving no apparent purpose but to send a member or two to Parliament, and to furnish a livelihood to about ten times the number of small tradesmen really needed for supplying the wants of the population, and where they live like fish in a pond by preying on each other, the butcher selling dear meat to the baker, and the baker dear bread to the butcher, and the plumber taking out his share of a livelihood by small jobs in bad workmanship all round ; while a few farmers and small annuitants contribute the surplus expenditure, which forms, after all, the ultimate means of support to the whole community. This was the apparent aspect of the sleepy little town, which lies sheltered and stuffy, nestled among hills on the banks of the Yew, at this part of its course merely a shallow trout-stream. But this first impression was dispelled at sight of the large mill referred to by Mr Paterson, which rose up above the bank of the river, quite destroying by its size the due perspective of the hills, yet forming, with its ivy-covered walls and shelter of tall poplars a not unpleasing feature in the landscape. The town, it was evident, lived upon the mill, or, as it was always called, the factory ; while the spare spendings of the neighbouring farmers

aforesaid, and the occasional country gentlemen who were too lazy or good-natured to do all their shopping in Yewcester or London, came in as a sort of bonus or extra dividend to the grocers and drapers of the place. The town generally appeared to belong to Mr Sheepshanks; the two trucks which stood in the station siding had a decayed label on each with his address, which seemed to do permanent duty on behalf of the mill: the Fore Street was adorned by a town hall, with an inscription notifying that it had been erected by John Sheepshanks, Esquire, M.P. for the borough; a tablet in the south aisle of the parish church proclaimed that it had been restored at the sole expense of the same generous representative, who, by the way, was a Dissenter himself, and always went to the Independent chapel; while a new church in the lower part of the town had been built entirely at his cost. The greater portion of the lower town, moreover, consisted of neat terraces constructed by him for his operatives in the days of the ten-pound householder. The other member was a certain Lord Wraymouth, at present holding a subordinate post in the Government—an elderly gentleman, whose father, the Earl of Stowe, had declined to make way for him at a reasonable age—who himself did not own an acre of land in the borough, where he never appeared except at election times, and whose principal connection with the place appeared to consist in an annual subscription of five-and-twenty pounds to the town races.

But all this information I acquired by degrees, and not during our journey to Leatherby. Sybil and Mary Drew met us at the station, and we walked up the little town to the house, sending our luggage on by the Three Butts omnibus. Sybil was very like Eva, not quite so tall, but almost as pretty, and with the same profusion of light-brown wavy hair; very shy at first, and always more or less so when in my company, but able to talk sometimes, as I could judge by the peals of gentle laughter to be heard on sundry occasions afterwards when the three girls were alone together. Of course there was an immense deal of kissing on the platform between them, the station-master and local porter notwithstanding; nor were the civil greetings to "Miss Eva" of those officials and the stout fellow who combined the functions of driver and conductor of the omnibus unpleasing to witness; nor those of one or two old acquaintances whom we met on our progress up Church Street—old Miss Barbour, to wit, who acknowledged to sixty, but stood recorded in the parish register as a ratepayer for fifty-five years—and young Harry Perkins, Mr Fergusson's pupil, who blushed up to the eyes as he found all escape cut off, and so came and shook hands all round.

The Miss Bartons' house was in the best and most retired street, which terminated in the churchyard, and hence derived its name. A cheerful gutter with a stream of clear water ran down beside each pave-

ment in front, and at the back was a steep garden well furnished with fruit and terminated by the willow-bordered stream. On the other bank of this was a meadow, beyond which the view was stopped by the poplars and higher walls of the mill, above which again rose the tops of the steep hills enclosing the valley. The house was an old-fashioned one of two storeys, which looked among its loftier neighbours right and left as if the builders had forgotten to pull it down when renewing the rest of the street. Right of the passage was the dining-parlour, left of it the drawing-room: the kitchen and offices projected at the back on a lower level, and looking on the garden also was the girls' schoolroom. The upper floor was more irregular, the constructor having apparently designed it on the principle that every room should be approached by a flight of steps up or down. The house had been furnished in the time of Mr Barton's childhood, and the chairs and tables partook of the spindle-like and perpendicular character affected by upholsterers fifty years ago; while time had so far left its mark on them that it was difficult to say what had been the original colour of the coverings which matched the curtains of an enormous four-post bedstead, filling up the best part of the spare room now appropriated to Eva, and last permanently occupied by the late Mrs Barton, who died about ten years after her son went to India. The drawing-room ornaments were in keeping. Con-

spicuous over the fire-place was the portrait of a certain Captain Bowyard, who, after having served for thirty years in the late East India Company's Marine, eventually obtained the distinction of a seat in the Court of Directors. This worthy, who had a high forehead, a white wig, one epaulette, and a considerable stomach, and appeared a sort of un-intellectual likeness of the late Marquess Cornwallis as represented in the Council Chamber at Calcutta, was Mr Barton's great uncle, and it was to him that the latter owed his appointment to an Indian writer-ship. Opposite this portrait was a view of the late Captain Bowyard's house in Essex, bequeathed by him to Mrs Barton, senior, with remainder to her daughters, and the rent of which, indeed, formed the major part of their proper income; a design in the Chinese school of art of a very ugly house of very red bricks and a great many very small bow-windows, approached by a circular gravel sweep surrounding a large grass plot with a rose-bush in the centre, the flowers of which were in course of being intently regarded by a gentleman in white stockings and a three-cornered hat escorting a lady with a large head of hair and a very short waist. These figures, supposed to represent the late Captain and Mrs Bowyard in the prime of their youth and beauty, were accompanied by a small terrier, standing out in one sense very black against the green grass, and in another on its hind legs, his head turned round to-

wards his master in opposition to the situation properly indicated for it by the direction of his tail, as if inviting him to a closer inspection of the rose-bush in question — which study from animal life, as Miss Barton once took occasion to observe, gave the whole scene a very natural appearance. These works of art were set off by others of a more modern character, indicating the course of the family history and the later inmates of the household. A half-figure portrait in oils of Eva's papa before he went to India: a smooth face with a vacuous smile, supported by a profusion of light hair carefully parted, brushed, and curled; a large satin scarf folded twice round the neck, showing very little shirt-collar, and fastened by a double pin and chain; a large pillar of the cyclopean order of architecture behind, bearing a red curtain not more than sixty feet high, a part of which had been drawn back to display what appeared to be an elevation of the Brighton pavilion together with a palm-tree, emblems of his future career; — the foreground consisting mainly of a very white hand turned up to show a very gold ring on the little finger. Then there was an oil-painting of Eva's four eldest sisters, done by a local artist, representing them all standing in a line gazing into the front, in red frocks, white frilled trousers, and sandals, with beautifully curled hair, the frills and buttons on the frocks especially being speaking likenesses. There were also photographic likenesses of

all the sisters taken at different times, and illustrating the advance in the photographic art; for whereas that of Mary the eldest sister was on metal, and of a sort that the portrait could only be dimly made out by standing with your nose against the wall about four feet on one side of the frame, in which position it was pronounced to be wonderfully distinct,—that of Eva, taken just before she sailed for India, was a coloured photograph done in Yewcester, and a very pretty picture of her—albeit a little stiff.

Various ornaments set off the room, proclaiming the connection of the family with India: fans of peacock-feathers, a Bombay inlaid work-box, a ditto chess-table, a ditto card-box, a Japanese cabinet, various little plaster figures of native servants, ivory bullock-carts, and little silver idols supposed to have some connection with the Brahmins,—the whole collection representing the non-edible or non-wearable contents of consignments shipped home at various times since the Misses Barton had the children under their care. They helped to set off the otherwise faded appearance of the room, which, however, did not want for evidence of feminine refinement in keeping with the character of its inmates. Miss Barton (Aunt Emily, as the girls called her) was a tall lady who looked to be about fifty, with features showing the remains of great beauty, a thin figure with a slight stoop, a low sweet voice, and a

gentle manner, while a certain nervous habit of rubbing her hands together when seated indicated a trait of character which became more plain on better acquaintance. It could indeed be seen at once that she was nervous and easily made anxious ; a languid movement spoke of deficient energy ; while her frail aspect and certain lines about the face gave the impression of one suffering from pain and ill health ; but no complaint on that score ever escaped Aunt Emily, and her life seemed to be devoted to her charges, and her thoughts mainly concerned about them.

Miss Honoria appeared to be at least fifteen years younger than her sister, and was still very handsome. Time had not yet silvered her dark hair ; and her pale clear complexion, upright carriage, and firm quick step, bespoke a sound constitution. I could not make her out at first, or discover her share in the household ; but it was impossible to be with the elder Miss Barton for more than a few minutes without discovering the unselfishness of her disposition, and her refined if somewhat effeminate nature. As soon as the early tea with the solid accompaniments provided on our account was despatched, the girls went up-stairs to unpack Eva's things ; and Miss Honoria going out for a solitary walk in the garden, it fell to her sister's share to entertain me in the drawing-room. We thus soon became better acquainted, and I was able to enter into the warmth of her affection for her

nieces, and to learn something of her way of looking at things. I could hardly understand, she said, the delight it was to her to see Eva again. One by one the girls went off, and then, although they heard of their marrying and settling down in homes of their own, they were such bad correspondents, dear girls, she got no particulars of their future life, except, indeed, from Mrs Barton, who wrote very regularly; and then she felt as if they were lost to her for ever, dearly as she loved them all: and now to get Eva back in this unexpected way, she could not say what a happiness it was. What she and Honoria would do when Sybil went, they could hardly bear to think; and then before long Mary Drew would be grown up and leaving them—very desolate the house would seem without the young people. At the same time I could readily understand there must have been great anxieties attached to the charge of these young girls, so pretty, too, as they all turned out; but they had been thoroughly good, and had never given a moment's trouble.

“Still, you can understand,” said the gentle lady, to whom, as I judged, this burst of talking must have been an unusual feat, “our position must have been a very anxious one. Indeed, from the day dear Joseph left us, his silence caused us great anxiety, although we got accustomed to it in time as the years went on, and he never wrote; and we know that civil servants holding these high appointments must have

a great deal to occupy their time ; and we used occasionally to hear about him from others who had friends in India, and that he was doing well : still, during my dear mother's last illness, it would have been a great comfort if he could have only written once or twice ; and she used to inquire so anxiously if there were any letters whenever we heard that any ships had come home ; but no doubt he was very busy. I believe he was a magistrate then, which no doubt in India must be a very arduous post ; and when he heard of my dear mother's death he at once sent a handsome remittance. And then when he married, and his dear wife began to write to us, we felt as if our brother was restored to us ; and when the children had to be sent home, and Maria (this was her sister-in-law) proposed they should be sent to us, we could not but feel what a providential thing his marriage had been." Miss Barton went on to say that she had doubts at first whether she should be justified in accepting such a responsibility, living so much out of the world as she and her sister did, and Honoria being then very young and never able to undertake much work ; but Mr Fergusson (their medical man) and Miss Barbour both counselled her to do so, and certainly she had every reason to be thankful at the result. It had given them a house when they should have found it difficult to live respectably and as became officers' children, for at one time they had the lease of their house (the brick

structure in Essex already referred to) on their hands, and they could never feel sufficiently grateful for having had such dear sweet girls to bring up.

I could heartily enter into and sympathise with Miss Barton's feelings, and was able conscientiously to reply in a few suitable words about the credit attaching to herself for the admirable result of all her care ; but when she apologised for her brother's neglect of his mother and sisters, on the score of his pressing official engagements, I could not help recalling to mind my father-in-law, as he used to appear after a rubber of racquets, while waiting for his turn to cut in again, smoking a number one manilla in the gallery, with his flannel-shirt rolled up to his shoulders, as probably he had been accustomed to pass a considerable part of each day for the last thirty years.

Our conversation was interrupted by the return of Eva and the girls, laden with the little gifts we had brought down with us. Even during our hurried stay at Bombay it had been found possible to lay in a small stock of the local curiosities esteemed by people in this country, and these we had supplemented by some more useful things in our London shopping, not forgetting the needs of Hannah the housemaid, and her sister Maria the cook ; and surely there are few of the more obvious pleasures of life greater than is afforded by the giving a present where relationship or intimacy sanctions it, and no false ob-

ligation is involved. Then all Eva's wedding-presents had to be brought out and inspected: such a wonderful display had never been seen before by any of the admiring group, not even in the best Yewcester shops, they declared; and happily there was no one of the party to whom the display need cause a tinge of jealousy, for Sybil no doubt looked for her turn to come in due course, and Mary Drew would be an heiress. Then when the things had been sufficiently looked at and admired by all, including Hannah and Maria, and put away again—Aunt Emily's anxiety on the score of robbers being mitigated by the reflection that a gentleman would be sleeping in the house and in the same room with the treasures—we all strolled into the garden and watched the sunset, and the trout balancing themselves in the river, and an occasional water-rat taking his evening swim. I think Miss Barton's good opinion of me, which I could see stood high from the first, was a little shaken when I asked if she objected to the smell of tobacco in the open air; and I confess I should have said nothing about it, but suffered in secret, if Eva had not betrayed me by declaring that she knew I was dying for a cigar, and always smoked one in the evening—adding that her papa smoked in every room of the house, and that she herself enjoyed the smell of tobacco above everything. Thereon I accepted her aunt's assurance that it would not be disagreeable, and my long face was such a mine of respectability,

that it would easily outweigh such small confessions of vicious ways.

Then when it grew dark we returned to the drawing-room, and a tray of wine and biscuits was brought in, and Mary Drew sang a song, and then Sybil; and then, at her aunt's request, Eva, who had been sitting on a low stool by her side, fondling her hands, sang one of her old duets with Sybil — something about wandering over land and sea, the charms of my sweet Savoy to see, Fa la la la, fa la lee! Miss Barton took occasion, while I remarked on the natural beauty of both voices, to say that she had bestowed great attention on the musical education of all her nieces; for, although no musician herself, she thought music must be such a very nice thing in a hot country. She would have liked them to have a master from Yewcester, but her sister-in-law had always laid such stress on economy, and about the difficulty she and Joseph had in paying their way, that the outlay did not appear justifiable; and no doubt the expenses of so large a family must have been very heavy, and explained the irregularity that had sometimes occurred in sending home money for the children. And Leatherby was very fortunate in having so accomplished a musician in the organist of the parish church, Mr Peddell, who taught music in all its branches, including harmony and thorough-bass, and had quite a large practice in the town. And again, as Miss Barton went on to describe the

mode of education pursued, and the various little points wherein she had felt bound to practise economy, by way of saving her brother's pocket, I could not help calling to mind the light wines and general good cheer always on stock at Rhododendron Lodge, and the absence of anything like self-denial in the way of life of the good-natured man whose only economy had been practised in this vicarious fashion.

The songs over, Miss Barton, not without evident misgivings whether such a proceeding would be acceptable to a military man, especially to one belonging to the mounted branch of the service, rang for the maids to come into prayers, which she read in a gentle if somewhat feeble voice. Thus ended our first day at Leatherby : and I was able to admit unreservedly, when put to the question by Eva at a later hour, that Aunt Emily was a sweet dear ; also, that Aunt Honoria was very handsome and very kind. The character of the latter lady I had not been quite able to make out, for beyond looking very handsome and amiable, and eating a hearty tea, she had taken no part in all that went on, while my efforts to open up a little independent conversation with her during the music, had broken down from want of reciprocity.



CHAPTER XI.

GLIMPSES OF A QUIET LIFE.

THE next day we had a levee of callers, including all the gentleness of the town, who appeared to consist for the most part of maiden ladies, and widows with grown-up daughters, an occasional gentleman being thrown in scantily here and there. Miss Barbour, the two Miss Provests, the three Miss Smiths, Mrs and the Miss Frowards, and Mrs Crane, the only one of the party in possession of a husband, and he was in India. There were also Mr and Mrs William Bowles, who lived in a house surrounded by a garden in the centre of the town, and were regarded almost county people by reason of their keeping a large yellow barouche and a couple of hunters, as indeed were his brother Mr Rupert Bowles and family, who lived in a pretty cottage just outside Squire Bamfylde's grounds. The conversation during these visits was not of the most lively character, being chiefly limited, after greetings, to inquiries whether the heat that afternoon was not quite Indian. I would fain have

followed Miss Honoria's example, and taken refuge in the shady grass plot by the river at the bottom of the garden, but was assured that my absence on this occasion would be regarded as an irreparable breach of Leatherby etiquette, so sat out the ordeal manfully. As it was, there seemed to be disappointment in some quarters that wedding-cake and wine were not served round; and by unanimous desire the wedding-presents had to be produced, the affair being generally regarded as a regular visit after the honeymoon, an occurrence too rare not to be made the most of; but it was a real pleasure to observe the kindly interest all callers took, not only in Eva herself, but also in her sisters, albeit they had evidently but the vaguest notion as to what had become of them, India being a country of mysterious import, and Mr Barton an official connected in some indeterminate way with the Hindoos. Mrs Crane, of course, took higher ground; and the Miss Frowards proved more than equal to the occasion, a certain cousin of theirs who lived in the north of England having married an officer belonging to the Hyderabad Contingent, which made them, so to speak, quite authorities on Indian subjects; and it was a disappointment to them to find that I had never met the gentleman in question and his wife, and my shortcomings in this respect appeared to throw a degree of suspicion on my antecedents. But they were all unaffectedly glad to see Eva again, although appa-

rently surprised that she was in no way changed, except being a little paler than before, and to find her dressed just like other people, only in much better taste.

Mr Harry Perkins was of course among the callers, with a high shirt-collar, hair well laid down with pomatum, and a flushed face, bringing three fine bouquets, sent by his mother, who lived at the neighbouring town of Stampton. "An offering from the maternal ladies, who hopes to have the felicity of calling on you herself in a day or two," said the young gentleman; whereon all the girls laughed. "I suppose you are as busy as ever, Mr Harry?" observed Miss Barton, after the needful greetings had been exchanged. "Oh yes, ma'am," he replied; "the claims of science and the healing art are as strong as ever; but the governor makes over his dispensing to your humble servant, you see, and so sometimes when he is away I dispense the medicines first, and then dispense with my own services afterwards." Thereon all the girls laughed again. "And are you as fond of poetry as you used to be, Mr Harry?" asked Eva, after a while. "Well," said he, "I do find a little time now and then to cultivate the Muses; science and art, you see, ladies, sometimes go together." Which remark caused as much merriment as the foregoing ones. It was explained to me afterwards that the young gentleman was a frequent contributor to the poet's corner of both the

Stampton and Leatherby papers. Notwithstanding his vein of humour, our friend's visit might have proved a little tedious, for having found himself in a chair, he seemed quite unequal to the task of finding his way out of the room again; but happily some more visitors were announced, and under cover of the ensuing bustle he made good his flight. "What a droll boy Harry Perkins is!" said Sybil. "He is very clever," said Eva; "I am sure his verses used to be beautiful." "And so well brought up as he has been, too," added her aunt. His mother, it appeared, was the widow of a clergyman, and Harry her only child.

The pleasantest visit of the day was from Mrs Fergusson, the doctor's wife, who came with her two handsome daughters after all the other visitors had gone, and stayed a long time. These young ladies were Eva's particular friends, and prodigies of learning, as she had often told me, who, when staying with their uncle in London, always attended the School of Art at South Kensington, and Professor Waxkopf's lectures at the Royal Institution, and spent hours every day studying botany and geology, and all sorts of horrid things; although, she added, it was no wonder, their mamma and papa were both so clever and scientific. But the admiration was mutual; if Eva respected her friends' accomplishments, they loved her for her beauty, and grace, and sweet gentle manners: there was enough disparity,

in short, for mutual attachment. Mr Fergusson himself looked in later in the evening, a well-preserved middle-aged man, with a handsome determined face, who had nothing about him of the country doctor except the active habits of the class. This gentleman was evidently a sort of family guardian, who, besides his duties of medical adviser to the household, seemed to fulfil as well the functions ordinarily performed by the family lawyer and the parish clergyman. It was he who gave Miss Barton the needful advice about the investment of her little property, and, as I afterwards learnt, had arranged for the overdrawing of her account with the local bank one time when her brother's remittances were more than ordinarily in arrears. He, too, always took the steamer passage for her nieces when that periodic arrangement had to be made; and on more than one occasion, when Miss Barton's health prevented her from going, he had accompanied the young traveller to Southampton, and placed her in charge of the matron—usually some friend of Mrs Barton returning to India—who was to act as chaperone during the voyage. Miss Barton, indeed, would hardly venture on a day's excursion to Yewcester without consulting Mr Fergusson; while not the least of his services had been to teach all the girls riding. Mrs Barton, in conveying her husband's periodic exhortations to economy, had always added his injunctions that the girls should go out to India

well educated in this respect; but as Leatherby did not boast a riding-school or master of equitation, it might have been difficult to carry out his wishes but for Mr Fergusson's good-nature. Eva's graceful horsemanship was due to the teaching received while accompanying Mr Fergusson—who rode more like a dragoon than a doctor—in his visits to country patients over Yewcestershire lanes and downs; and Sybil was now going through a course in the same useful art, the moving power being a certain well-bred screw belonging to the Three Butts, and known there as the Fergusson mare, because that gentleman was accustomed to use it when his own horse wanted rest; an animal of encyclopedic accomplishments, which during the winter months was the accustomed vehicle for exhibiting the prowess of the rising Leatherby sportsmen,—young Provest from Guy's Hospital, when he came home for his Christmas holidays—young Froward the articulated attorney, and occasionally Harry Perkins,—with Squire Bamfylde's hounds; and in the summer, when not wanted for jobs in harness, enjoyed the recreation of carrying one of the Miss Bartons two or three times a-week. Mary Drew, also, was now in course of acquiring the same accomplishment, her father sending in a shaggy pony from Thorpe on these occasions for her use.

Mr Fergusson, I thought, appeared a little anxious as he looked at Eva, and noticed that she was paler

and thinner than she used to be ; but she explained how much she had gone through on the journey home, and that she was now rapidly getting strong again. We strolled together into the garden after a while, and he reverted to the subject, saying that he always felt somewhat anxious about all the sisters, for there were none of them really strong ; but they seemed all to keep so well in India, he supposed the climate there must be suited to them. "What a happiness this must be to their aunt," said he, "to get one of her nieces back again ! Each time that she has had to part with one the pang has seemed harder—it has been like giving up a child of her own ; and but that resignation is the foundation of her character, I really think it would have been too much for her. What she will do when Miss Sybil goes out to India, and Mary Drew goes home for good, I hardly like to think ; but perhaps it is as well in other respects that her charge should be coming to an end, and that there are no more younger sisters coming home, for her strength is not what it was ; and Miss Honoria——"

He paused here, feeling probably that it did not become him to speak confidentially about any member of the family to one who might be said now to belong to it ; while I, for my part, although desirous to know more, forbore for several reasons from pressing him further. In truth, I had been puzzled from the first to understand Miss Honoria's part in the little

household. Although apparently in robust health, and certainly in the enjoyment of an excellent appetite, she took no share in the care or management of the house, which appeared to be shared between her sister and Mary Drew, the latter presiding at the breakfast and tea table, and doing all the heavy carving at dinner. She went to church daily morning and evening, and when not so employed or at meals, her time seemed to be spent in walking up and down the path at the bottom of the garden. When in the house she occupied herself in plain needlework, and rarely spoke unless addressed, but she was more often in her own room than sitting with the others. Withal she seemed quite rational, as well as thoroughly amiable. Both the girls and her sister accepted the state of things as a matter of course; and to the latter she appeared as much an object of regard and care as if she had been the most useful member of the household.

Of course we had to see the local sights, or rather I accompanied Sybil and Mary Drew on a tour to see them, for Miss Barton was not equal to much walking, and seldom went further than to the almshouses at the end of the street, where she read twice a-week to some old women, and Eva stayed at home on this occasion to keep her aunt company. Thus we went over the church ("I don't know much about the architecture of it," said Miss Barton, "but I believe it is very much admired as something quite Gothic"), a

roomy, ill-kept structure, much damaged by restorations a hundred years before; the grammar school, where the boys of the town appeared to receive an inferior education at a very low price, and where the initials were pointed out to us carved on one of the forms, of one John Tully, who, having gone up quite a poor boy to try his fortune in London, eventually became Lord Mayor thereof; also a similar autograph wood-engraving of another distinguished townsman who served as a lieutenant in the fleet at Trafalgar. Then we climbed up the hill above the Bamfylde woods, to look from the celebrated view over the town, and descending again went some way along the river to see the celebrated view of the hills from below, which Deedes, R.A., a connection of the Provosts, was reported to have said, when he paid them a visit a few years ago, reminded him of the Trosachs. And of course we went over the factory, as well as the schools connected therewith, and the mechanics' reading-room, "erected by John Sheepshanks, Esquire, proprietor of the mill, and M.P. for the borough." It was a very happy quiet week this; and the rest, and the society of her aunt and the girls were evidently agreeing better with Eva than the restless noisy life of a big London hotel. A general holiday was of course proclaimed on such an occasion, which meant that the morning visits were suspended of little Mr Abel, the writing and arithmetic master. Sybil appeared to have got as far as

compound addition, an odious thing, she said ; but Mary Drew, who Eva had told me beforehand was awfully clever, was deep in the mysteries of decimals, and made light of fractions. Also were suspended the bi-weekly lessons of Miss Jones, the French governess—"Mademoiselle" as she was called—who, having been English governess for a season at a *pension* in Paris, was regarded throughout Leatherby as an infallible authority on French politics, and the only person qualified to see through the real designs of the Commune. The saturnalia occasioned by our visit included also the discontinuance of the evening readings in history—six pages of Hume read aloud in alternate pages by the two girls, while Miss Barton sat listening and gently rubbing her hands, and Miss Honoria was engaged silently on some article of plain work—fearfully dry stuff, Eva had styled this same improving study, when describing to me beforehand the mode of life at Leatherby. The schoolroom was used, however, by the younger members of the party to sit in of a morning, while Miss Honoria was at church and Miss Emily engaged on household duties ; and little peals of innocent laughter often issued from it as I wrote letters or read the papers in the drawing-room, the silence of the place otherwise unbroken, save when about eleven o'clock every day Mr Sheepshanks passed by on his way to the mill, sitting upright in his one-horse barouche, with a benevolent smile on his face and a snuff-box

in his hand ; or when the empty omnibus from the Three Butts would make its periodic circuit of the town in search of passengers for the trains, who never appeared. There was one black afternoon when the visits had to be returned, but we refused all invitations except one to tea with the Fergussons, and another to be mentioned presently. "I make no apology for our simple habits," said the mistress of the house, as we sat down to the well-covered table ; "for Eva knows our ways so well that the pretension of a heavy dinner would not impose on you. We could never have brought up our family properly if we had not renounced all needless waste in eating and drinking from the first ; and Mr Fergusson can never be sure of sitting out a meal, however simple." And indeed Mr Fergusson was absent on this occasion, only coming in just as everybody else had finished, and even then a little girl was reported to have arrived in the surgery with the intelligence that her still smaller sister had "scalded of herself." However, Robert, the eldest son (house-surgeon of St Brice's, but just now at home on leave), was deputed to act while his father took supper in peace. "I always maintain," said Mr Fergusson, while drinking his third cup of tea, "in opposition to the popular notions of the day, professional and otherwise, that wine is not necessary for health. Except mamma there, not one of us takes wine, and very few of us even beer, and the plan has agreed with us all."

And certainly when I looked round the table I could not help thinking that if Eva and Sybil were left out, and perhaps young Perkins the pupil, who had not been brought up in the house, we should average eleven stone at the least. "But then," continued Mr Fergusson, "we country doctors are not supposed to know anything about these things. We regard each specimen of humanity as a whole, and so are incapacitated from forming sound opinions. To do that, you must lay yourself out for some specialty. Spend your life in a consulting practice devoted to complaints of the fifth rib, or the great toe, and you are entitled to be deemed a philosopher. A very pretty theory if the fifth rib or the great toe were a distinct autonomy, with behaviour apart from the remainder of the body, but as things go actually, hardly consistent with fact."

This remark was made as we strolled through the doctor's garden, his special hobby, where a goodly show of fruit was garnished with a still more brilliant display of flowers, and the tasteful arrangement of creepers and evergreens made it truly a *rus in urbe*, for the house was in the centre of the town, and the garden was surrounded on all sides by walls and houses.

There was now a general demand for music, and although the summer air was tempting outside, the party repaired indoors. The whole Fergusson family were musical, and sang duets, trios, and quartets in

excellent style ; but they were still greater at instrumental music, and made up quite an orchestra, Mrs and Miss Fergusson at the piano, Miss Kate at the harp, Robert first violin, the second ditto being taken by Reginald the Cambridge freshman (foundation exhibitor at Mary-Anne Hall from the Leatherby grammar-school, an honour carried off after severe competition with the three other prefects in the sixth form), while Mr Fergusson played the violoncello. "Everlasting classical music, and dry stuff of that sort," said Sybil, as we walked home afterwards ; "Beethoven six nights in the week, and Mendelssohn the seventh."

"I hope we shall not bore you awfully, Captain West," said Miss Kate, as the party were engaged in tuning up their instruments preparatory to the first piece ; "but music is the one thing as to which we always say your wife is not perfect."

"Of course I like classical music," rejoined Eva, thus attacked ; "and I should like nothing better than to play it, if it wasn't so horribly difficult."

"As if you could not play that or anything else you liked, dear," replied the other, "if you only tried. I assure you, Captain West, we none of us are fit to do more than work the bellows, if Eva played the organ ; and as for difficulty, these things are nothing to her fantasia and variations by Herr Skratzky ; but I needn't tell *you* what a touch Eva has, all thrown away owing to that horrid Mr Peddell."

And then the music began. Young Perkins was the only member of the family who could not take a part, and he remained silent throughout the evening, for at the sound of his voice, on his attempting some sniggering whispers intended for Sybil's ear, young Robert Fergusson, who was just coming to that celebrated passage (movement in D) for the first violin, and who being a full surgeon naturally regarded a pupil as something to be snubbed on every occasion, looked round so angrily that the youngster was effectually silenced. Why he did not pursue the natural course of falling in love with his master's daughters I cannot say; but it had been his fate apparently to cherish a hopeless attachment to each of the Miss Bartons in turn, beginning with Mary when she was only six years older than himself, and so on down to Sybil, who was now in course unconsciously of kindling the warmest sentiments of his heart. And as the young fellow sat in a corner, his usually perky features assuming for the nonce a somewhat melancholy aspect, it was easy to fancy him, under the influence of the music, building castles in the air on a foundation of Beethoven: an appointment to the Bengal medical establishment, followed by an early meeting with Sybil's parents, who spurn the young unknown assistant surgeon with contumely; how his surpassing merits would soon be recognised and rewarded by a confidential post on the Governor-General's staff; and how, summoned to attend Sybil

in a desperate Indian fever, he succeeds in recovering her after she had been given over by three of the most eminent local physicians; how, finally, when brought to see his worth and talent, in a transport of emotion she gives him her hand, the grateful parents assenting to and blessing the union. And in truth Sybil was pretty enough to turn any young fellow's head.

"I have often regretted," said Mr Fergusson later in the evening, as we partook of refreshments preparatory to departure, "that I did not succeed in persuading Miss Barton to employ Dr Phewgew of Yewcester to teach her nieces music, for old Peddell, our organist, although a worthy soul, is not much of a musician, as you will be able to discover on Sunday; but she did not feel at liberty to incur the expense and so I did not press the point."

CHAPTER XII.

LOCAL POLITICS.

THE other visit we paid was to Thorpe, Mr—or, as all the people in those parts called him, Squire—Drew's place, that gentleman having ridden in and given us a pressing invitation to go out and see his grounds. Mr Drew was a widower, who, finding the care of a young girl rather a difficult and troublesome office, had obtained the consent of Miss Barton, a distant connection of his wife, to take charge of her; Mary Drew had accordingly been an inmate of Aunt Emily's household for the last eight years, and it was understood would remain there for another year, or perhaps two, until she was grown up; her father, in the mean time—a shrewd, well-educated, but shy man—occupying himself mainly in hunting, shooting, the growing of turnips, and the miscellaneous business of a county magistrate. As he was reputed to be worth five thousand a-year and to spend about one, it was expected that his daughter would be a great heiress. Mary was cast in a somewhat

more robust mould than her young companions, but although not so pretty as them, she was handsome enough, with a bright face expressing both intellect and character: while she could not have lived so long with Aunt Emily, as she always called Miss Barton, without acquiring her habit of refined and gentle manners.

We drove out in the afternoon in an open fly hired from the Three Butts, the unfortunate Ferguson mare being ignobly yoked for the occasion to a less high bred but equally gummy companion. The party consisted of Mary Drew, Sybil, Eva, and myself; Aunt Emily excused herself from the exertion, and Aunt Honoria could not come, as the excursion would have interfered with afternoon service. The road lay up the narrow valley of the Yew, with hills clothed in splendid woods on either side. We passed one or two pretty country seats, Mr Sheepshanks's modest villa among them, lying low down on the borders of the river, before we came to Squire Drew's, situated at the head of a little valley which ran down at right angles to the main one, on the border-land between the woods and the moors above, cleverly placed so as to command the smallest possible view—a white-plastered, comfortable, ugly house, under the porch of which the Squire, stooping slightly, as was his wont, and with his spectacles on, stood waiting to receive us. The interior of the house corresponded with the appearance of the outside, and was

probably just as the late Mrs Drew had left it. A drawing-room evidently disused, and the anteroom, gave evidence of a taste in art, and the things we saw had been collected by the Squire when travelling abroad twenty years before. But his art education had become stereotyped at this point, or the love of money had intervened to stop the process of collecting, for there was nothing visible in the way of ornament or books of a later date; and the rooms which appeared to be tenanted bespoke the ordinary country gentleman with a taste for field-sports.

However, we were not long in the house, for, on our refusing the refreshments offered, the Squire led us out to see the place. The ornamentation of the grounds had still to be carried out, the drive up to the house being little different from a common field—and there was no flower-garden to speak of, or anything which offered the opportunity for complimenting the proprietor; while it was curious to observe Mary Drew walking like a stranger about her father's grounds, or looking at the rooms of a house in which she could not remember ever having slept. Almost immediately behind the house we came on the coverts, plentifully tenanted by pheasants with their young broods, and their feeding-troughs guarded by chained dogs; and then we passed through some fields farmed by the Squire himself. The most striking thing at first about the estate was the dilapidated condition of the labourers' thatched cottages; and I took occa-

sion to observe that they looked to be more picturesque than comfortable. They cost a lot of money to keep up, however, did those cottages, said Mr Drew. I thereon inquired how wages stood in these parts, and was told that they were fairly satisfactory—generally about nine or ten shillings a-week, and seldom so high as eleven shillings. “You see, if we take a man on in the spring we promise him a bonus of ten or fifteen shillings after the harvest, and that keeps the hands with you right through the season. Otherwise they would be off all over the country in mowing and reaping times. But rates are high, very high; in the winter especially, if it comes a frost, the Stampton Union is crowded.”

The conversation which followed, about the poor-rates and the general difficulty farmers and landlords found in paying their way, was however interrupted as we reached the edge of the cultivated table-land and entered on the wooded side of the hill overlooking the main valley and river. Here the narrow path and the beauty of the scene were alike sufficient to extinguish any desire for a discussion on the dismal science; and when we reached a small plateau whereon stood a summer-house, the view was beautiful enough to attract the attention of the most indifferent. The woods extended straight down to the river about two hundred feet below us, the red bank and white shingle bed of which set off the bright green of the strips of meadow-land, dotted with noble elms, which

bordered the little stream on one side or the other, as it meandered to and fro; while opposite us, and rising to the same height, were hills also wooded, and in the full splendour of summer foliage. A few cows feeding in the meadows, a fly-fisher pursuing his sport, a cart slowly crossing the bridge over the stream below, the smoke from a cottage, were, save the birds singing in the trees, the only objects in movement; the scene was redolent of the quiet sweetness of sylvan beauty only to be found in England; while the surroundings were suggestive of that happy state of life where pheasants are abundant and wages stand at nine shillings a-week.

But such reflections hardly found time for expression in view of the cheerful bustle of the immediate foreground. A gamekeeper had already lighted a wood-fire beside the summer-house, and was engaged in spreading on the table the contents of a hamper which a lad had brought down from the house. Trout-salad, chicken and tongue, syllabub, late strawberries and cream, with cakes and tartines, formed our repast. Tea and coffee were prepared by Mary Drew, while various wines and some wonderful Yewcestershire cider were provided for those who preferred stronger drink. Some of this last-named fluid, I was informed, had been drunk at the Stamp-ton Conservative banquet two years before, and was pronounced by the local paper to be equal to superior champagne; and, apart from comparisons, it was

certainly a most excellent beverage, although possibly suggestive of gout. Our little feast, in such scenery, on a lovely summer evening, could not fail to go off well; and the pleasure of the picnic was much enhanced by the timely arrival of Mr Fergusson and his second daughter. He had taken advantage of a professional visit in the neighbourhood to drive her out; and, putting up his horse and gig at the little farm below, he and the young lady climbed up the wood; and the party being simultaneously completed by the addition of a neighbouring squire who joined us at this rendezvous, we sat down on the benches of the summer-house to our meal.

This concluded, the young ladies set about collecting wild-flowers; while Mr Drew, producing some very tolerable cigars—the wreck of his property, apparently, after the poor-rates had been paid—the men, more lazily disposed, arranged themselves for a quiet smoke on the grassy bank.

“Well,” said I, “when that redistribution of property takes place among our citizens which the prophets foretell, I think this is the particular bit which I should like to have registered in my name. With a neat little four-roomed cottage on this plateau, a fly-rod, and the run of these woods in October, a republic under those conditions would not be such a bad thing after all.”

“Ah! those days are coming, and sooner than people think,” said Fergusson, with a sigh; “the

only difference is that there will be no property left to divide." And the prosperous doctor, as he said this, took a melancholy pull at his havannah, as if he would at least finish that before the evil time arrived.

"At any rate," added Drew, "there will be such a lot of people to cut in for shares, that no one will be left with a bit of land bigger than what we are now sitting on." And the Squire threw a glance over the visible portion of his property up and down the valley, as though taking a farewell view of it before the preliminary staking out of lots commenced.

"Yes," continued Fergusson, "we are going ahead at a tremendous rate. The Irish Church destroyed; university tests abolished; purchase done away in the army; the House of Lords tottering; and now the Land Reform League and Republican Society are beginning their machinations, and they won't be easily satisfied."

"Yes indeed," chimed in the Squire, "Mr Merri-field has found it very easy to set the stone a-rolling, but it will puzzle him or anybody else to stop it."

Then both speakers relapsed into silence, puffing their cigars moodily, as if awaiting in despair the impending final crash of the avalanche.

"I infer from these remarks," said I, after a pause, "that I have the honour of being in the society of two Tories. This is quite an agreeable surprise, for

I had been led to suppose that the genus was extinct."

"It will very soon be so," said Drew. "When men who have been brought up in sound principles and ought to know better, go over to the enemy's camp, what can you expect from those who have never been taught what is right, and who have nothing to lose by change and revolution?"

This was evidently meant for a hit at his brother squire, a stout hale man about twice Drew's weight, who, as he smiled good-humouredly at the attack, looked the very personification of substantial prosperity.

"Yes," added Fergusson; "but our friend here has merely followed the bad example set him. It is Strickland's defection that has broken up the county and made political consistency a byword."

Then it was explained to me how Mr Strickland, the greatest landed proprietor, and the head of the oldest family in the county, who had represented it for thirty years in the Conservative interest, had lately changed sides and voted for the disestablishment of the Irish Church and the abolition of university tests, and how it was understood Mr Merrifield was going to raise him to the peerage as a reward for his tergiversation.

"But I thought," said Drew, "you at least, Captain West, as a military man, would be a Conservative. Is it possible," he added, with a shrewd smile, "that

these levelling doctrines can have permeated the army? Surely, now, you can't approve of the abolition of purchase?"

"Well, considering that we have got along for the last hundred years in my regiment without purchase, I don't suppose its abolition is likely to have a very disastrous effect upon us. But I claim to be a Conservative in the fullest sense of the term, at least if I understand what the name means. It is only, I suppose, an out and out Tory of the most bigoted school who would want to conserve everything, good or bad. A reasonable Conservative, it may be assumed, only wants to preserve what is good, and is ready to improve what is bad. I am quite prepared to be judged by that canon."

"I fear it is only too true," said Fergusson, "that Captain West is but a Radical in disguise. Another poor erring brother, Morton, come to join your sheep-fold."

But our discussion was interrupted at this point by the return of the young ladies laden with ferns and flowers; and the shaggy pony also having arrived for Eva to ride upon, with a shawl for a habit, we returned towards the house.

"He is a shrewd fellow, is our host," said Fergusson, as we were wending our way in Indian file along the narrow path from the summer-house—"and, as you may have inferred from his conversation, a man of sound political opinions. He ought to be in

Parliament, and I hope we shall get him in some day.”

“Why, I thought your party were at a complete discount in these regions. Surely Leatherby is Liberal to the backbone? They tell me that the last election was not even contested.”

“No more it was, but then you may put that down to personal considerations. Mr Sheepshanks is everything to the town, and many people would stand by him who belong to the opposite side—certainly I should be very sorry to vote against him myself; and although Lord Wraymouth doesn't do much for the place directly, still he is in the Government and has helped on a good many of the townfolk. But now all that sort of thing has come to an end with these competitive examinations, and I expect at the next election he will have to fight for his seat.”

“What! even with Mr Sheepshanks to back him, and the tenants of all those neat cottages in the lower town sure to vote for him?”

“Well, I don't know exactly about Lord Wraymouth, because he has been our member for so long, and we are all creatures of habit; but Lord Wraymouth may be called up to the House of Lords any day, for old Lord Stowe must be close upon ninety, and we certainly shouldn't allow a new man to be brought in without a struggle. Besides, the present state of things can't last for ever. Mr Sheepshanks is an old man himself, and his grandson is a young

boy at school, and there might be time before he could fill Mr Sheepshanks's place to establish the Conservative interests on a strong basis."

"But is not all this rather a looking a-head into the days of the republic, when there will be no squires left to stand for counties or boroughs either, and the possession of property of any sort will be a disqualification for becoming a representative of the people?"

"True," said the doctor, laughing, "there is no saying how soon these evil days may be upon us, and the prospect gives me the only sleepless nights I ever have had; but it is to be hoped the Conservative party will give a kick or two before it is finally trampled out."

"Well, but I suppose you hardly expect, amid your gloomy forebodings, that the principle of hereditary legislators will last as long as the respected Mr Sheepshanks. Does not the prospect of Lord Wraymouth coming down as the Earl of Stowe, with money in both pockets, to claim the suffrages of his old friends for a continuance of his seat in the Lower House, disturb your slumbers sometimes? However, at any rate, you have one consolation. Whatever happens, the inhabitants of these meadow-lands are like to go on suffering from the rheumatics to the end of the chapter, and I should think not even a political millennium will clear the low-lying lanes of Leatherby from occasional typhus. That must be an

abiding consolation to gentlemen of your profession, doctor. We poor soldiers may have our occupation stopped any day, but your fraternity will be allowed to go on killing people to the end of the chapter."

"Yes, but then by that time the citizens will expect to be attended for nothing, or else there will be a general participation of profits, the result being a very unfair day's wages for a fair day's work, which won't leave life worth having, or, at any rate, worth taking."

"If it's not an improper question, I should like to ask how far you carry politics into your professional practice, Mr Fergusson? Do you attend only those patients whose principles are of the right sort, or do you sink these little differences in the face of illness?"

"Well, to tell the truth, I doubt if many of my patients know that I have any political opinions, and I am sure I very often know nothing about theirs. You must not suppose that I speak as openly to everybody as I have done to you, but I have known your wife and her sisters so many years, and they are so intimate with my girls, that I feel that I am speaking as to an old friend. And, oddly enough, I took it for granted that you must be on the right side. But in fact we have had no politics here since I have been settled in the place, and I don't suppose we shall have as long as Mr Sheepshanks lives."

At this point we reached the top of the woods, and were able to join in the general conversation as we returned to the house; and declining the Squire's offer of further refreshments, Mr Fergusson and his daughter mounted the gig, and the rest of us took our seats in the fly, and were drawn back to Leatherby in the summer twilight, by the Fergusson mare and her stable companion.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN WHICH NO PROGRESS IS MADE.

BUT although our visit to Leatherby was passed thus agreeably, and it was a real happiness to witness Eva's delight at being with her aunt and sister again, and still more to notice the gain in strength due to our quiet life, I was consumed myself all the time by an inward restlessness in utter contrast to the peaceful surroundings of the scene. As for news, Miss Barton took in the Stampton weekly paper as well as the Leatherby Express, a very large sheet made up of a great many extracts in very small type, not a very clever paper Miss Barton said she was told, but which she thought it proper to subscribe to as an encouragement to local enterprise, although no one in the house appeared to read either of them; and I took the liberty of supplementing the supply with the London dailies, and watched eagerly the progress of the session. At times it appeared as if I should be altogether too late in my errand—evidently destined to be a fool's errand, so

comprehensive was the Government scheme, so sensibly would the Ministers express themselves about the great question. And when the *Dial* threw out suggestive feelers to the effect that enough had been done already in the way of reform and organisation, while the *Daily Eclectic* pronounced the same opinion quite decidedly, my expectations fell to zero. I had evidently risked my wife's life for nothing. But then perhaps the next day, on the first breath of opposition, a Minister would signify that this point or that would not be insisted on, and that the whole plan was an open question subject to any degree of modification ; that in short the Government scheme meant everything or nothing, according to the amount of squeezing applied ; or another Minister would make some fatuous remark showing that he had not mastered the first elements of his case, and did not in the least understand what he was talking about ; or Mr Merrifield would take occasion to throw out some disparaging hint signifying that he disliked and disbelieved in the whole business, and that the Secretary of State for War should not set the country on fire for want of cold water thrown upon it by his chief : coming across such extracts as these, and turning to the *Unicorn*, which did not fail to denounce Mr Merrifield and the whole Cabinet every day as ignorant impostors, only fit to meddle and muddle ; reading these inspiriting opinions, and the savage attacks made almost every evening in the

Piccadilly, I could discern a glimmer of hope that this part of the business of the country was not likely after all to be settled out of hand.

But in the mean time no advance was being made towards building my Spanish castle, even so much as laying in the needful bricks and mortar. Here was nearly a fortnight gone, and absolutely nothing done, and the feeling that time was thus slipping away grew daily more irritating and perplexing, to say nothing of the absurdity of coming all this way in such a hurry merely to dawdle at the end. It was therefore with a sense of relief that I heard one morning from Mr Roberts that my presence in town was needed for a decision regarding the sale of some South American stock, and other matters of the sort, which afforded an excuse for bringing our visit to an end.

Sybil was allowed to return with us to town, her aunt having got over the objection felt at first to intrusting her to the care of a military man. The fact was Miss Barton's idea of the profession appeared to have been mainly derived from a certain Captain Brawn, a half-pay officer, and the only representative of it residing in Leatherby, a burly-looking ruffian, who seldom appeared in public except on Sundays, when he scowled down on the other residents during morning service from a pew in the gallery; who was reputed to beat his wife, and certainly beat his two sons, those unfortunate lads frequently turning up at the grammar school with black eyes and other

bruises not earned in conflict with their playfellows. The eminent respectability of my long face, which not even the dissipation of an afternoon cigar could abate, had effectually overcome the natural misgivings of the gentle lady about intrusting her precious charge to our care ; and we left accordingly for town one fine morning with Sibyl, our party being further supplemented by a little maid, orphan niece to Hannah and Maria, who had served an apprenticeship in waiting and needlework in Squire Bamfylde's family, and who, much to her relatives' delight, now entered into our service as body attendant to Eva. It was a mournful day in the little house, for the numerous partings Miss Barton had gone through with her nieces did not make them more easy to bear, and Mary Drew, who had never been without a companion since she entered it, was especially disconsolate.

Our party being now too large to admit of our fulfilling the engagement to stay with Mr Paterson, we returned at first to the hotel ; but that gentleman declaring that there was abundant room for all, and making a very strong point of the matter, we moved into Sackville Street almost immediately. And indeed this caravanserai was not a suitable place for us ; the care of these young girls involved perpetual attendance upon them, and the most careful escort could not secure them from the ill-manners of insolent starers in the lobbies, while Annette—Eva's

little maid—seemed frightened out of her wits by the noise and publicity and the free-and-easy ways of the servants' hall. So as Mr Paterson would take no denial, I gladly accepted his hospitality.

Our host lived in Sackville Street, because he said he liked the quietude and fresh air of that part of the town after the bustle of the city. At any rate there could hardly have been a more convenient locality for young people paying a first visit to town, and who now addressed themselves seriously to the business of sight-seeing ; flower-shows, concerts, morning and evening ; the Crystal Palace of course ; the Royal Academy ; the exhibition of the old masters, which both Eva and Sybil pronounced stupid. Some days, instead of sight-seeing, we would sally forth for a ride in the Row, on very presentable hacks hired for the occasion, and I don't know which of us enjoyed it more, the girls or their escort, for in truth I felt on all these occasions that after all there was no prettier exhibition in London. We seldom saw our host before dinner-time, at least the young ladies did not, for they were never down in time for his early breakfast, and of course they did not accompany me in my occasional visits citywards, where the business of scheduling went slowly on, Mr Paterson appearing not the least in a hurry to adjust the estate ; and in the evening we were seldom alone for a continuous stream of guests joined the dinner-party — Scotch clients, English clients, sometimes

even Irish clients, who had come to town on business, filling day after day the little dining-room in Sackville Street, till between the steamy odours of viands in the warm summer evening and the crowd of white-waistcoated officials, there seemed often to be hardly breathing-room. Very long were the repasts, but not a bit too long for our host, who sat at the head of the table, smiling pleasantly, and happily unconscious that it was possible to feel bored on such occasions. His pleasure in life indeed appeared to be to accumulate clients for himself, or at any rate work for Herries and Crouch to do, and to pay back the former in hospitality when they came to town. The after-dinner times were somewhat trying too, especially if any ladies were among the party, there being no specific hostess to act as stage-manager: happily the long dinner made the rest of the evening short, and the awkwardness was often relieved by the presence of the young lady from the Royal Academy, who sang with a voice fit to bring the walls down, and caused quite a little crowd to assemble in the street below the open window. On nights when there were no visitors we used to go to the opera, or sometimes, as Mr Paterson was always pleased to act as escort, I deserted them for the House of Commons, for which special orders were always obtainable through his kindness, and sat steadily through the debates, interesting or otherwise, watching the forms of procedure and trying to

discover why the bores were so patiently listened to. Mr Paterson got orders also for the girls to the ladies' gallery one evening, and it promised to be an interesting occasion, as both Mr Braham and Mr Merrifield were expected to speak; but we had not been there long when I perceived from the opposite gallery their signal for retreat, and rejoined them in the lobby.

"Such a dreadful place to be boxed up in!" said Eva, next morning at breakfast.


"And then only think to have to listen to those dismal creatures down below," added Sybil, who had begun to find a voice sometimes even when I was present.

"Yes," said Eva; "only fancy choosing to go there night after night when they might be going to the opera or to dances. How anybody who is not obliged can lead such a life——"

Here the speaker stopped and blushed, for I had confided to her my desire to become a member of that august assembly; but I laughed away the fears she expressed afterwards when we were alone lest she should have wounded my feelings; she must have found out by this time, I said, that her old husband belonged to the stupid people whose tastes lay in the direction of dismal pursuits.

Then there was a Woolwich ball to which we all went, for by this time various regimental friends had begun to find us out. Brooke and Winchester, who

were stationed there, insisted on our going down to dress and stay over the night, and turned out of their quarters, which they fitted up quite sumptuously for the reception of the young ladies, with cheval glasses and toilet-tables which the foolish young fellows had evidently hired for the occasion from town regardless of expense. The girls were delighted with their apartments, and with the sergent's wife who was engaged to wait upon them, and our hosts appeared equally pleased with their company. The ball was pronounced perfect, and as Sybil had never been to one of any kind before, she was properly impressed with the splendour of the occasion; while even Eva, who had gone through two seasons of continuous dancing, had never seen anything like it. "The Sirmoori balls were very nice," she said; "but all the officers used to wear black coats—so stupid of them. Only fancy, Captain Gray, I have only seen Charlie twice in his uniform; he might almost just as well not be in the army at all. Even when there were full-dress balls he used always to stay away. He hates balls and things of that sort, and would rather be reading some stupid book any day,—wouldn't you, Charlie? He looks awfully bored now, doesn't he?" These remarks, which may possibly have been suggested by my lanky face in a fit of absence assuming an unusually lugubrious expression, were uttered while we were assembled in Captain Gray's quarters preparatory to a descent of the



whole party to the mess-room ; but indeed one must have been a very misanthrope not to appreciate the scene and the value of our contribution to it. Of course the girls enjoyed it, especially when at about one o'clock it became possible to dance, and it was sufficient pleasure to witness their happiness, and the admiration they excited : it was broad daylight before we returned to our rooms.

The ball was followed by a breakfast party in barracks, when various officers' wives were invited, after which it was proposed to go over the Arsenal, one of our hosts holding an appointment in that establishment. Eva declared she would like to see the Arsenal of all things, but in fact she could hardly stand for fatigue, and was fain obliged to accept the offer of a drive in a pony-carriage with one of the ladies to see the Academy and Shooters Hill, while Sybil and one or two unconquerable spirits joined the party of sight-seers. We should all have been glad of pony-carriages before the day was over, for our guide was one of those excellent fellows who suppose you must be as interested in their business as they are themselves, and would not allow us to pass by anything ; the result was that Sybil was soon reduced to the same state of prostration as her sister, and the two returned to town in the evening half-dead with fatigue, and scarcely able to exchange compliments with our kind young hosts, who insisted on coming down to the railway station to see us off.

CHAPTER XIV.

I MAKE A CONFESSION.


NEXT day was perforce spent by the sisters resting in Sackville Street, from sheer inability of either to do anything else, and as London was now getting very hot and stuffy, we were all glad that the following day was that appointed for our visit to Mrs Herries ; the fresh air and quiet of Bushey Heath formed a grateful change, and there was some chance of Eva getting the rest there which it seemed impossible to insist on while in town.

Mrs Herries, in the absence of any family distractions, occupied herself with the cares of lap-dogs, ducks of strange plumage, and geraniums. Mr Herries devoted such time as he could snatch from business engagements, and travelling up and down by the Liverpool night mail, which seemed to be his principal employment, to the encouragement of the fine arts as developed in the English school of water-colour painters ; and the walls of all the rooms in the comfortable old-fashioned brick house were cover-

ed with various specimens of their skill, remarkable for their originality and diversity of treatment. Teddington Lock, by Jerky Coster, a composition consisting of willows, weeds, and water, with a foreground of three ducks and a little girl in a pinafore with blue spots. "Coster's best manner," said Herries, as he took me round the rooms; "I'll back Coster to paint a duck and green weeds against any man in England." Shepperton Lock, by the same artist, a composition also made up of willows, weeds, and water, with a foreground of four ducks and a little girl in a pinafore with pink spots. The Lago Maggiore from the south, by Joe Botham; a very snowy mountain, a very blue sky, a still bluer lake, with a red road in the right foreground set off by a green vine trailing over a pillar, and a brown peasant woman with a white head-dress picked out in body-colour. Lago Maggiore from the east, by the same artist; another blue sky, white mountain, and blue lake, with a red road in the left foreground, also set off by a green vine trailing over a pillar and a brown peasant woman with a white head-dress in body-colour. "Wonderful clean colourist Joe Botham is," said Herries, as we surveyed these works of art together; "and they say he has never been to Italy, which makes his painting all the more extraordinary." Then there was a "View of Harborough from the sea," by George Sparrow, junior; a brig going over the bar, with a background of very yellow sand,

and a cliff with very distinct stratification standing out against a lake and indigo sky. "View of Riley from the sea," by the same artist; the same brig going over the same bar, also with a background of very yellow sand and cliff; remarkable similarity between the geology of Riley and that of Harborough. "He's a very clean colourist too, is young Sparrow," said my host; "in fact, I really don't know which is the cleaner of the two;" and certainly the appearance of the yellow sands quite bore out this criticism.

But my mind just now was too much engrossed with another subject to admit of its being properly susceptible to the elevating influence of these works of art. As the days went on, bringing me no nearer to the accomplishment of the object my heart was set on, I felt as if possessed with a demon of restless dissatisfaction, till it became utterly impossible to take real interest in anything that was going on around me. Few people will be able to enter into this feeling, because few probably have experienced it in the same intensity; but the lover who sees the precious moments given him in the society of his mistress passing away, and his cause from pique or obstinacy or blundering making no progress; or a mother who, when she would devote to the dear child about to leave her the last hours before parting, finds them absorbed in the paltry distractions of everyday life; or the professional man growing grey while he



eats his heart away with vexation for want of the opportunity which never comes ;—those who have undergone experiences of this kind may appreciate my feelings. Withal I could not but be amused at the incongruity of my outward appearance and inward desires ; apparently bent only on amusement, and that under the most agreeable auspices—escort to two of the prettiest girls in London, fresh and unsophisticated enough to enjoy these simple pleasures with unalloyed delight—yet all the while consumed by this restless desire to be up and at work. Still more absurd was the contrast between the greatness of my ambition and the selfish recklessness with which I set off to pursue it, and the perfect impotence of the sequel. Here was a man who aspired to a great mission, whose thoughts, sleeping and waking, were absorbed in his intended task, and yet who had not the moral courage and common-sense sufficient to set about accomplishing the first simple step ! No one in fact could have been more impressed than I was myself with the absurdity of my position ; the ridiculous contrast between the magnitude of my aspirations and the impotence of my behaviour. The fact is, I did not know how to set about making a beginning. To do this involved taking some one into confidence, and I shrank from the ridicule such a confession of my aspirations might evoke. Yet without the aid of some friend there seemed no way of making a start. I had heard or read, indeed, of

Parliamentary agents, personages who arranged the representation of the country by some mysterious procedure, working in league with the political organisation known as "the clubs;" men who registered, ticketed off in their memory, the representative feeling of every constituency in the kingdom, and kept lists in their note-books of the approved candidates to be distributed among them, and the charges to be incurred by each; men without whose aid and support it would be useless to come forward for any borough, large or small. But although I had heard there were such people, and to a certain extent believed in their existence, I did not expect to find the names of any of these gentlemen in the London Directory, and I felt too shy to make inquiries about them. The natural course would of course have been to consult my kind-hearted and shrewd old lawyer; but whether it was that his clients were all exceptionally stupid people, or that he supposed a military man by reason of his profession must necessarily be incompetent to understand business matters, Mr Paterson had a way of going down to first principles whenever he touched upon such things by no means flattering to one's self-esteem—as, for example, a brief disquisition on the nature of consols, and a statement of the fact that a thousand pounds invested in the three per cents would produce more than three per cent; also that when you made a payment it was a good plan to take a receipt; and further, that the Court of Pro-

bate was an institution established by law whose requirements must not be evaded, and so forth. I had a sort of feeling, therefore, that if I made known my wish to Mr Paterson he would be disposed to regard it as more of a fancy than a serious purpose—a suspicion, moreover, that he would probably carry on any electioneering business in the same leisurely way that he set about scheduling the estate, which would be fatal to my hopes of a speedy consummation; and thus I had somehow always stopped short when on the point of speaking about the matter. But I confess that when returning from my numerous visits to his office in Gracechurch Street, I had more than once taken a route homewards by Chancery Lane and Lincoln's Inn Fields, and other localities affected by lawyers, wondering which of the names painted on the doors belonged to the powerful being whose agency was necessary to open the magic portals.

However, there must evidently be a limit to this ridiculous state of bashfulness, and I determined to unbosom myself to Herries. Herries I fancied would be more sympathetic in such a matter, at any rate would enter readily into my ideas, while it was easy to see that he would be more prompt to act if action were needed. His restless dark eyes betokened a man of action, and indeed half his time seemed to go in rushing about the country on mysterious errands. Herries evidently was the man to apply to. And an opportunity occurred immediately on our going down

to Bushey. Our dinner-party the first evening comprised in addition to ourselves only Mr Crouch and the young lady from the Royal Academy. Crouch was much younger than either of his partners, a man good-looking enough, but with a mean manner, and who called Mr Paterson 'Sir,' and never addressed Herries without the prefix of 'Mr,' and seemed not at all at his ease in the presence of ladies. In fact he came up much more closely to what, in my ignorance of such matters, I supposed to be the conventional standard of attorneys, but then my acquaintance with the legal profession had been so far very limited. In India, happily, we had not much need for lawyers, and the only ones I knew anything of personally were a benevolent Chief-Justice of the Supreme Court at Calcutta, whose unbounded hospitality included all the young and friendless, as I had often experienced when a youngster doing duty at Dumdum; the other was a half-caste fellow said to be a barrister, but who never appeared in the presidency courts, and who picked up a precarious livelihood as a pleader in the up-country courts in any disreputable cases where Europeans were concerned, and the agency of such a creature, who spoke Hindustani better than English, was useful. It had been my ill fortune to meet this worthy every evening for about a month at the hotel *table d'hôte* of a station whither I had been detached on court-martial duty, and where he was pleading in some case in the local

court; and as we sometimes had the table to ourselves, we had thus got to be on speaking terms. But it was rash to generalise from specimens taken at the zenith and nadir of the profession. Certainly I never quite understood how Messrs Paterson and Herries came to associate with them in their firm a man so different to themselves as this young Crouch; perhaps it was to do the dirty work of the firm, if there was any to be done; at any rate he seemed of much less account in it than old Mr Roberts the head clerk, and his partners kept him at a great distance, addressing him familiarly by his surname, while he never spoke to them without the prefix of respect.

However, on the present eventful occasion Mr Crouch knew his place, was not only respectful to his partner, but appeared fascinated by the society of the young lady from the Royal Academy, and on the ladies leaving the dining-room through the open window into the lawn, that gentleman accompanied them; and as soon as Herries and I had resumed our seats, I at once fell to work.

“Mr Herries, can you put me in the way of setting about getting into Parliament?”

“Getting into Parliament? Are you thinking of taking up that line?”

“That’s what I came home for. Of course there was the primary object of this affair of the property, but that was what made me in such a hurry about it.”

“Well, I should say you couldn't do better. There's plenty of room for military men in Parliament. It will give you an occupation too, for I suppose you have had enough of soldiering by this time, and now that you are married you would like to be settled.”

“No, I can't say that I am tired of the army, and my wife likes the notion of military life; but you know there is no need to leave it because one goes into Parliament.”

“True, I had forgotten that. Oh no; your position would be the better both ways. A plain captain, saving your presence, may be a nobody, but a captain and M.P. is a very different sort of person. Well, I have no doubt it can be managed. You must be prepared to spend something of course.”

“Anything in reason, or out of reason either, if that is the only difficulty. But now, can you advise me how to set to work?”

“Well, I should say the best plan would be to fix on some place, a small borough would be best; large places are apt to be dreadfully expensive unless you go in upon some extreme platform, and you ought to be at least a duke or an earl's son to carry off ultra-Radical principles properly. I know one or two snug little towns where there are no strong existing interests. You should fix on one of these, go down there, buy or rent a place in the neighbourhood, subscribe to all the local charities, give good dinners and make yourself popular—you may leave the pop-

ularity part to Mrs West—and then when the next general election——”

“Next general election? why, that is ever so far off! I want to get in at once.”

“Ah! that’s quite another matter. That’s just what everybody wants to do who failed last time. It’s a very difficult matter to get a seat nowadays. Why, I suppose there are a couple of hundred men at least looking out for seats at the present moment.”

“Is that really so? Certainly I have heard the same thing said before. Everybody talks about there being these two hundred expectants, but there are no manifest signs of their existence. I daresay there may be a couple of hundred men who would like to drop into seats if they came in their way without any trouble, but if there are this number of eager applicants, why don’t they appear? There was that election for the Cockaleekie Burghs only the other day, since I came home, but two hundred candidates did not come forward; there were only two.”

“Ah! that was a Scotch seat, which choked off a lot of men to begin with. But of course I don’t mean to say that everybody has an equal chance for every place. Want of local interest eliminates a lot of men. Then, again, a great many places are closed to those who are not on a particular side in politics. But local interest is the thing. It’s a curious state of things altogether is this matter of getting into Parliament. You see men who would give their

heads and ten thousand pounds into the bargain for a seat and can't get one, and on the other hand you may see boroughs literally going a-begging."

"That is just the impression I had obtained merely from watching the course of elections in the papers. And one of these begging boroughs is just what I should like to find. But in most cases the chance of success, as far as I can make out, appears to depend on standing for a place where there are not stronger local interests already established—in fact, where the field is clear."

"You are quite right, I believe. Maryborough now is a case in point. That is the little place down in North-westernshire which I hail from,—at least I was brought up there as a boy, and my friends are living there still. Well, we could have brought you in or anybody else that we wanted at the last election. The big man of the place, Lord Awbury, who used to have the seat in his gift practically, has fallen out with the townspeople and lost all his influence, and the seat was literally going a-begging."

"Well, but why did not one of the two hundred expectants go down to such a land of Canaan as this with the ten thousand pounds in his pocket? This is just one of those chances which one would have thought everybody would have been on the watch to snap up."

"No, I believe a stranger would not have had a chance. If one had come down on our side, Lord

Awbury would have started a candidate on the other, and people would have been divided, for a local bigwig, quarrelsome or not, always has a certain amount of interest, and very possibly we should have lost the election. No, we needed some one sufficiently well known or well recommended to prevent a split. They wanted my brother, who is the leading solicitor in the place, to stand, but he declined to become an M.P. on any terms, and so at last they hit upon the local banker; he made a great fuss about it, but they insisted on his coming forward, and brought him in after a merely nominal contest. But he was not at all ambitious of the honour, and if you had been on the spot then, I daresay we could have managed the thing for you, and for a mere trifle."

"Excuse my asking the question, but with all this interest at your command, why did you not stand for the borough yourself?"

"Who? me? Oh no, that would not have suited me at all. I am much too busy for that sort of work: besides, it would not be in my line at all. I don't think you will find many of my fraternity in Parliament; we leave the talking work to be done by the talking branch of the profession, the barristers. But I daresay there will be a capital opening for you there next time, for our banker will hardly care to stand again; he is quite an elderly man."

"Well, but now, is there not such a thing as mak-

ing vacancies? Cannot men be got to retire sometimes in favour of others by a sort of private arrangement? Your friend the banker, for instance; if his membership involves such a sacrifice on his part, might he not be persuaded?"

"Well, as to that, people are apt to say a good deal more than they mean about such matters; and now that he is there, I am not at all sure that he does not enjoy the dignity of the thing as much as other people. No, I doubt if old Butler would care to retire, at any rate till the next general election, and of course anything in the shape of consideration would be quite out of the question in that quarter."

"Well, but setting aside Mr Butler and Maryborough, still I suppose there *are* men and places where considerations, as you call them, might not be without force?"

"I daresay there may be. I am not a parliamentary agent, you understand, and don't know much about these things; but I can soon make inquiries for you if you wish, and find out. But in such a case your chance of success, I suspect, would be a very risky one. All that a man can do for you by retiring is to secure a vacancy and an open field, and perhaps to give you the first start. You may find all your trouble and expense in that line come to nothing after all."

I remained silent. There could be no doubt of the soundness of his views; and, brought into con-

tact with common-sense, my schemes for immediate action seemed to melt away at once into a more visionary form than ever.

“But I take it, Captain West,” continued Herries, after a pause, “that a year or two would not make any serious difference in your case? If you want to go into Parliament merely for the name of the thing, there would surely be no great harm in waiting a bit? But if you mean to lay yourself out for being a working member, why, you could not do better than begin by taking up some business in the city; go on to one or two directions, and so forth. This will stand you in capital stead when you go down to canvass any place. With your command of capital we could arrange this for you off the reel. Solid concerns I mean, of course—a first-class assurance company or joint-stock bank—not those shady things a man loses caste in the city by having anything to do with.”

“Thank you very much; but waiting in this way is just what I am so anxious to avoid. The fact is, Mr Herries,” I added, after some hesitation, “I have set my heart upon accomplishing this matter before this army reform game is played out. I can’t at all express to you how anxious I feel about it, absurd as you may think it; but I assure you the calmness of my outward appearance is no index of the anxiety I feel at having lost even these few weeks in setting about this job. Is there really no way of carrying out my idea at once?”

Mr Herries got up thoughtfully, and stood with his back to the fireplace, giving his spectacles a little push further on to his nose before replying.

“Well,” said he at last, “but after all—of course I don’t pretend to know much about army matters, they are not in my line—but, from all I can hear, if you got into Parliament four or five years hence you would be in capital time for anything that is likely to be done beforehand, beyond what has been done already, and that, some of the papers seem to say, is all that is needed to be done. I should think that if this is your object there is no need for particular hurry.”

“That may be very true, but it would be a very poor consolation to me all the while if my hopes had to be deferred so long. The fact is,—I daresay you will be amused at my confession, but I may as well make a clean breast of it at once, and then perhaps you will understand my eagerness in the matter. The truth is, I believe that what has been done, although well enough so far as it goes, nevertheless leaves a very great deal more still to be done; and I have a sort of idea, foolish perhaps, but not the less a strongly felt one, that I could bring some useful contributions to the discussion. You see, it seems to me that the people who are most eager about army reform are just those who don’t know anything about it; and those who have the knowledge can’t or won’t make use of it. Now I think I may venture to say

that I have got to the bottom of the military mystery, so far as there really is anything mysterious about the thing, while I am certainly one of those who believe that there is room for further improvement. And what I am so anxious for is to get an opportunity——”

My little oration was here interrupted by the arrival of the coffee, and Mr Herries sat down and thoughtfully stirred his cup. At last he said—

“But it is not necessary for a man to get into Parliament in order to have his say about the army, or anything else. Why not ventilate your ideas in print?”

“Nobody seems to read books nowadays ; at least nobody does who is living about town, and one doesn't want to convert the people who live down in the country.”

“Well, if they don't read books they certainly don't read speeches. But it is not necessary to bring out a big book in order to have your say. There are plenty of editors ready to get hold of ideas and put them into shape for you. In that way you may get as much publicity as you like.”

“But do you think that is really a good way of attracting attention? It seems to me that things said in a newspaper are practically lost, buried in the mass of matter poured forth.”

“People certainly read the papers if they read nothing else.”

“Yes, but it goes out of their heads as fast as it goes in. People seem to me to read for the news, or to kill time, or from habit, not to learn. Besides, the papers are so one-sided, most of them, that people don't believe in them. Either the Government are a set of hopelessly incompetent blunderers, or they represent all the honesty and ability of the country as collected on that side. Any proposals coming forward with a trade-mark of that sort stamped on them are sure to be received with more or less suspicion; besides, everybody does not read the same paper.”

“Oh! if you want to be sure of having the whole country for audience, then I admit even a daily paper might fail you. But I suggested writing instead of speaking because you seemed to be in such a hurry. Even when you get into Parliament that is merely one step. It takes a man perhaps a dozen years to get what they call the ear of the House.”

“Is that necessarily so? Look at Rigby Sebright and Summer-toppe; they appear to have gone off at score almost from the first day they entered it.”

“As for that, Rigby Sebright is literally made of brass. He is a man who would always make himself heard wherever he was. It would take a good deal to put *him* down. And he is an uncommonly long-headed fellow to boot. Then you must remember that both of these men are barristers, men who have been accustomed to talk on their legs for years.”

“Well, then, take Pendragon; he went into Parliament almost straight from college, yet he seems to talk pretty freely.”

“Yes, very true, but then very possibly he may have practised beforehand at debating clubs; besides, he went in with a university reputation. Of course I don't deny that there are such cases, but then there must be natural gifts for the thing. And very possibly you may yourself have had the needful practice beforehand to make you feel sure of your powers. You will excuse my plain speaking, I am sure, but you want my advice, and so I feel bound to say what I think.”

“That is precisely what I desire, and I daresay you will think me still more presumptuous when I tell you that I have never addressed half-a-dozen people together in my life. Nevertheless, absurd as it may sound to say it, I feel certain that I could do so without any difficulty if I had anything to say, and the opportunity for saying it. Besides, though here again it may appear very absurd to offer an opinion when my sole experience is derived from three or four visits to the gallery of the House, if one thing impressed me more than another about the place, it is the patience with which men are listened to who have got anything to say, without any reference to their manner of saying it. It is, for the matter of that, almost the same with men who have nothing to say. The tolerance of bores there is surprising.”

“ To tell you the truth, I have not been present at a debate for years. I could not manage the time even if I wanted to, but judging from what I see of members out of the House—and I have had to do with a good many one way and another—I can quite understand that they may be dreadfully stupid there as elsewhere. But, after all, speaking in Parliament won't do what you want any more than writing. Independent members are perfectly powerless to introduce changes in such a matter as you speak of. If you want to be reforming the army, you must get a place in the Government. And that is not an easy matter, whatever public speaking may be.”

“ I see you are laughing at me, and you will laugh still more when I tell you that this is part of my scheme too. A very humble place will do; I ought to mention that although a simple regimental officer now, I have had some experience of public business, although in what you would perhaps consider a small way, still sufficient for giving an insight into the ways of Government; and my belief is that all you want is the power of initiation. Provided you have that, and get other people to take up your ideas, and are behind the scenes to help to pull the administrative wires, it does not matter much, I suspect, who is nominally the leader. Of course you must have the opportunity of expounding your ideas, and that a seat in the House would give. And please don't run away with the notion that I believe myself en-

dowed with any special gifts or special knowledge. There are dozens of men in the army, I daresay, who would do the thing just as well, probably very much better, only they haven't the chance. I should never have done more than think about the thing in more or less dreamy fashion—for men don't trouble themselves about the impossible—but for the stroke of fortune which has befallen me. As things have turned out, however, I feel the impulse very strong upon me, and anyhow I must make the attempt."

"Well," said Herries, after a pause, "my devil's advocacy of the difficulties before you has at least made it plain that you are very anxious to get into Parliament, and the point is now, how to forward your wishes. There are men who make it their business to manage this sort of thing, and it can be easily arranged to put you in communication with them. At the same time, I am rather afraid you will find their hands full already—that is, that they have already pledged themselves to other applicants to help to any seats likely to fall in. The competition for these things is tremendous, I have always understood. And after all I have no great belief in these gentry. I see that Government officials often cannot find a seat when they want one, which looks as if there were a good deal of humbug about this special agency business. Still we must see what can be done. But, mean time, you ought certainly to have a second string to your bow; you ought to

establish a local interest of the kind I mentioned just now, in view to the next general election. I should say it would not be at all a bad plan to try Maryborough. It's a nice country enough, and the hunting is pretty fair, I believe, which I suppose would be an attraction. I daresay you would have no difficulty in finding a suitable place for rent in the neighbourhood. If you don't fancy Maryborough, some other little borough might be tried. There is Leatherby, for instance; why, bless my soul!" said Herries, jumping up, and taking his old position before the fireplace, "how is it I never thought of this before? Why, Leatherby would be the very place of all others. Sheepshanks has the borough in his pocket, and he and Paterson are on most intimate terms, and there must be a vacancy there before long. Yes, it was odd I never thought of this sooner; Leatherby is the very place of all others to go in for. Besides, you are known there already, or at any rate Mrs West is. Her relations live there, don't they? So you will have some local interest to start with."

I thought of Miss Barton's circle of friends, old Miss Barbour, Mrs Crane, and the Misses Provest, and observed that I feared in an electioneering point of view my wife's acquaintance would hardly be able to help much.

"Never mind," replied Herries, "you won't need any other help if Sheepshanks will support you. He

returns the second member just as easily as he does himself. The great point is, that very likely you may not have to wait for a general election. Lord Stowe may go off any day ; he is a very old man, and very shaky, as I happen to know ; and then Lord Wraymouth's seat becomes vacant."

"But is it not likely Mr Sheepshanks may be already committed to local interests of some sort ? The contingency of this seat becoming available must be foreseen by others as well as by us. I should be afraid we shall find ourselves forestalled here. There are almost sure to be men on the spot who want to get in."

"I don't know about that. Lord Wraymouth has had the seat almost unopposed there for five-and-twenty years, till people must have almost forgotten to think about the possibility of a change of members. Besides, Sheepshanks is an eccentric man in some ways, and I am told keeps very much aloof from the people about him, and certainly he would not encourage any negotiations about the matter while Lord Wraymouth is there. Nor can you yourself do anything for the present ; but depend upon it Leatherby is just the place to look out for. Paterson knows all about it much better than I do. I am not well acquainted with Sheepshanks myself, but Paterson and he are very old friends. I'll speak to Paterson about it to-morrow."

At this juncture Mrs Herries looked in to say that

there were lights in the drawing-room, and that the young lady from the Royal Academy was going to sing. To the drawing-room accordingly we repaired.

"I'll talk over the matter with Paterson to-morrow," said Herries, as we left the room. "I did mean to go down to Manchester by the twelve o'clock train, but it will do just as well to start in the evening, and I will see Paterson first."

I expressed my thanks hurriedly as we passed into the drawing-room for the hearty interest he took in the matter, but begged him not to let Paterson know why I was in such a hurry about it. "For goodness' sake don't tell him all I have told you. One confession is enough. I don't want both my friends to think me a donkey."

We found Mr Crouch standing by the piano, with a pleased simper on his face, turning over the music-leaves for the young lady from the Royal Academy. It was in keeping with my little wife's unaffected simplicity of character, and her sister's, that after the first-named accomplished vocalist had sung three or four songs, sending her powerful voice well out of the room through the open windows into the garden, and so round to the shrubbery in the front, till even the cabman who was waiting to convey Mr Crouch to the train might share in the general entertainment—that after this quite thrilling exhibition Eva and Sybil should not refuse to take her place at the instrument, and to sing one of their simple duets; for

I have observed that many young ladies who sing reserve themselves for occasions when invidious comparisons are not likely to be made. Even more pleasing was the perfect good taste with which they received the young lady's somewhat overdone expressions of delight at the treat they had afforded her.

CHAPTER XV.

REPORTS PROGRESS.

“So,” said Mr Paterson, when, the second day after that described in the foregoing chapter, I went down to the office in Gracechurch Street to discuss the interminable schedule—“so you want to go into Parliament. I wish I had known this before you went down to Leatherby. I would have made a point of introducing you to my friend Sheepshanks, for Herries’s idea of trying to get you in there seems a very good one. I am afraid there is no chance of his coming to town again this session, and I can’t very well go down there without some business to take me, for this is a sort of thing that must be managed carefully. Anyhow, there is no hurry in the matter; very possibly it may not come to anything for some years. The great thing is to be on the look-out, and we are in a position to have the first information if the seat is likely to be vacant. Meanwhile, what Herries suggests about your establishing yourself down there seems a very good one, supposing you fancy the neighbourhood.”

The idea certainly did seem a very good one, especially as it would keep the sisters together, for Sybil's visit to us could not be indefinitely prolonged. But in my restless state of mind I felt quite unable to face the prospect of settling down to that sort of country life. Something more than partridge-shooting was needed for inducing a habit of patience. There was a still stronger reason against the plan. The physician whom by Mr Fergusson's advice I had called in to see Eva pronounced that her system wanted tone, and recommended change of air and a course of Kissingen waters, so we determined to pay that place a visit. Parliament was up, and Mr Paterson wanted to be off on his annual visit to his sister in Scotland; Herries was about to start for America on business; and the progress of scheduling the estate was practically suspended. Not that there really appeared to be anything remaining to be done. All the more risky investments had been withdrawn, and the bulk of the property was now concentrated in a few good securities—in fact there was nothing remaining towards the completion of the executor's business that might not, so far as I could see, be despatched in a few hours. But Mr Paterson was not a man to be hurried. Happily we are not responsible for our thoughts, but it makes me blush even now when I call to mind how it struck me at the time that the estate was now in a handy form for a man who wanted to realise it, and that it would be a very

convenient opportunity for doing so when both Herries and myself were away, and Mr Roberts the managing clerk also bound on a fortnight's holiday. Happily, too, my worthy friend did not know the base suspicions with which I involuntarily repaid his disinterested kindness.

However, there being no longer a reason for staying in town, which was already empty and very hot and stuffy, we started off with a due supply of circular notes and an undue supply of luggage, Sybil, Eva, Annette, the little maid whom we had brought away from Leatherby, and myself, all full of pleased expectancy, and Annette trembling with wonder and anxiety at this her second great move in life. We took the Rhine route, which I believe we enjoyed quite as much as the ordinary run of travellers; but inasmuch as the girls knew no German, and almost less French, and my acquaintance with those languages was merely a book one, we did not add much to the general stock of observation which our countrymen have already brought to bear on those regions.

At Kissingen we led the usual pottering, purposeless life affected by idle people at the smaller German baths, and as Eva had to get up early to drink the water, the days were not too short. A more uninteresting life so far as incidents go it would be difficult to conceive, yet I look back on that time of peace as one of the happiest in my life. The day began with a very early saunter in *deshabille* on the promenade,

while Eva consumed about forty tumblers of water to the strains of the band. Then back to the hotel to make a more complete toilette and breakfast. Then a morning passed in quiet idling on the part of the girls, and German lessons on mine. They joined in these at first, and we took in a German newspaper and used to spell through the advertisements in turn, but the business was voted stupid at length, and I was left to take my lessons alone. The music was more successful. They had lessons both in the piano and singing, and it was hard to say which of the two improved fastest, while for people who had never been accustomed to settle down to anything, it was surprising how much they practised. In the afternoon we sallied forth again to the promenade, where every one, as before, spent the time in fatiguing himself by slow pacing up and down to the music of the band. Then there was dinner, and then another stroll.

New acquaintances of course were made during our sojourn, nor were old acquaintances wanting. Young Brodie of the Indian Public Works to wit, who lived out on the canals near Sirdhanna, and used to drive in occasionally to partake of station hospitality, attired in a blanket jumper by way of coat, a mushroom pith hat about three feet in diameter, and white trousers which might have been made for a much smaller brother. I confess I did not recognise Brodie at first when he accosted me, attired

in one of Hoole's frock-coats of faultless make, a geranium in his button-hole, and altogether from his glossy black hat down to his natty boots looking more adapted to the meridian of Bond Street than the free-and-easy appearance affected at a German bath; while his whilom shaggy beard was trimmed to a Vandyke point, and nothing remained of his former jungly aspect but the incipient baldness due to exposure under an Indian sun. "Jamie looks a respectable being now," said Miss Brodie, who with her mother was being escorted by the newly-returned brother through a German tour, "but you never saw such a figure as he was when he first came home. I hope all the gentlemen in India don't dress like that, for he wants me to go back with him when his furlough is over, and I am sure I couldn't stay there if people are such frights." I assured her that although last week's fashions were not strictly followed there, still that the men on the canals must not be taken as samples, for that they were looked on as an exceptional race of wild beings. But the great advantage of India, I observed, was that in that climate people never grew old, a view of things which, still more than my assurances about the civilisation of the country, appeared to reconcile that young lady to the prospect of exile. Her brother was a young fellow of a little over thirty, and Mrs Brodie had informed me incidentally that he was her youngest child.

Then there was Featherstone of the Civil Service, like Mr Barton a Commissioner, generally regarded by the fellow-residents of his station as the cheeriest of old bachelors, and famous for his ladies' dinner-parties, but who now turned up with a fashionable wife and two showy daughters. "It was so hard to leave the children," Mrs Featherstone explained, as we lounged up and down the promenade, "when their education had to be looked after; and really my health used to be so delicate in India; and then my husband had bought our house at Brighton, and there was a difficulty about finding a tenant; and we wanted a home for the boys in the holidays; and so it seemed better in every way that he should leave me at home. But these new furlough regulations are a great blessing; it is such a comfort to have Mr Featherstone home again after being out only three years; indeed I don't think I could have made this journey alone with the girls." But there is no lot in life without its trials, and Mrs Featherstone appeared to be already somewhat depressed by the fact that in two years her husband would complete his full term of service and be obliged to retire, "and how we are to manage then I am sure I don't know, with three boys at school to provide for. Mr Featherstone's own expenditure has always been very heavy, quite equal indeed to what his pension will be, and with our double establishment we have never been able to save anything." Meantime, until this stroke of ill-

fortune should descend they were making the best of their time ; and for people who saw each other only about every five or six years they seemed a truly attached couple.

But our principal friends at Kissingen were the Lowders. Mrs Lowder was an invalid, on whose account the visit had been made ; the two girls were nice-looking, clever, and a little blue, although on our becoming acquainted they straightway fell down and worshipped my two companions ; but to me secretly the great attraction was the father, for Sergeant Lowder was member for Drymouth, a cheery pleasant fellow, full of conversation, and never tired of talking Parliamentary shop, as I was certainly never tired of listening. And when I observed the impression which the House had evidently made upon him ; how this prosperous, well-known advocate appeared to be scarcely on speaking terms with the chiefs of his own party, and admitted to me in confidence as we sat smoking under a lime-tree in the gardens, that he never rose to speak without trepidation, and how, after being five years in the House, he still felt himself, to use his own expression, " a mere junior ;"—when such was the experience of this light of the criminal bar, who had spent his life on his legs, and was reputed to be able to turn any witness inside out ; with such a precedent before me, my heart sank within me as I thought of the absurdity of the hopes I had allowed myself to nourish, that I,

an untried stranger, should succeed in soaring to higher flights where such a man had failed.

Such reflections were wholesome, no doubt ; but at this distance from England, and when the noise of Parliamentary business had died away in the recess, the foolish restlessness which possessed me there had to a great extent passed away. Nor had I heard anything from the firm to keep up any excitement of feeling. Mr Paterson was still, I supposed, in Scotland ; Mr Herries had gone to New York ; my last letter was one from Mr Roberts the manager, sending a further supply of circular notes ; and I was becoming quite settled down to the quiet monotonous life we were leading, which brought my wife improved health daily—the mornings with a German master, the afternoons in reading some book aloud, when the girls did fancy-work and professed to listen, the evenings given to music in the Lowders' or our apartments. Six weeks had passed away in this fashion, and four tumblers of the cold water were becoming almost too cold in the fresh morning air, when the course of our quiet life was interrupted by the arrival of a telegram, which we found awaiting us on our return one evening from a picnic with the Lowders and Featherstones in the neighbouring mountain woods.

It ran as follows :—

“ From R. Roberts, Gracechurch Street, London, to Captain West, Hotel de Russie, Kissingen. Mr

Paterson thinks a favourable opportunity may soon occur for carrying out your wish. He recommends your speedy return."

It was quite needless to enjoin speed. Annette and Sybil sat up half the night packing, for the latter would not allow Eva to exert herself, and we started from Kissingen the next morning, travelling homewards as fast as we could without undue fatigue to the latter. Eva was delighted with the news when I explained its purport, knowing my anxiety on the subject, but happily did not ask for particulars as to how I expected to carry out my plan, so I was not obliged to confess my ignorance, and my utter dependence in the matter on the friendly firm. For Sybil it was sufficient to know that we were recalled by business.

CHAPTER XVI.

THREE CONSPIRATORS VISIT LEATHERBY.

I TELEGRAPHED from Brussels that we should arrive in town the same evening, and Dobbins the office messenger was waiting to meet us at the Charing Cross station. Mr Paterson, he reported, was down in Lincolnshire, but would be back the next day, and begged that we would go to Sackville Street as before, where everything was ready for us. Mr Herries had returned from America the day before, but had gone down again to Liverpool that morning.

To Sackville Street accordingly we went, and found that Mrs Benton, the good lady who combined the functions of cook and housekeeper, had prepared dinner for us ; Frederick, Mr Paterson's man, was waiting to receive us, and we were soon settled down as comfortably as if we had never been absent. But the air of Sackville Street seemed dirty and thick after Kissingen, and a sort of reaction followed the excitement of the journey. Nor had Mr Paterson left a single line in elucidation of his first message ;

and as the ladies retired almost immediately after dinner, I wandered out to walk down my restlessness, taking, as was natural, the route of the great building at Westminster, now dark and silent.

Next day, about noon, came a telegram from Mr Paterson from the city. He had gone there straight on his return, would I go down to meet him? Of course I drove down to Gracechurch Street at once, whither he had arrived by a morning train, and in a few minutes the reason for our sudden recall was explained. The opportunity we had talked about, it seemed, was likely to occur at once. Lord Stowe was very ill, and gradually sinking, and would not outlive the week. "I have just come from his lordship's place," Mr Paterson went on to say. "We are not his lawyers, although we have been employed by him and Lord Wraymouth at different times. His regular lawyer is a solicitor at Lincoln; but the latter asked my advice about certain testamentary arrangements his lordship desired to make, and so I went down. And this, you see, is how I have become acquainted with the facts. If we had been the family lawyers, I should have considered myself bound in confidence to say nothing about the matter, indeed not to act without first taking note of Lord Wraymouth's wishes. And of course all I am saying now is in confidence. But the fact is, the seat at Leatherby will be vacant before the end of the week, and Lord Wraymouth is away yachting in Greece with his daughters, so

that there is really no opportunity of acting with him, or consulting him in the matter. The succession to his seat will be settled before he can get home. If you are to take advantage of this opportunity, it will be necessary to act at once. Now the question is, what is the best thing to be done?"

Thereon we fell to discussing the matter. Mr Paterson's idea of the proper line of action was, that he should write to Mr Sheepshanks, informing him of the probable vacancy in the representation of the borough, and asking for his support on my behalf; and although this seemed hardly a vigorous way of setting to work, or a fitting sequence to our rapid flight from Kissingen, still I did not like to press my kind friend to do more than he felt inclined to undertake himself, more especially in a matter turning on the death of a man who was still alive; and accordingly I was writing a letter to Mr Sheepshanks at Mr Paterson's dictation, and in his name—he never wrote a letter with his own hand if he could help it, but generally called in a clerk to act as amanuensis—when Mr Herries and his travelling bags arrived from Liverpool, and he came straightway into Mr Paterson's room, and after greetings the nature of our occupation was explained to him.

Herries was for more vigorous action at once. Everything depended on taking steps quickly. There would be a dozen men after the seat as soon as the news got abroad, as it would have done already if

Lord Wraymouth had been at home ; the Treasury whip would be writing to Mr Sheepshanks to ask his support for some candidate, and a promise would be given, and we should be too late.

“ I don't see myself,” said Herries, “ any difference between acting before a man's actually dead, and acting before he is buried, and that you will have to do in any case if you really mean business. Writing will never do here. Suppose Mr Sheepshanks were to ask for further information, or to propose conditions ; then there will be a reply, and further writing and delay, and so the chance will be lost. Besides, the matter of this vacancy may have got wind already ; who knows but what a letter may go down from the Treasury whip by the same post ? He may have telegraphed already, very likely, and Mr Sheepshanks is a stanch man by the Government. No, no ; everything will turn on an hour or two, depend on it. The best plan is to go down at once and see him yourself. I think Captain West should go too, and be ready to give any explanations needed, or guarantees for the genuine liberalness of his principles.”

Mr Herries was so strong on this point that his partner soon agreed to the plan, and proposed starting the following morning, as it was now two o'clock, and there was no reasonable train available ; but the former insisted on the value of time, and urged that we should go down by the night mail. I felt that

this was the right thing to do, if we went at all, but did not like to say anything, for my elderly friend was evidently tired from his morning's journey ; but his younger partner, whose normal state it was to spend the night in a railway carriage, thereby, as he said, saving the day for business, made light of the half-expressed objections, and so it was arranged accordingly ; and Herries, after leaving the room, put in his head again to say that he would go too, and was out of the house before Mr Paterson could stop him.

I returned to Sackville Street to order, on Mr Paterson's behalf, an early dinner, leaving him to follow after he had transacted some business. Eva was delighted when I told her that there was a possibility of my becoming member for Leatherby in place of Lord Wraymouth, although she could not understand why that nobleman should be obliged to retire from the representation ; but still more at the prospect opened of going down shortly to see her aunt. It was agreed, however, that Sybil should be told for the present only that I was called down to Leatherby on business, but business quite unconnected with the little house in Church Street.

After dinner, Mr Paterson and I set off to catch the night mail. This was the first time Eva and I had been separated, and the back drawing-room was witness to a tender parting while Mr Paterson followed Frederic and the luggage down to the hall ;

nor could my gentle wife restrain a tear or two, although I should not be absent for more than a couple of days at most, while receiving the ten-pound note which I made over to her in case money should be needed, the first she ever had possession of, I think, for hitherto I had been paymaster on all occasions.

It appeared at first that Herries would not be of the party, but he came rushing out of the ticket-room on to the platform at the last moment, followed by Dobbins the messenger carrying his travelling-bags and rug (that useful creature, by the way, seemed to spend a considerable part of his life on railway platforms), to whom, standing at the carriage-door, he conveyed a string of messages and instructions up to the last instant.

Knowing how emphatically his time was money, and what a quantity of travelling he had on his own account, I felt quite uneasy that Herries should be coming down too, and I took the opportunity of his partner having settled down to a nap to apologise for giving him so much trouble.

“Don't mention it,” said Herries. “When I take up a thing, I like to go through with it. Besides, if we manage this job well, it will save a lot of trouble by-and-by, for of course you won't be satisfied till you get what you want; and between ourselves,” he added, dropping his voice, “although I don't know a man in London with a sounder judgment than Pater-son, still, you see, he is not so young as he was, and

he may not be quite so alive as I am to the value of time in affairs of this kind, where a few hours or minutes may be decisive one way or the other. So altogether my coming may be of use."

With this Mr Herries tucked his railway rug round him, and adjusting his spectacles firmly on his nose, prepared for sleep. I tried to follow his example, but in vain; the excitement of the prospect before us was too great. There is no time when the brain conjures up images of the past and visions of the future more busily than during a sleepless railway journey. The motion of the train imparts a sort of exaltation to the brain, though its activity may be exerted in a purposeless inconsecutive fashion. Thus as we rattled along, scene after scene of my life came up; my landing in India and the enjoyment of all the novelty that awaits first-comers there; my first campaign; my appointment to the horse artillery; my service in the secretariat; return to military duty; the season at Sirmoori ending in my captivity; the pig-sticking party on the banks of the Ganges; the news of accession to fortune; love-making; the Barton family; marriage; the journey home, and horrible anxiety it occasioned, now passed away like a bad dream; my first acquaintance with Mr Pater-son, and the ridiculous suspicions that would force themselves on my mind, do what I might to keep them down; our visit to Leatherby and Eva's gentle aunt, and Harry Perkins and all the people there;

our picnic in Thorpe woods; and then, for the first time, there flashed upon me the recollection of my conversation with Mr Fergusson, and the hopes he confided to me about bringing in Squire Drew as member for the borough whenever a vacancy should occur. As all that had passed on that occasion was recalled to mind, a feeling quite of horror came over me at the possible misconstruction that might be put on my conduct in thus stealing a march on the other side, and after a bad quarter of an hour, I took the opportunity of a general waking up at Stalebun Junction to explain my dilemma to Herries. How it had suddenly occurred to me that my going down in this way to Leatherby, where I was already known, would certainly be observed; the difficulty of accounting for my visit to friends, while to conceal its object would seem unfair to the Conservatives, whose intentions I had become acquainted with unintentionally, yet so to speak in confidence.

My companion, however, made light of these difficulties. "As for being seen," he said, "we shall get there before it is light, and as Sheepshanks lives out of the town, and never has any company, you may come and go without anybody being a bit the wiser."

"But then it seems so like stealing a march on the other side."

"That is just what we want to do. It is everything in such matters to be first in the field."

"Of course, and if I were a perfect stranger to the

place, it would be all well enough. But then having been taken into the confidence of the other party, as it were, I confess I feel as if almost treacherous to be acting behind their backs."

"Well, but then this other party, as you call it, what does it really consist of? I have always understood that it did not exist. Did Drew himself tell you that he meant to come forward and fight whenever this vacancy happened?"

"I can't say that he did. It was my friend the doctor who confided to me the hopes of their party to secure one of the two seats in the borough by-and-by."

"Well, but, now really all this seems to me very shadowy and vague. If it had been a gentleman of my profession who worked the party, there might have been something in it; but the idea of being hindered by—I don't want to say anything against your friend, but you may be pretty sure that a country doctor will be much too anxious to keep his practice together, and too busy into the bargain, to meddle much with politics. And merely because this gentleman told you he should like to see a member returned of his way of thinking? Really, Captain West, you must excuse my saying that I cannot see the force of your scruples."

"I am very conscious that I must seem unreasonable; and, as you put the case, it looks absurd enough; but I cannot well make you understand how the thing came about, or the sort of relation I stand

on with the other people in this matter. Here is Drew's daughter, a most intimate friend of Mrs West, brought up together, and living in the same house for years; and now to go down secretly and make arrangements for cutting out her father! Upon my word, I don't see how I am to do it."

"Well, I must say, Captain West," replied Herries, settling himself back in his corner of the carriage with an air of vexation, "it is a pity you did not think of these things before we started. If a man is to be thrown off an election by every fanciful notion that comes uppermost, or because somebody else wants the seat, he had better give up the idea of Parliament altogether."

As I looked at Mr Paterson taking his uneasy night's rest opposite, his face having slipped down into his comforter, till merely the top of his nose appeared, one eye covered with his wig now all awry under the jolting, and thought how the good-natured old gentleman had given up his proper night's rest through disinterested kindness on my behalf, and how my other companion had scarcely passed an hour out of a railway carriage since his return from America, and that he too had taken the matter up apparently through sheer friendliness, I felt very keenly the ungracious aspect my conduct would present to both of them, and perhaps still more so the ludicrousness of the situation, embarrassing as it seemed.

“You are quite justified in feeling annoyed,” I answered after a pause; “and, of course, I ought to have foreseen these complications sooner. But please do not misunderstand me. I am quite prepared to contest the election against any man. My difficulty does not lie there. What I am doubtful about is the propriety of doing so without giving fair notice to the other side, especially as I had in confidence been made acquainted to a certain extent with their plans.”

“But you are not going to contest an election. What you are going to do is to put certain questions to Mr Sheepshanks. Surely he is the proper person to speak to first? There can be no call either in honour or common-sense to go running about Leatherby telling everybody that you have come down to ask Mr Sheepshanks a favour?”

“That way of putting the thing no doubt makes me look absurd, but——”

“Besides,” interrupted Herries, to whom this argument had come up quite suddenly, and who therefore spoke as if he had kept it in view all along, “supposing that Mr Sheepshanks is committed already to some other applicant, or that for any other reason he declines to support you, would you not look rather foolish if you had let it be known that you had asked?”

“Certainly that way of putting it has great force.”

“I can't see how there can be any other way of

looking at it. Let us hear first what Sheepshanks says about the matter ; and if he goes in to back you up, there will be time enough then to consider your line of action. If he doesn't, why the less said about our journey the better."

This reasoning appeared at the time unanswerable, and indeed it was an immense comfort to have my qualms of conscience thus laid to rest ; but I objected that I could not hope to keep my visit a secret ; the people at the station would be sure to recognise me.

"Well, for the matter of that, it will be quite dark when we arrive, but this train does not go on to Leatherby; we shall have to drive from the junction, and I told Dobbins to telegraph for a carriage to meet us there, so we shall drive through Leatherby without being seen."

To this there seemed to be nothing more to be replied, and I think we both fell asleep eventually to awake at the Leatherby junction. It was still quite dark, but I thought I could detect the Fergusson mare as one of the pair in the carriage awaiting us, and as I carried my bag across the platform and deposited it in the carriage, I turned my coat-collar well up to avoid detection.

While on the way to the house, which lay about two miles beyond the town, I referred to the discussion which had taken place coming down, and said to Mr Paterson that although Mr Herries had satis-

fied the scruples I felt about the expedition generally, I still felt uneasy about the possession of the secret regarding Lord Wraymouth and his father. But Mr Paterson observed that the information was not mine but his, and conveyed to me in confidence; and added that at any rate it would be sufficient to let this point stand over till Mr Sheepshanks had the news. He might be safely trusted to take whatever action was needed and proper in a matter which concerned his old friend and fellow-member. There was nothing to be objected to so sensible a view, and we drove on in silence till our journey came to an end. Indeed the old gentleman looked tired and crusty, and not disposed for conversation.

Mr Sheepshanks' house and grounds lay in the valley of the Yew leading to Thorpe, which here expanded to a width sufficient to contain, besides some fields, a good-sized lawn and gardens with an acre or two of wood, all on the bank of the river, and separated from the main road by a thick-set hedge. We were not expected, for at Mr Herries's suggestion no announcement had been sent of our coming, and the footman and a housemaid were in the act of shaking out the door-mats on the hall-steps, in a manner suggestive of a well-regulated flirtation between the two, notwithstanding the depressing influence of the chill morning fog which lay heavy on the lawn. Mr Paterson was at once recognised, and we were shown into the dining-room, which

looked cheerless and half-swept; and altogether our party seemed rather forlorn, the old gentleman especially, unshorn and unkempt, with his wig still awry, and I could not resist the feeling that we had come on a fool's errand. But the spirits of most of us are under the influence of external things; the coffee and tea brought in and the warm fire made while our rooms were being got ready soon revived the party; and as we went up to dress, the butler, who had just taken in the news of our arrival to his master's room, together with a jug of hot water of a size suggesting that the latter came to maturity before the days of tubbing, brought back word that Mr Sheepshanks would be glad to see Mr Paterson at eight o'clock in his study, and by that time my friend descended to the appointment looking quite a different man—shaven, his wig neatly brushed, brisk and cheery as ever. Herries meanwhile took a stroll in the garden, and I looked out of the breakfast-room window upon the river, the same stream that ran past Miss Barton's garden, feeling too excited for companionship; feeling also very much like a schoolboy whose papa has gone in to see the head-master and ask leave to take him out for the day; watching in a feeble way the ducks which had waddled up from the river and stood in a row on the lawn before the window. Their presence and expectation were presently explained by the entry of their mistress into the

room, a middle-aged, delicate-looking, and shy lady, Miss Sheepshanks, who was evidently puzzled to account for my visit, but quite incurious; it was explained sufficiently no doubt by my being in company with her old friend. Happily the ducks and the feeding of them did duty for conversation, and presently we were joined by Herries, and shortly afterwards by the other two gentlemen, when I could see from Mr Paterson's face that he was satisfied with what had passed, while Mr Sheepshanks' greeting was cordial and agreeable.

During breakfast the conversation was quite general. That over, Mr Paterson signified that Mr Sheepshanks wished to confer with us both, and we retired to his study. I looked to where Herries was standing, making a sort of mute inquiry whether he should not be invited to make one of the party, but neither Mr Paterson nor Mr Sheepshanks responded to the appeal, and as Herries did not seem to expect to be asked I passed in.

Mr Paterson then in his quiet way at once fell to business, sitting well back in an easy-chair, with his legs crossed, his elbows resting on the arms, and fingers pressed together. Mr Sheepshanks sat more upright, with his head a little on one side, and occasionally refreshing himself with a pinch of snuff. Mr Paterson's communication, for Mr Sheepshanks hardly spoke, was that the latter accepted his description of my soundness in political opinions and

general eligibility—he must, I presume, have spoken much more warmly behind my back than he did now, to have carried his friend so heartily into the matter—and was prepared to give me his full support in the event of the vacancy occurring, with the proviso, however, that the Government agent should be first consulted. It was only due to the Government, Mr Sheepshanks thought, especially as Lord Wraymouth was a member of it, that he should ascertain whether there was any one connected with it in particular need of a seat just now. If the Government had no special desire to be served at the present moment, then I could come forward with Mr Sheepshanks' full support.


I could not, under the circumstances, sympathise with his stanchness to his party so much as perhaps it deserved, but I could thoroughly appreciate his friendliness in thus taking up the cause of a perfect stranger so heartily, still more the great and disinterested kindness of our common friend who had brought about the arrangement.

Mr Paterson then mentioned what they thought should be done. First the Secretary to the Treasury must be referred to, but simultaneous preparations should be quietly made for organising a committee and inviting the support of the more influential residents of the place. At this point Mr Herries was summoned to join in the deliberation, and he at once proposed to return by the first train, and see the Secretary if possible before night. As regards local

action, it was explained that Mr Sheepshanks could not take any direct part in the affair ; but his Leatherby agent and factory manager would both of them no doubt be ready to serve on the committee, which would be the same thing as if he did so himself. The great thing, however, would be to bespeak the aid of Mr Rupert Bowles, who was the most active politician in the place ; and accordingly the three gentlemen set off in Mr Sheepshanks' carriage, which had been waiting some time at the door, to call together on that gentleman, after which Herries was to start for town, first telegraphing to the Treasury whip to secure an appointment if possible for that evening. I would fain have returned too, to get out of what appeared to be a false position, but could not well desert Mr Paterson, who needed a night in bed after his fatigues ; so it was agreed that we two should remain till the following day.

The morning, I am bound to say, was a long one. Miss Sheepshanks was shy, and apparently unaccustomed to society of any kind, leading the life of a recluse. I learnt afterwards that, when first her father settled in the place and built his factory, a struggling man driven from the north by strikes, the county people had kept aloof from him ; and afterwards when he became the richest man within twenty miles (even if the income rumour assigned to him were divided by four), he declined their advances, either by way of resenting their behaviour or because

he had become accustomed to his solitary position, and occupied himself solely in business and good works, never appearing in public except to take the chair at a public meeting, and never speaking even then a word more than could be helped. Family sorrows may have had their influence too over his way of life: he had lost an only son, and his married daughter and her husband; and there now only remained to him the grandson at Harrow, destined, if he survived the fatal dampness of these low-lying meadows, to succeed him in the mill and his seat, and the middle-aged spinster with whom I was now endeavouring to maintain a conversation that should have the semblance of interest on either side. In her way Miss Sheepshanks was as unsophisticated as aunt Emily; certainly her acquaintance with people was smaller, for she never accompanied her father in his visits to London; and I suspect this was the first occasion of her meeting with a military man, at any rate a captain of horse artillery. However, everybody is interested about something, if you can only find out what it is; and next after her nephew her poultry and garden and the village schools occupied Miss Sheepshanks' attention, and in going the round of these we became quite animated. Truly grateful, too, did I feel to a certain tame duck of special rarity and plumage, a dissertation on whose merits detained us for five minutes on the gravel path inside the highroad before emerging on the village green; for



while under the shelter of the hedge who should ride past but Drew himself, on his market-day visit to Leatherby, riding slowly along on the grassy side, close to the hedge, avoiding the hot September sun.


Our tour ended, I repaired to my room to write the draft of my address to the electors, but deferred this undertaking for a nap, from which I was awakened by the return of Mr Paterson. Mr Rupert Bowles had been visited and had entered heartily into the affair, and Mr Scrap, the leading attorney, had been summoned to the mill and was also secured. Both these gentlemen, as well as Mr Hunter, the mill-manager, were coming to dinner, an announcement which evidently caused Miss Sheepshanks some trepidation, and her disappearance to the offices for the rest of the afternoon.

Mr Paterson and I then set to work upon the address, which we got through just as Mr Sheepshanks returned from his counting-house, and while reading it over a telegram for the former was brought in from the Leatherby station. It was from the lawyer at Lincoln and as follows: "Lord Stowe expired at half-past seven o'clock this morning." It had been addressed to the office in Gracechurch Street and thence forwarded on. Now, even if the telegraph clerk's education and knowledge of the aristocracy had not brought him to the point of understanding the relation between this event and the representation of Leatherby, the event would certainly be notified

in next morning's papers. I proposed, therefore, to walk into Leatherby and announce myself at once, but Mr Paterson suggested that all I could announce was that I had asked Mr Sheepshanks to support me and had only so far got a conditional answer, and this objection to immediate action seemed unanswerable.

However, the address was completed to our mutual satisfaction and despatched by messenger to Mr Handsaw, the Leatherby agent, to be sent up in charge of a trusty messenger by the evening train to town, and thence carried to a certain printing-office, which was warned by telegraph of his coming. The needful copies could thus be printed off during the night and brought down by early train the next morning, ready for posting up soon after mid-day, if the Treasury whip's reply should be auspicious.

Messrs Rupert Bowles, Scrap, and Hunter came to dinner; the evening would have been a dull one without them, for both our host and his daughter were almost silent, and Mr Paterson was tired after his night's journey. But Mr Bowles, a hale man with snow-white hair and whiskers, a ruddy face and dark eyes, kept us all from going to sleep, speaking in a loud cheery voice with a somewhat provincial, or, at least, homely accent. Mr Scrap was a tall, thin, gentlemanly-looking man, with a long, slightly-hooked nose, a stoop, and a double neckcloth and high shirt-collar that must have been worth ever so much per annum as a professional advertisement.



A lawyer with that neck-tie must be a safe adviser. No direct allusions were made to the matter in hand so long as Miss Sheepshanks or the servants remained in the room ; but afterwards the conversation came round at once to the point, and it was surprising to see the unreserved way in which the two visitors accepted me upon trust ; whether it was the effect of Mr Paterson's recommendation, or the all-sufficiency of being Mr Sheepshanks' nominee, certainly they never even so much as put me through my paces, but seemed to regard the whole matter as settled. "You must stand up for the old place, Captain West," said Mr Bowles ; "Lord Wraymouth has always been a true friend to us. There's young Slowe, Dr Slowe's son, a clerk in the post-office, and doing uncommonly well I'm told, and Humphries too in the Poor Law Board, and quite high up in it now : " and he went on to enumerate various other preferments conferred, from which it appeared that Lord Wraymouth, who in the course of his long public career had been the round of almost all the state departments, without ever rising, however, to the top of any, had left behind him a legacy in each, in the shape of a son of some deserving inhabitant, including, as Mr Bowles might have added, but did not at the time, that promising member of the civil service, Mr Rupert Bowles, junior, or, as he styled himself on his card, Mr R. Podger Bowles (Mrs Bowles was a Miss Podger), a clerk in the Treasury,

and regarded by the rising generation of Leatherby as the personification of London fashion, whose name appeared every year in the list of visitors at Lady Elizabeth Merrifield's receptions, and other distinguished entertainments.

I ventured to observe that these recognitions of Leatherby merit most probably dated from a time prior to the introduction of open competition, and Mr Bowles admitted that these were degenerate days ; whereon we fell to discussing the hunting capabilities of the country, and the chances of finding some place in the neighbourhood where Mrs West and I could settle down for the winter. Mr Scrap's remarks during our little private conversation by the tea-table turned principally on the desire of Mrs Scrap to become better acquainted with me, and the regard she had always entertained for Eva. Politeness prevented my replying that I had never heard Eva express any similar feeling, nor could I remember indeed having seen that lady among the numerous callers during our visit.

There was, of course, some talk about the prospect of a contested election, and I found it was generally understood that the other party would at least try to bring Drew forward ; but Mr Scrap was very decided that he had not the ghost of a chance, while Mr Bowles doubted whether he would be got to face the expense. Not a word, by the way, was said about the expenses on our side, but I knew this matter

might safely be left in Mr Paterson's hands, and, moreover, felt perfectly indifferent about it.

The next morning was beautiful enough to tempt the veriest sluggard from his bed, much less a man who had not yet lost the habit of early rising ; but I had scarcely dressed, and was stepping into the garden, when the servant handed me a telegram from Mr Paterson's room which had just arrived, and to receive which the old gentleman had been awakened an hour before his proper time. It was from Herries : " Glissereene entirely agrees, and thinks the proposed arrangement very suitable." Glissereene was the Treasury whip. Here, then, were all the obstacles removed so far as could be seen. My success so far seemed wonderful. I was obliged to take a sharp turn round the garden to keep down the elation of spirits this news caused, and, on returning, found Mr Sheepshanks coming out for his morning stroll, for he too was an early man. He admitted that there was now no longer any need for concealment, and I therefore arranged to walk into Leatherby, there being just time to get there for Miss Barton's half-past eight o'clock breakfast, and Mr Paterson would pick me up on his way to catch the ten o'clock train. After all it would be a cheap bit of candour, for the news would probably not get beyond aunt Emily's household before the afternoon, and the handbills and posters were due from town by two. Accordingly, bidding appropriate adieus to

my hosts, I set off in the fresh morning air along the dusty road, passing on my way the celebrated spot whence, looking back, you see the view which reminded Deedes, R.A., of the Trossachs.

The household in Church Street were at prayers when I arrived, as I could infer from Hannah's stealthy movement out of the parlour to answer my knock, and from the fact that her sister, the cook, was discovered in that apartment on my entry there. My appearance excited of course much surprise, and I had to assure everybody several times over that no accident had happened either to Eva or Sybil, or even to Annette. Mary Drew was absent, having gone on a visit to friends at Stampton, so, as I sat down to breakfast with the two elder ladies, my news was the easier to tell; but it took some time for them to apprehend its purport clearly, if indeed Miss Honoria understood what it was about after all, which seemed doubtful. Under the circumstances I felt no scruple in asking them to say nothing on the matter till they should hear of it from outside, which would be early in the afternoon when the address arrived from town. This would give my supporters the satisfaction of being the first to communicate the news. Breakfast over, the carriage with Mr Paterson called to pick me up, and I started with him for town, leaving the aunts in great joy at the prospect of their nieces' speedy return.

CHAPTER XVII.

AN IMPOSING RECEPTION.

“ Now then, girls, array yourselves in purple and orange ; summon Annette and produce your choicest garments in those colours ; or, if you are not provided, let us sally forth and procure them forthwith. A dress of orange, say, with a purple scarf, and a purple bonnet with orange flowers ; something in that style would look neat and expressive, wouldn't it ? Anyhow there is not a moment to be lost, for we must all repair to the scene of war to-morrow at the very latest.”

“ What nonsense you talk, Charlie ! as if we could possibly make ourselves into such frights. But do you really mean that you have been elected ? I shall be so pleased——”

“ Why, not exactly elected, my love ; you go too fast, you little thing ; but everything has been settled satisfactorily, and I am to stand for the borough, and you must come with me at once to help to carry on the canvass.”

This announcement took place, after greetings on my arrival, in the drawing-room in Sackville Street; and then explaining matters to Sybil, who had so far heard nothing of the reason for my absence, I produced a copy of the poster which had been sent from the printing-office, wherein the electors of Leatherby were informed in purple letters on a flaming yellow ground that their very faithful and obedient servant, Charles West, presumed to invite their suffrages for the representation of the borough to fill the vacancy caused by the removal of their noble and respected member to the responsibilities of a seat in the Upper House of Parliament. That he could not express his political sentiments more clearly than by saying that they were generally in accord with those of their esteemed member and fellow-townsmen, Mr Sheepshanks, and of the great party to whose efforts and measures so much of the prosperity of the country and the manufacturing interests was due. And so forth, according to received practice. Also, that administrative reform would always receive his cordial support, especially such measures as were needed for organising the military forces of the country on a basis of improved efficiency and greater economy. Finally, the candidate stated that, although a comparative stranger himself, he was connected with Leatherby by family ties, and hoped now to become a member of their society in every sense.

The indefatigable Herries accompanied us on our

journey the next morning. "I'll see you started properly," he said, "and then you must take your own line for the war-ministership." Mrs Herries came also to see the fun; and the three ladies, without exactly adopting the costume I had suggested, were yet attired in a manner sufficiently pronounced to denote their connection with the candidate. But any colour would become Eva, or Sybil either; and Mrs Herries, flushed and happy at being allowed to accompany her husband anywhere, looked handsomer than ever.

But we were not at all prepared for the greeting that awaited us at Leatherby, where, as the train drew up, a discordant clang almost enough to frighten the engine burst forth from the town band, intended to do duty for "See, the conquering hero comes," but with improvised variations on each instrument. On the platform, set off by a background of a purple and orange banner, stood the candidate's committee:—Mr Rupert Bowles, his brother, Mr William Bowles, Mr Scrap, Mr Handsaw, Mr Hunter, Messrs St Leger and Gernel, the bankers, Mr Hambrowe, the wine merchant of Fore Street, Mr Tawney, the wine merchant of Stampton Street, Messrs Dyapur and Ruche, the leading drapers, Mr Staine, the upholsterer, Mr Prymekut, the leading butcher, and others too numerous to mention. "There can't be anybody to speak of left for a committee on the other side," whispered Herries, "even if they try to get one up." Then, as

we stepped on to the platform, Mr Rupert Bowles moved forward, and I shook hands with all the committee, and then introduced them to Eva, who, looking very pretty and shy, shook hands all round; and then Sybil, also looking very pretty and shy, shook hands all round too, while a select deputation of small boys, who had managed to get on to the platform, cried Hooray! and were immediately chased off by the one policeman. Outside the station we found Mrs Scrap in her pony-carriage, herself and the ponies ablaze with orange ribbons, and Eva was invited to take the vacant seat, while Sybil and Mrs Herries were assisted into the Three Butts fly, which awaited us with the Fergusson mare and her companion similarly decorated. The whole distance from the station to the Three Butts being rather less than a quarter of a mile, the ladies would fain have walked up after us, but it was represented that this would mar the effect; whereas however it was intended that the carriages should drive on and pull up with a splash at the Three Butts, thus announcing our advent, it happened that the procession was formed and in motion before the ladies were ready to start, and the street being somewhat narrow the carriages were unable to pass, and so brought up the rear of our procession, to wit:—

A purple banner with orange streamers, borne by two men.

Band of seven performers, all performing vigorously

and independently, supported by juvenile attendants on either side.

Two youths carrying flags.

The candidate, arm-in-arm with Messrs Rupert Bowles and Scrap.

Mr Herries, on the same friendly terms with Messrs William Bowles and Hunter.

The rest of the committee.

Various residents of the borough, for the most part disqualified for exercise of the franchise by reason of their tender age.

Mrs Scrap's pony-phaeton.

The Three Butts fly.

The whole effect must have been inexpressibly ludicrous, but I could not venture to look round. From various houses streamers were suspended, useful rather as indicating the proclivities of the owners than remarkable for size or as works of design ; but from the second floor of Messrs Dyapur and Ruche's establishment, which faced the inn just at the entrance into the Fore Street, and at its widest part, quite a balloon of coloured calico floated out in the air. " You see, Captain," said Mr Dyapur, when the procession stopped, " you didn't give us much time for preparation, but we've done our best." I was just going to observe that I hoped it would wash, when the idea suddenly struck me that perhaps this was one of the items to be included in the election bill, and that utilitarian questions of this sort would

be held to savour of meanness unworthy of a right-thinking candidate, so I held my peace.

At the open windows of the Three Butts, in the rooms which had been engaged for us, were to be seen both the two Mrs Bowles and other ladies, all more or less in a glory of orange and purple. There must have been quite a run on Messrs Dyapur's stock that morning. Miss Barton, too, we were told, was waiting within, but would not appear. The ladies here stopped, while the procession continued its way to the public rooms, where a meeting was held, Mr Sheepshanks in the chair, consisting of about a hundred people, and where I was introduced to the electors or such of them as were present, and proposed by Mr Scrap, and seconded by Mr Dyapur. I had of course to make a speech, and very nervous I felt at starting lest I should break down on this first occasion. Luckily the excitement and movement had prevented my thinking too much about it beforehand, and I got through the affair well enough. There was plenty to be said, and I had not to beat about for topics ; and although probably the speech was jerky and inartistic, still it was well received, and its success gave me confidence for the future. I had accomplished the feat of speaking on my legs and without premeditation. There was plenty more of this to be done before the election was over, especially open-air speaking ; and it appeared to me that there were two leading principles which if acted on

were always successful—namely, to be free and jocular in the smaller meetings, where the audience consisted mainly of the local tradesmen, but in the open-air assemblies of operatives to be extremely polite and deferential. I commend this method to all intending candidates.

The meeting was followed by a public banquet for the Liberal party at the Three Buts—three-and-sixpence a-head, wine and spirits not included—which was perhaps the greatest infliction undergone during the canvass. Such an afternoon's work did not conduce to hunger; about twice as many people were stuffed into the room as it could properly hold, and several of my worthy supporters took the opportunity of the jollification to make a regular night of it, sending for pipes and tobacco, and standing glasses round in succession, till the atmosphere of smoke and gin became almost insupportable. The eating began at five, and was over before the autumn twilight had faded away, soon after which Mr Sheepshanks retired; but it was near midnight when I managed to get away, a select party remaining to the last, whose encouraging prophecies of the result of the election followed me almost out of the room. "We'll carry you through, Captain," said one jolly farmer, who in virtue of being also a butcher had a shop and a borough vote, as he stood in front of the door waving his pipe with one hand, and holding on to the wainscot with the other to steady himself; "and don't you

be afeard of this talk about Squire Drew. He ain't no good for 'lectioneering ; he'll never a-bring hisself to making free with his coin. He's that close he couldn't screw hisself to do it. I don't mind a-saying it, though I do rent a bit of his land ; I don't care a brass farden about him, I don't, and if I meets him this here very night, I'll say it to his face, just I'm a-saying it to you. He is a mean one, he is, and so I'll tell him if I meets him. Don't you be afeard, Captain, we'll 'lect you right enough ; and as for Squire Drew"—but at this point I succeeded in effecting my escape, quite satisfied of my friend's pot-valiancy in his present condition, when he was like a dragon, breathing forth spirits, whatever might happen should he meet the Squire next day, and feeling that the occasion was not propitious for argument about Mr Drew's personal qualities. Escaping from the banquet, I went to Church Street to fetch Eva, and found all the party in the little drawing-room, tired out with sitting up for me so much beyond the hour at which Miss Barton's household was accustomed to retire to rest. I would fain have let Eva stay in this quiet shelter, knowing too that the whole inn must be reeking with the odours of the feast ; but this retirement was not admissible under the circumstances, and we had taken a suite of rooms at the Three Butts, comprising, in fact, the first floor. "We so much wanted you and your sweet wife to stay with us at Holly Lodge," Mr

Scrap had said on our arrival, "and dear Miss Barton can hardly be equal to entertaining such a party, but Mr Scrap thought it might be inconvenient to you just now to be so far in the country. The country is indeed very charming; but then this country visiting is so fatiguing, the distances are so great. Fancy, Captain West, we are five miles from the next county family;" and in truth it was just that distance by the road from Roodeley, Squire Garnett's place, to the gate of Mrs Scrap's shrubbery, which was situated at the end of South Lane, one of the terminations of Leatherby.

So far our side had had it all their own way, but the opposition were gathering their forces for a fight. Scarcely had my blue and yellow posters, following close after the news of Lord Stowe's death, astonished the town, when the holders of what they called sound opinions, recovering their surprise, began to marshal their forces. A deputation, it appeared, had gone out to Squire Drew's the very evening of my previous visit, and again early the following day, when they succeeded in overcoming any remaining scruples; and accordingly, the morning after the banquet, when I looked out of my dressing-room window at the Three Butts, there on a hoarding opposite, and side by side with my own, was another large poster, in which their very humble and obedient servant John Drew requested the support of the electors of Leatherby in favour of the only political principles which could

appeal to an enlightened and patriotic constituency. However, his committee had not had time to get up their announcement on coloured paper, which circumstance was deemed to confer a moral superiority on my side, especially by the juvenile portion of the population; but very soon an opposition band, adorned with light blue and pink, came down the street, making if possible even more hideous sounds than ours, and arousing poor Eva from her slumbers; and both parties went hard into canvassing.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ELECTION.

MR FERGUSSON, as Herries had predicted, did not come forward as an ostensible partisan on Drew's committee, but privately was very active, as became his character, and was indeed the most respectable member of the other side; for the resident gentry, such of them as belonged to the male sex, were generally indifferent about the matter, and the tradespeople could not afford to think differently in politics from the factory hands. But of course we were capital friends notwithstanding. "We are quite torn by conflicting emotions," said Miss Kate, when Eva and I paid them an early call. "Of course we should like you to win, on your own account as well as on Eva's; but then you know, as papa says, one's political principles must be put before everything. Oh, Captain West! why could you not be on the right side, and then all this bother would never have occurred? Even the little household in Church Street had its rival factions. "Come along, Sybil,"

said I, entering the schoolroom; "come and help Eva. We have to go all round the town to-day. You and she have to kiss all the ugly babies, and I have to do the same by the pretty women. Such, I am informed, is the correct programme. But what do I see here, pink and blue rosettes mixed with our noble colours! Can it be that even here too the demon-paw of party obtrudes its venom fang, as Mr Rupert Bowles so beautifully expressed it at the meeting yesterday?"

I was answered by the entry of Mary Drew into the room, who it appeared had returned from her visit the day before. "We are having a match, you see, Captain West, which can make up rosettes fastest. Sybil is thirty-five against my twenty-six, but then she had a long start. You mustn't join, Eva—two against one would not be fair. Aunt Emily has promised to be neutral, so let Sybil and me fight it out together."

"Oh, my dear," replied Eva, who had now followed me into the room, "you needn't be afraid of my helping. I feel as if I could hardly stand already, and I couldn't hold a needle if I tried ever so. This canvassing is capital fun, but dreadfully tiring."

"You mustn't let Eva over-fatigue herself," said Mary; "and after all there is no need to take much trouble, for papa says it is all humbug his contesting the election, for he hasn't a chance. Dear me! I ought not to have told you this, but I daresay it is

no secret ; however, we mean to fight to the death," and so saying the young lady sat down and resumed her occupation of fabricating opposition rosettes.

Eva was happily spared further exertion that morning by the arrival of Mrs Scrap in her pony-phaeton to carry her off to spend the day ; and the lady further insisted on picking me up in the street later in the morning, while engaged upon my canvass, and driving me down to the great luncheon-party held at Holly Lodge in honour of the Liberal candidate. "Your wife is the same sweet little thing as ever," said Mrs Scrap, a comely little woman with sharp features and an eager face, as we drove along. "I have always been so fond of her, and I was saying to Missie" (Missie was the eldest Miss Scrap, *æt.* fifteen) "only this morning what an acquisition she would be to our Leatherby society ; for although, of course, one looks mainly to the county for one's company, still in Mr Scrap's position we are obliged to keep on good terms with the townspeople. Indeed," she added, suddenly recollecting, I presume, the existence of the household in Church Street, "there are some most estimable residents in the town, really quite desirable acquaintances, but the double tie makes the claims of society very engrossing. I have often wanted Mr Scrap to give up Holly Lodge and move somewhere farther into the country ; but business is business, you know, Captain West—one is obliged to think of these things." I might have

replied that Mrs West was at least four inches taller than herself, but I understood her expression to be meant rather in a moral than a physical sense, and that my wife was regarded for the present as somebody to be half patronised and half looked up to and made much of.

During the luncheon, which was a very long affair, the room being full of guests, including various carriage company as well as townsfolk—Mrs Scrap was particular in notifying for my information that the former kept *their* carriages, apparently to prevent it being supposed that they kept the carriages of anybody else—our hostess was too preoccupied and anxious for conversation, and her comely face grew flushed as the courses went by, in consumption of the good things provided, and in pressing them on the guests. Eventually, as the eating came to an end, Mrs Scrap found time to offer her kindly advice about our future plans. She was so glad to hear that we meant to settle at Leatherby; for although they all liked Lord Wraymouth very much, still it would be so nice to have the second member a resident: dear good Mr Sheepshanks was a most estimable person, still he could not be said to do much for society, and dear Miss Sheepshanks had not been brought up to that sort of thing. Mrs West, of course, would entertain, and no doubt her parties would be charming, although she (Mrs Scrap) could assure me that these pleasures were not without

their anxieties, which, indeed, having observed my hostess's face during the meal, and the frowns at and whisperings to the servants, I could well understand. But then dear Mrs West had not any family cares at present to oppress her. What with Missie's education and the younger ones, and Adolphus, really it was an anxious task. She hardly knew what to do about Missie's music—the child had so much taste it would be a thousand pities not to cultivate it, wouldn't it? And although Dr Phewgew was no doubt a very sound musician, still he had not the style of a London master. She really must get Mr Scrap to let her take Missie to town next year for the season to finish her education. And then she should hope to see a great deal of dear Mrs West. Then there was Adolphus. I had not seen Adolphus yet; he had just gone back to school; she was so sorry she had not been able to introduce him to me. He was such a noble boy. Yes, she believed the Leatherby school was very well, and Adolphus went there when he was a little fellow, but the society was very miscellaneous, so many of the trades-people sent their sons there, which made it very awkward, I knew, and so it was better he should go to Harrow. She would have preferred sending him to Eton, but Harrow was quite as expensive, and Mr Sheepshanks' grandson, young Cramer, was at Harrow, and the two boys were such friends. What form was he in? Well, he was not quite sure what form he

was in, but thought it was the fifth, or it might be the fourth form; at any rate his tutor wrote home excellent accounts of him, and said there was not a more gentlemanly boy in his house. Young Lord Lolly Poppe was in the same house, second son of the Marquis of Jinjerbredde—such a gentlemanly youth. Should I find it difficult to get a place to settle down in? Well, Mr Scrap would be only too happy to help me to look out for something; they had found it very difficult, but then they wanted so much; and when at last Mr Scrap bought Holly Lodge, it was such a tumble-down place that she told him she really thought they could not live in it; but by building out a new drawing-room and two best bedrooms, and adding a conservatory, and turning the old drawing-room into a schoolroom, and converting the attics into nurseries, they had managed to make it do. “But then, you know, Captain West, you have no nurseries or governess to provide for, have you? But won’t you come now and look at the conservatory?”

Thus it will be seen that everybody seemed to take my election for granted; nevertheless the business went on as if the election were to be hotly contested; and what between speeches out of window, and speeches in the public rooms, and committee meetings, and the work of personal canvassing, there was enough to be done. I cannot say I found the personal canvass at all disagreeable. The minor

tradesmen, indeed, between a sort of natural obsequiousness and the independence simulated for the occasion, were not very easy to get on with; I always felt when calling on them as if we both understood that this political talk was all humbug at bottom, and that real business would have consisted in a handsome order for tobacco, or shoes, or almonds and raisins, or whatever the article on hand might be; and this one could not do just at present for certain considerations. I confess, too, I should have been better pleased if the leading committee-men had put me through my facings, so to speak, before taking up my cause so heartily, instead of letting it be seen so plainly that I was adopted merely as Mr Sheepshanks' nominee, and not on the score of any personal merit. But one must not look a gift horse in the mouth; and I found the operatives thoroughly pleasant fellows to talk to, independent yet civil, and although full of prejudice and disposed to be over-conceited about their knowledge, yet intelligent and shrewd withal. I gave no pledges and asked for no promises, but made no secret of my opinions; and I must say I found the arguments one used to get into with some of these good fellows very useful for fixing my own ideas, as well as for the new light in which they presented things; while they for their part appeared both surprised and gratified to find a soldier thinking the army might be more efficient and yet cheaper. Their wives, too, were a civil but

apparently thriftless set, who seemed to understand thoroughly the art of making a little money go a very short way, and spent without much to show for it enough to keep a poor gentleman in comfort. There used to be a certain amount of looking round from behind back-doors, accompanied by sniggering, on the part of the numerous young ladies dwelling in these parts who were employed as factory hands, and they seemed hardly to know whether to be civil or saucy to Eva when she accompanied me on my rounds; but on the whole I liked what I saw of the people, and we became very good friends. Eva and Sybil began very actively with the canvassing at first, but the former was soon obliged to give up the work from fatigue. For so long as she held out, her gracious presence as she walked down these back streets like a gentle, modest queen, had a very good effect. Sybil was a less useful ally, perhaps, as people were accustomed to see her going about in the school-girl state.

Meanwhile the two committees carried on the war, and various squibs, as well as addresses, soon decorated the available wall space, of a style quite adapted to the mental calibre of the readers to be edified. I remember one in particular, notifying that the celebrated West Indian juggler (*the West in italics, of course*), would have the honour of exhibiting his tricks to the Leatherby public, including his remarkable personation of the character of a Liberal

(also in italics) country gentleman; and how, finally, this juggler would conclude his entertainment by vanishing just before the polling-day. Whereupon our side came out with a report of the meeting of the Stampton Agricultural Benevolent Society, Squire Screw in the chair, when half-a-crown and a new smock was presented to John Hodge, for having brought up a family of fifteen children without aid from the parish. Also a notice to the effect that Squire Screw had announced his intention of subscribing half-a-sovereign to be divided between the Leatherby Infirmary and the Literary and Scientific Institution. What wag composed these *jeux d'esprit* I do not know, and I declare they were posted up without my sanction. We had most of them defaced, but they appear to have been much relished by the community, and were pronounced more telling, if less witty, than the opposition devices.

Happily the principals on either side bore the attacks good-humouredly, and we continued to be capital friends. "Here, at any rate, is neutral ground," said a voice from the corner of Miss Barton's drawing-room, as I entered it one evening towards dusk, and dimly discerned Drew sitting there with the ladies; "we can meet here at any rate without exchanging haughty salutations, as we have to do in the streets; only it would never do to let our committees know anything about it. Mine would set me down as a traitor for certain, and I daresay yours would too.

What a joke it is, to be sure, at least for me ! I knew I hadn't a ghost of a chance, and my committee know it too ; but for goodness' sake don't let them know I said so. I must carry on a bit longer for the look of the thing, but it will be no good holding out much more."

"For shame, papa," said his daughter, "to be so downhearted ; you ought not to encourage Captain West in that way. For my part, I think we have a capital chance, and Mr Fergusson was in great spirits about it this morning."

"Fergusson was only humbugging you girls ; he knows all about it really. But appearances must be kept up. See me out of doors, and I can swagger with any of them. But I am not telling Captain West any secrets. He knows how the land lies just as well as I do, and there is no use in playing at hoax in here."

"Well, papa, all I can say is, it's a great shame. I don't feel so very sorry on your account, because I know you would be miserable in London ; but it would be so nice for you to have been an M.P. just for once. Besides, of course, we wanted the good cause to triumph. If Captain West had only belonged to the right side!—oh, dear! what a pity it is! Mr Fergusson was saying he never could have supposed you were such a Radical, Captain West. I suppose he never said anything about it to you, Eva, did he, before you were married?"

“My dear, I knew nothing about Tories or Radicals in those days, and I don't know much more about them now; but I wish Charlie could be an M.P. without going into Parliament. It's very nice being an M.P., I daresay; but how anybody can like going to Parliament, I am sure I can't think. We went there one evening, and you ought to have seen the place they put us into. And oh! such tiresome stuff as they talked!”

Mr Drew had not at all understated his chance of success. There really was no effectual opposition; and almost before the writ came down for the election, a placard appeared in which, while thanking his many friends for the generous support they had accorded, he considered that the present condition of the Conservative interests in the borough did not justify his proceeding to the poll; and therefore, while hinting darkly that on the next occasion they would have an overwhelming majority on their side, he would for the present withdraw from the contest. It was very foolish, he afterwards remarked to me, to allow himself to be persuaded into coming forward at all. They need not try it again.

“Didn't like to put his hand in his pocket,” said Mr Rupert Bowles, when discussing the matter in committee; “Drew's an awful close fellow.”

“He's fond of money, is Drew,” replied his brother; “but he can spend it too sometimes. Look at that right-of-way case of his which he lost at the Yewcester

annulment, with special jury and the Attorney-General got down special, and then fought out in the Queen's Bench. It must have cost him a precious lot before he had done with it. But Drew don't like throwing money away any more than most folks, and that's what he was doing here. He wouldn't have polled a couple of hundred votes. He didn't pull up a bit too soon, to my thinking."

Anyhow, the result was, that on Drew's retirement no one else was found bold enough to take^s up his place; and in a few days I found myself returned unopposed, with but a very moderate bill to pay, and no doubts of imputations or petitions in reserve to qualify the full pleasure of success.

CHAPTER XIX.

PROFESSIONAL.

THERE still remained four weary months to wait before entering on my new functions ; for although Parliament stood prorogued till November, it was well understood there would be no meeting till February. The young lady looking forward to her first ball ; the youngster awaiting the arrival of his first uniform ; the little boy counting the days remaining to the holidays in his first half at school ; all who have gone through the like experiences can enter into my feelings and state of foolish expectancy. Not that there was any illusion about the matter. I had seen enough from the Speaker's gallery to know what a humdrum affair Parliamentary life was ; that by far the larger number of the members took no active part in the proceedings, and that to lay yourself out to be a working member involved weary and dreary hours of waiting about. I could picture to myself quite clearly beforehand just what would happen ; how I should probably be very assiduous

in attendance at first, and how my zeal would gradually abate; and how when at last an opportunity should come for an utterance, the result would be of such a commonplace sort, neither failure nor success, that I should be tempted to give up my plan in disgust as not worth all the sacrifice of time and trouble; or how, if I determined to go on, it would be with a full knowledge of the dull plodding life that awaited me, and the awful consumption of time required to produce even a moderate success; time that, given to any other pursuit, might bring at least the solid advantage of self-satisfaction, if not the higher meed of fame.

There were no illusions therefore in my case. The days of heaven-born prime ministers, or even of Sheridans and Cannings, were gone by. Cabinet ministers were nowadays mostly grey-headed men who had gone through a lot of subordinate drudgery; and I looked forward to a thoroughly dull prosaic existence, such as I felt certain it would prove to be even if I were successful. Nevertheless my eagerness to begin was as keen, and my inner feelings as restless, as if the prospect had been one of undiluted social bliss.

However, restlessness would not make February come a bit the sooner. The time had to be got through somehow, and it could not be better spent than in making secure the seat which good fortune had brought me so easily. Clearly we should do well to

spend the winter at Leatherby and endeavour to make ourselves popular for our own sakes. And another piece of luck awaited us, for a suitable house became available just when it was wanted. Mrs Scrap called early one morning in Church Street, whither we had now moved, to tell us that Mr Scrap had just received instructions from the Misses Harington to let their place for the winter, those elderly ladies having been advised to visit the south of France ; and accordingly in a day or two we found ourselves tenants of Dingwell, a comfortable but unromantic-looking house about a mile out of the town, with a prim garden, three or four acres of ground, an eminently respectable and plethoric butler of whom Eva from the first was thoroughly afraid, an equally respectable and venerable housemaid, a ditto cook, a cross gardener, a stolid coachman, and two fat horses drawing a chariot in which the Misses Harington were wont three times a-week to take so much of the air as found its way through the little windows, above which those ladies' noses could just be seen ; two cows, an apoplectic spaniel accustomed also to take exercise in the chariot, and a splendid Persian cat. It must have cost the sisters a pang to part with these treasures, still more to make them over to the care of strangers ; but, on the other hand, it was a great object to the owners to find tenants prepared to take over the establishment as it stood : and when, on our calling to see the place the Persian

cat after brief negotiations jumped straightway into Eva's lap, Miss Harington pronounced that the arrangement was clearly providential, and Mr Scrap had little difficulty in completing the transfer. We for our part could have preferred a lighter equipage, and generally a more cheerful household ; but it was of course a great advantage to find one ready organised, and available for just the time we wanted to occupy it. Accordingly there remained nothing to be done but to order the butler to obtain supplies as usual, thus in effect retaining that domestic tyrant in command ; and we entered into possession, merely allowing a decent interval to elapse after the departure of our landladies on their tour.

Meanwhile I took the opportunity to run up to town for a day or two on schedule business, first, however, performing one of the functions of my new office. The day after my return was announced, I received a note from the grammar school, in which honourable and dear sir was requested in conformity with the ancient usage of this loyal borough to obtain a whole holiday for the boys of this ancient foundation. This appeal, which was written in a fine round hand with splendid flourishes in Mr Aborn the writing-master's best style, was signed Thomas Provest, head monitor, and William Dyapur, captain of the eleven ; and on receiving it I went straightway down to the school, and being met at the lodge by the porter, that official donned an old blue gown, and

conducting me across the green to the school-house, went in and announced my arrival; whereupon, following the order prescribed by tradition, the two signitaries to the note came out and conducted me to the head-master, who occupied a sort of pulpit at the end of the schoolroom,—the boys being ranged on forms on either side,—after shaking hands with whom, I requested, according to the ancient privilege accorded to a newly elected member, a whole holiday for the school. This request the head-master, who wore his college cap all the time, such it appeared being part of the traditionary ceremony, was pleased generously to assent to; whereupon the boys, notwithstanding that unlike their parents they were all stout Conservatives, sinking politics for the moment, gave three cheers for the new member. I was then introduced to the under-master; the mathematical master (late scholar of Mary Anne Hall, Cambridge, and graduate in mathematical honours; so ran the prospectus, I afterwards heard that he was twenty-ninth junior optime); the French master; and Eva's little friend Mr Aborn the writing-master; and the ceremony concluded by my tipping the signitaries to the letter a guinea each, and subscribing five pounds to the school athletic sports. Five would go seven hundred times into three thousand five hundred, as I told Eva afterwards, a number which in those days seemed practically infinite.

During my visit to town Eva remained with her

ant. I found that the schedule was still in course of preparation, the court of probate being apparently in no hurry to conclude the affair, and I felt under too great an obligation to my kind friend to urge him to go faster than his wont, while my discreditable anxiety was long ago allayed about any disappearance westward. The American voyage would evidently be made only by his partner, and indeed Herries was now on the point of making a second visit to New York. The firm it appeared were London agents to the great New York and Mexico Railway Company, which gave them an immensity of American business. Before setting off, however, he carried out his promise of giving me a start in the city, which my new position greatly assisted. The name of Captain West, M.P., now appeared on the direction of the Metropolitan and Provincial Bank, and the Agricultural and Commercial Assurance Company; and I took my seat while in town at the board meetings of each, looking properly grave and maintaining solemn silence till I should get into the swing of the business. Both were deemed to be first-class affairs in which I was now a considerable shareholder, and the chairman of the Metropolitan and Provincial was a great financial authority, and a Bank director as well as a county member. Our proceedings at the Board of the Company appeared to consist mainly in sitting round a long table while the applicants for policies presented

themselves in turn before us. Each applicant took a seat by the chairman for a couple of minutes, who put a few jocular questions to him, after which the insurer made his bow and retired, and the proposal papers with our medical officer's opinion were passed round for opinion. This system of requiring personal interviews, I found, was considered the strong point of the Agricultural and Commercial; for whereas in other companies a man could take out a policy after being seen merely by the secretary and medical officer, no one could insure with us without first appearing before the whole board. This, as our prospectus pointed out, afforded a peculiar guarantee to the shareholders for the soundness of the business done; and clearly a machinery of this sort was admirably adapted for detecting bad lives which might impose on our doctor.

The board of the Metropolitan and Provincial was a smaller affair, consisting of six members with the managing director and chairman. The secretary produced a bundle of flimsy papers and a list of discounts made during the week, whereon the managing director, running his fingers through them jauntily, like a conjuror playing with a pack of cards, said, "all quite first-class paper you see, gentlemen," and we all replied "quite so," except one man of independent mind, who said "evidently;" and then there was a ticking off of vouchers, and reading of minutes of the last meeting, and we broke up. For these

exertions the Agricultural paid us each a fee of two guineas, and the bank two and a half. "Looks well, to be on first-class directions of this kind," said Herries that evening, as he took his farewell dinner in Sackville Street preparatory to starting for Liverpool, "and pays your travelling expenses into the bargain," as indeed it did, for a first-class return ticket to Leatherby was only thirty-seven and sixpence.

It was pleasant also to walk into the Union Jack, of which popular establishment I had lately been elected a member, and receive the congratulations of friends and acquaintances. "Holloa, old West!" cried Cobbe Smith, of my regiment; "so you've been and gone and got into Parliament! I congratulate you, my boy. Here's Julian Straight somewhere in the house, and Murphy and little Gatlay; we are all going to dine together; come and join us; and we will have some champagne cooled and drink your health."

"By Jove, West, what a lucky fellow you are!" said Straight, as we settled down to dinner; "an uncle died and left you a hatful of money, isn't it? Dash it, I wish one of my uncles would die and leave me something. But no such luck."

"Well, West," said Cobbe Smith, "you must stick up for the old regiment in Parliament; we shall look to get a lot out of you, mind; you ought to be good for another brigade at least. Not that I want

promotion myself, for I wouldn't lose my troop for anything. Rather be as I am, than a field-officer, any day."

"You may say that, indeed," said Straight. "Look at me. Here have I been, subaltern and captain, seventeen years in the horse artillery, and am now shunted off on promotion to a garrison brigade. And a nice brigade it is, too, one battery at Mahrattapoor, one at Seringapatam, and two at Ormuz, and they won't muster together, all told, the strength of my old horse battery. That was something like a command. But it's just like my luck."

"And which of all these stations are you posted to?"

"I am down for Mahrattapoor; but as they have a colonel and lieutenant-colonel there already I shall hardly be wanted. Two field-officers are about enough to look after one garrison battery. There is a lieutenant-colonel at Seringapatam also, and the other colonel has to be provided for; he is on leave just now. I suppose I shall have to go to Ormuz, and play second fiddle to that duffer Jones. However, there won't be much to do. Jones won't want me to help him in meddling with the captain of the one battery there. I shall be able to get six months' leave every year, that's something."

"Well, Murphy," said Cobbe Smith, "what are they going to do with the regiment, and when are they going to do it? When is this long-incubated

scheme of reorganisation coming off? Give us your confidence, like a trustworthy War Office official as you are. We are badly in want of a shave or two down at Aldershot."

"It is very easy to talk in that glib way, my good sir; but matters of this sort are not so easily settled. This is a large question, this reorganisation. However, there's a committee sitting on it now, and our report, I expect, will go in very soon."

"That makes the twentieth committee at the very least, to my knowledge," said Cobbe Smith, "and there will be twenty more yet, I'll be bound; and at the end of it we shall all be very much where we are now, I expect. We have got a few efficient batteries, and that is about the whole of it."

"It is very easy to talk, young man, but it's a different thing when you come to deal with the thing practically. You will find, however, that this last committee has dealt with the subject exhaustively. Not that I agree with them altogether. Indeed, I have put a paper of my own before the Secretary of State, which he has had under consideration since last May, and which I hope he may take up. I have looked at the thing from every point of view, and the conclusion I come to is, that you must make the battery your administrative unit."

"And do away with the brigade system altogether?"

"Certainly; what good are these brigades?"

“Then you would have two hundred and fifty batteries all working separately, and nothing between them and the Horse —— well, between them and Colonel Murphy?”

“No, not quite that. You would have field-officers commanding stations, of course, and district-adjutants, and so forth, but the regimental records would be kept at headquarters, and there would be one general roster by batteries through the regiment for foreign service.”

“Certainly your scheme would be a triumph of decentralisation. I conclude that, of course, you would number the batteries in one list right down through the regiment? Number 250 R.A. would look neat on a man’s shoulder-strap; it would be so easy to remember, too.”

“For my part,” said Straight, “I think if you go in for changes of this sort, you ought to make the horse artillery a distinct service from the rest. At present you may get fellows posted to it as field-officers who have scarcely done a day’s duty with it before. Men with no style, who have forgotten how to ride perhaps. Plays the very deuce with the horse artillery, that sort of thing does.”

“At any rate that practice gives the garrison brigades the inestimable benefit of the occasional presence of a horse artillery officer, as in your case, Straight.”

“And I hope the horse artillery will have the same benefit too, soon, by getting me back again.”

"But why should there be an artillery regiment at all?" asked Cobbe Smith.

"What! an army without artillery?"

"I don't mean that exactly. But why should all the artillery be in one regiment any more than all the cavalry or all the infantry?"

"Break up the old regiment?" cried Straight.
"Oh, confound it, man, you couldn't do that! Oh, dash it, no! you must keep the old regiment together. Whatever you do, you must do that."

"Where's the necessity?"

"Why, you would break down all our *esprit de corps* altogether if you were to split us up into different regiments. Oh, confound it, man, it would never do to break up the old regiment!"

"Well, but this old regiment, as you call it, has after all been joined together for only about ten years. And as to the *esprit de corps*, does it depend on our being all promoted on one seniority list? And where are the signs of that close bond of brotherhood among your sixteen hundred brother officers that you speak of? Do you yourself, Straight, know even a tenth of them personally?"

"I should rather think not," said Straight, drawing himself up, and pulling his moustache, "nor yet a twentieth, and don't want to." Straight was by way of being a swell both regimental and otherwise, and perhaps would hardly have cared to dine at the Union Jack with a junior captain if he had not been

also an M.P. As for Colonel Murphy, he could be quite affable with his brother officers when on business, or if there was no better company available, and this being October the Club was empty; at other times a regimental party of this sort would hardly have been in his line, for it was quite understood by the regiment that he moved in a superior circle, as became a distinguished official and man about town.

“Well, then,” continued Cobbe Smith, “I fail to perceive the force of your objection, Straight; and it seems to me that common-sense points to the need for dealing with our regiment as you would with any other branch of the service. Why should you not have fifteen or twenty artillery regiments of a handy, manageable size, just as you have regiments of cavalry and infantry?”

“Ah! but the case is very different,” observed Murphy; “you don’t want to have entire regiments of artillery stationed at different places. You must have your batteries scattered about. A regimental system such as you propose would never work.”

“But are not the other branches of the service scattered about too? How many regiments of cavalry are there serving at home which are not distributed by detachments? Yet we don’t find that the regimental system fails to work with them.”

“Yes; but then the artillery is a different service altogether. Besides, you would have all sorts

of irregularities and differences creeping into the drill and system. You must have uniformity in the artillery."

"And that you think would be secured by organising the regiment as a congeries of independent batteries?"

"Not by the independent batteries, but by having one centre of administration and one headquarters. If you had separate regiments they would be wanting to have different equipments, and then differences in drill and system would be sure to arise. No, depend on it, if you are to maintain uniformity in your artillery, you must keep it as one regiment."

"Yet we don't find the infantry and cavalry breaking out in different patterns of rifles and sabres, because they are divided off. If you serve out only one kind of gun and one kind of shell to the artillery they will have to use it; and as for uniformity of system, you may secure that by proper inspections."

"But if you had separate regiments," broke in Straight, "you might have a man promoted before you who came out of Woolwich below you. That would never do."

"Why shouldn't it? In the other branches of the service men don't continue through life to stand in the order of their first commissions. And it is considered quite lawful for the artillery to supersede the engineers who beat them at the Academy. After all, the chances of good luck would be the same for

everybody. You might be one of the lucky ones yourself, Straight."

"Oh, don't talk to me about luck, my dear fellow. Just fancy, if I had been a captain in the Crimea, instead of being just at the top of the lieutenants, I should have got my brevet majority to a certainty, for I landed a week before the place fell; and I should have been sure of my lieutenant-colonelcy and C.B. for India, and should have been a brevet colonel years ago, and very likely a brigadier-general at this moment; and here I am a bare regimental lieutenant-colonel, and not even a battery to command. There never was such luck."

"I'll tell you what, West," said Murphy in an undertone, "now that you have got into Parliament you may possibly have something to say to the settlement of these matters. I daresay they will put you on to any select committee that may be appointed about the regiment. I should like you to read my memorandum on the subject. I will send it you to-morrow, and I should be glad to talk the matter over with you any time that you care to look in at the office."

Murphy, it appeared to me, behaved during this little party like a man of the world who was prepared to recognise the altered relations produced by a seat in the House of Commons, however much such a distinction might jar against his sense of the innate fitness of things. Straight, on the other hand, seemed

to regard my good fortune as a sort of personal grievance, second only to his transfer to the foot artillery, or any scheme for the disruption of the old regiment. But at this point of the conversation, the former descried Lord Kewrassé of the household cavalry coming into the coffee-room, and rose at once to engage that popular young officer in conversation. As Straight did not know Lord Kewrassé, and did not apparently relish Murphy's desertion, he pleaded an engagement and moved off too, and Cobbe Smith and Gatlay and myself adjourned to the smoking-room.

CHAPTER XX.

A MODEL M.P.

RETURNING to Leatherby, Eva and I moved into our new residence, and I went to work to drown in occupation the impatient longing I felt for the consummation of my new position. The intervening three months and a fraction would clearly be best spent by fulfilling in a proper manner the new rôle of borough member, and this accordingly I set about doing vigorously. The first thing was to subscribe liberally to the Leatherby Hunt, and to join in that pastime ; and I got down a couple of lively nags on job from town, also a pony and little carriage for Eva, which made her independent on fine days of the chariot, so that this ancient vehicle could be reserved mainly for taking us out to dinner-parties, or for conveying her aunts to and fro when they came out to see us. As for the hunting, it was passable enough, but I confess I did not take to it very kindly. The meet was well enough, especially as Eva would sometimes drive me there, or sometimes ride to see

the hounds throw off, and the run was splendid fun when we had one, although the Yewcestershire country was not good ; but the concomitants, to my thinking, outweighed the pleasure. To find yourself at the end of a December day eighteen or twenty miles from home, on a tired horse, was about as dreary a prospect as could be conceived. Some people can think on horseback, and so pass the time agreeably ; I never could. I can think with a pen in my hand, or in a railway train, the motion of which, I think, produces a sort of exaltation of the brain. Many a fine debate have I carried on when going down in the Leatherby express, putting, of course, sophistical argument of the feeblest kind into the mouths of my opponents, and then exposing them in terse and forcible speeches ; but when riding home from hunting I never could do anything but look forward to the milestones when it was light enough to see them, or else peer out into the gloom for any visible marks to indicate my progress homewards. Nor were the dinner-parties much better ; the Miss Haringtons' horses being good for about seven miles an hour, and the visiting distances enormous, a considerable part of our winter nights seemed to be spent in plodding over the Yewcestershire lanes in the yellow chariot, which had not done so much service for years.

Then there was the borough business. I had been nominated joint-patron with Mr Sheepshanks of the

Leatherby Literary and Scientific Institution, and took the chair on various occasions—it was understood that my colleague was to be deemed exempt from all petty work of this kind—notably when Mr R. Podger Bowles gave his elegant lecture on Rome, entitled “Recreations of an Overworked Official,” a lecture delivered by the young Treasury swell with great self-possession to a crowded and attentive audience, the great hall of the Institution which holds nearly a hundred people being full to overflowing, and all the young ladies of Leatherby in the front rows in their best bonnets; and again when young Harry Perkins read his Essay on the Genius of Modern Poesy. Mrs Scrap, next to whom I had the honour of sitting on this last occasion, remarked that it was really quite gratifying to see how well Mrs Perkins, who was a most respectable person, had brought up her son, and that the spread of education among all classes of people was a remarkable sign of the age. We supped afterwards at the Fergussons’, and the only unkindly thing I ever noticed in that family was that scarcely any allusion was made to the lecture, although Harry Perkins was evidently longing to hear something said about it; so that I was glad to feel in a position as late chairman and present member to rise at the table and propose the health of our able essayist, leading off three cheers with effusion, which ceremony made the poor lad quite happy for the rest of the evening, and I doubt not converted

my own assistance. Politically Harry Perkins
 was my supporter already, although not yet in the
 enjoyment of the franchise. The government, you
 know, Captain West, has had taken occasion to set
 on our general election canvas: "It is our duty to
 the old school, and of course the ladies take on in
 the same line—women never have any opinions of
 their own, and I don't see her talking politics in
 that house. I keep my opinions to myself, but I'm
 sure of your way of thinking, sir. You see, Captain,
 I don't like things to be granted: the study of anatomy
 and materia medica and that sort of thing makes a
 man go to the bottom of things. I am Liberal to
 the backbone, sir."

Thus passed the winter days at Leatherby, Sybil
 spending by agreement every alternate week with us,
 and going during her visits three times a-week to
 her aunts for her French lessons with Miss Jones.
 Thus with little Mr. Aborn the writing-master were
 suspended for the time, and I fear Sybil's mathema-
 tical education thereby stopped short somewhere
 about compound addition. During the alternate week,
 when it was Sybil's turn to stay with her aunts, Eva
 generally managed to secure her company and that
 of Mary Drew almost every evening that we were at
 home, and sometimes Miss Barton herself and even
 Miss Hanoria would be prevailed upon to join the
 party, on all which occasions the chariot would be
 put in requisition to convey the fair freight to and

fro. Sunday we always spent in Church Street, partaking of Miss Barton's early dinner after the morning service.

At last, when we had completed the round of entertainments provided in our honour, and Christmas was coming on, when Mr Paterson and Mr and Mrs Herries had promised to pay us a visit, I suggested to Eva that as our stay would be short, it behoved us to lose no time in returning these hospitalities, and in fact giving a series of dinner-parties ourselves. "It will give us an opportunity for spending a little money in the town, which we have hardly done sufficiently yet. It struck me Mr Hambrowe looked at me in the street rather sulkily yesterday, as if he thought the consumption of champagne in this house was quite unbecoming a borough member. I will sit down and order some of his highest brand straight-way, and some port and claret from Tawney's; and do you, my pretty one, make out a list of invitations.

"How will this do, Charlie?" said Eva, half an hour later. "I have put down sixteen; that will be enough, I suppose, for the first time."

"Let us see. The Rupert Bowles, Mr R. Podger Bowles, the William Bowles; isn't that making a family business of it? better get the William Bowles to come another time. The Fergussons—that won't do, dear. Rupert Bowles is about the only man in the place on our list who took Fergusson's opposition to my canvass seriously. Better not bring them together."

“Oh dear me, I forgot all about that; but it does seem such nonsense to bring politics into dinner-parties. Besides I am sure Mr Fergusson does not think about such things.”

“Very likely not, my love, but Rupert Bowles does. Better ask the Fergussons for another day, you will have plenty of opportunities. Well, let us see who else are down. The Bamfylde, three; the St Legers—good, they will be flattered at meeting county people; Miss Barbour; why, you have left out Mr Sheepshanks! he may very possibly come just this once to dine with his fellow-member, at any rate we ought to ask him. Then you must not forget that Mr Paterson and his ward will be here; and of course Sybil will be here that evening, and then there are ourselves. And why, goodness me, you have left out the Scraps! That will never do.”

“Must we ask Mrs Scrap, Charlie?” said Eva, hesitatingly.

“If we don’t want to convert her into an enemy for life, we must.”

“It will quite spoil the evening if she comes. I never feel quite comfortable when she is in the room. She’s so——”

“You mean that she is a little disposed to be patronising, and more than disposed to be vulgar. You can’t help the vulgarity, and the patronising will adjust itself by-and-by; but Scrap was my most energetic supporter, and Mrs Scrap did her best too.”

"But you must please tell me what to order for dinner, Charlie; I haven't a notion what is proper."

"Better just have what everybody else has. Side dishes and sweets, and so forth."

"Yes, but I don't know the names of a single one. I never shall understand anything about cookery."

"Well then, ask your aunt to come up and help you to make out a bill of fare."

"Oh, my dear Charlie! Aunt Emily has no more notion about it than I have. She would be sure to suggest minced veal. We used always to have minced veal for dinner whenever Mr Drew took his luncheon with us. We can't have minced veal for sixteen people, you know."

"Well, not exactly; but suppose we take Johnson and the cook into council. The Miss Haringtons used to give very fair dinners, I believe,—very likely their servants will understand all about it without any help."

The butler and cook proved quite equal to the occasion, and both in their quiet way seemed to relish the excitement of professional employment, so the difficulty was overcome; and as Eva declared she could not write her invitations, because my presence flurried her, I went to my room to write my own letters. Returning to the morning room half-an-hour afterwards, my little wife was still hard at work on her notes.

"Not done yet, Eva? and what is that little book

you have got there?" for with some confusion she had closed a little volume that was on the table, and had covered it with a piece of blotting-paper.

"Nothing that you need see, sir," said she, blushing and trying to convey it to her pocket. "Now, Charlie, don't be so rude; let me alone; for shame, you rude boy," cried Eva, as, after a delightful little struggle, I remained captor of the book.

I had noticed this little book several times before as being constantly in her possession, and fancied it was one of those little devotional manuals which young ladies are sometimes wont to carry out with them. It turned out to be a pocket edition of Johnson's Dictionary.

"Well," said Eva, with a pretty blush of confusion, as I smiled, looking perhaps a little sarcastic, "how can I help it? You scolded me the other day because I spelt apology with two p's. If I am never to make these mistakes I must hunt up my words sometimes. You are not angry, are you, Charlie?" she added, after a pause.

"Angry! you little thing; what should make you think I was angry?"

"Because you looked so awfully severe. You know I always was stupid, you know, and so I always shall be."

"My darling, pray don't talk like that! To hear you say such things is almost as bad as if I said them myself. Spelling after all, my child, is said to

be very much matter of opinion, and the slips even people who call themselves well educated make, not to mention Lord High Commissioners and swells of that sort, are surprising. But, my dear Eva, you can't always be sure of having Johnson in your pocket, and the way to spell is to read. If you don't accustom yourself to the look of words, you will never be able to spell. I have been wanting to say something about this for some time, Eva dear. You see, if you don't ever put anything into that pretty little head, you can't expect much to come out of it."

"But, my dear Charlie, when has there been time for reading? Just look at the life we have been leading! First in London, and then down here, and then in Germany, and then this election, and all the time I have been so tired I could often scarcely stand, much less read. I think you are rather hard upon me, Charlie."

"My dear, I don't say a word about that time. We were leading a life of bustle, and you were not strong, and there was plenty to be done besides reading. But we have now been settled down here nearly three months, and I really don't think you have opened a book all that time, or even so much as looked at the newspaper."

"Oh, Charlie! you know it is no good wanting me to take an interest about politics; I never could understand anything about them, and never shall.

And as for books, I am sure the whole day goes in something or other. The time seems to fly."

"I am glad you don't find it dull, my pretty one, for sometimes I think——"

"Charlie! as if anything could be dull with you. But sometimes I think too——"

"Well, what is it my little woman thinks? Come, Eva, unburden yourself. I see from all this hesitation that something weighs on that little brain."

"Well, Charlie—you won't be angry with me, will you?—don't you think," said Eva, nestling her head on my shoulder, "don't you think it would have been better if you had found out what a stupid little thing I was before you married me?"

"Oh, Eva, Eva! how can you talk in that shocking way? What can have put such horrid notions into your head? What have I said to make you in such a taking?" For the large tears were beginning to drop on my coat, although she was trying to conceal them.

"It isn't what you say, Charlie," she replied between her bursts of sobbing, "but you look so vexed very often when I say something silly—I know I am a little goose, but I can't help it. We can't be different from what we are, can we? No, Charlie; you should have thought of this before you married me."

"Good heavens! Eva, what can I have been looking like that you should be conjuring up all these horrid doubts? Will you believe me, dear, that all these fancies are wholly out of your own imagi-

nation? And whatever we do," I added, when she became a little calmer, "don't let us get into the way of talking about what we might have done. That is not a healthy kind of retrospect for man and wife to indulge in, depend on it. But this comes on me like a revelation, Eva. Here was I fancying that I was making you happy; and you all the time building up this fabric of imaginary troubles. It is all my fault, I have no doubt; I suppose I must have been behaving like a brute, for you to be so put out, but I did not mean to be."

"No, no, Charlie, don't say that; it's all my fault. But you do look so dreadfully grave sometimes, you quite frighten me, when I say something silly. I know I am very stupid and ignorant, but we can't make ourselves different to what we are."

"But, my dear Eva, after all, we need not always stand still in these things. Our education need not come to an end as soon as one grows up. And although you, dear, are a married woman, after all you are not nineteen yet, so there is plenty of time for learning and wisdom too, in addition to beauty."

"Oh no, Charlie, it's no good talking about these things. I suppose I must have a pretty face, because you are always saying so, but I shall never be clever and learned and that sort of thing. You must be satisfied to take me as you find me."

"My darling, I wish I knew how to cure you of this false impression! I won't be such a prig as to

say that I am more than satisfied to have you as you are, because that would be putting the matter on quite a wrong footing, and making matters worse. But what shall I say to put you at ease? When I feel that it is I who ought to apologise, when I wonder how a sweet young creature like you, who might have had all the world at your feet, came to choose such an ugly old fellow as me for a husband."

"Now, Charlie, you are laughing at me."

"There it is again! What can I have done to drive you into this state of self-abasement, Eva? What can I do to make you see things in their true light, to make you feel that you have no right to put me up on a pedestal above you in this way? Any one who knows us—Mr Paterson, or the Fergussons, or any one else—would say at once, if they spoke candidly, that it is I who am the lucky one, and have got the best of the bargain."

"Then they would say wrong. Mr Paterson is a dear old flatterer, I know, and the Fergussons are such old friends; but they can't help my being a stupid little thing."

Here our conversation was interrupted by the sound of the chariot-wheels announcing that Aunt Emily and Sybil were coming to spend the day. And it seemed soon as if the little cloud had passed away; but, alas! the first words of difference had been spoken, and they could not but leave a certain uneasiness of feeling behind. Both must have felt,

whatever we may have said, that there was something left unsatisfied, and a certain want of confidence remaining between us. And when, the following evening, which we were spending alone, and I was spelling out with the help of a dictionary Von Ordnung's great work on military organisation, I noticed that Eva took out from the bookcase a volume of 'Russell's Modern Europe,' which formed one of those included in the Miss Haringtons' neat selection of standard authors in brown leather bindings, and sat down by the fire to read it. But in a few minutes the pretty little head was nodding, and I don't think that estimable work was ever put in requisition again.

It was not often, however, that we were alone when at home, and I am bound to mention that our first dinner-party went off very successfully, except that Eva was rather taken aback by Mrs Scrap kissing her with effusion when she came into the drawing-room ; also that Eva quite forgot to give the signal for rising from the dinner-table, so that the ladies sat on till past ten o'clock. But the most successful event in this way was the meeting of the Leatherby Philharmonic Society, which was held at our house on Christmas Eve under Mr Fergusson's presidency, with a full orchestra of seventeen performers, which gave classical music of the highest character for three consecutive hours. Mrs Herries was spending the

Christmas week with us, and Herries himself was persuaded to join her, arriving late in the evening and staying over till the following Monday, when he departed considerably before daylight to catch the early train to town. Mr Paterson came down too, accompanied by the young lady from the Royal Academy, who, poor girl, having no particular home of her own, was very glad to pay us a lengthened visit, and quite electrified the good folks of Leatherby at the concert by her powerful voice. Almost equal to professional, observed Mr St Leger, who played a second violin in the orchestra at the Handel festivals, and was considered nearly as great an authority as Mr Fergusson himself; as indeed it well might be. The supper which followed went off very well; and when I proposed the toast of 'Prosperity to the Leatherby Philharmonic Society,' and thanked the president and members on behalf of the rest of the company for the splendid musical treat they had afforded us, there was both excitement and emotion when Mr Fergusson, in responding, feelingly reviewed their past history, how through evil report and good report, undismayed by difficulty and embarrassment, the Society had maintained its course, till, from the humble beginning many of those present could remember, it had attained to its present magnificent development.

Emboldened by this social success, Eva proposed

giving a ball, and this I think was the only thing needed to bring up our popularity to the highest pitch; but there was a sort of understanding with the Miss Haringtons that we should not disturb their comfortable old-fashioned furniture, so we abstained from the temptation.

CHAPTER XXI.

TO BUSINESS AT LAST.

BUT even the longest winter must come to an end. Parliament was summoned for the 8th of February, and a day or two before that we established ourselves in London. "Better take a furnished house for a season or two," said Mr Paterson, "till you see your way, and find out exactly what you want. A house that would suit you very well now, might be inconvenient by-and-by, if you become a great man; besides it is just as well to begin quietly. It is easy enough to expand in your scale of living, the difficulty always is in contracting it." Acting on this sound advice we had secured a small house in the direction of Queen's Gate. My first impulse would have been to settle down somewhere near to Westminster, but I recollected that Lord Palmerston had recommended a walk home as the best sedative after the excitement of debate, so in this view the distance appeared just the proper thing. The house, of which Eva expressed full approval when we went up to town together to

make a final selection, was of the regular London pattern, two rooms to a floor; a comfortable, but gloomy dining-room, with a still more gloomy apartment at the back, to be devoted henceforth to blue-books and business; two drawing-rooms on the first floor, to which the rest of the house had been sacrificed; then came a bedroom and dressing-room; over these a spare room destined for Sybil later in the season, with a little workroom for Annette at the back; while a narrow staircase led from this floor to the servants' rooms at the top, where you could touch the ceiling with your hand, and where they must inevitably be burnt to death on the outbreak of fire. The furniture was good and new, for the original tenant ('something in the city') had only been a short time in occupation. Nobody in the house seemed ever to have written a letter, the appliances for which were wholly wanting, or opened a book; but the addition of a writing-table or two and some book-shelves completed our arrangements in this respect, and when our books and other belongings were unpacked our new abode began to look sufficiently snug.

About this time the schedule was completed at last, the duties finally paid and declarations sworn, and the estate handed over to my own control. And looking over the account, I was really distressed to see how small were the charges made for transacting all my business, hardly enough it seemed, to pay for

the wine we had drunk at Mr Paterson's table. Discovering how little there was to discharge for all the trouble the firm had taken on my behalf, I felt more than ever ashamed at the horrid suspicions of earlier days, the very thought of which made my cheeks tingle, more especially when I recalled the unworthy expectations of later ones, that their disinterested exertions in the matter of the election and everything else would be accounted for in the bill. The bill paid, there was still a heavy load of obligation remaining of genuine hearty kindness, which it would be difficult ever to repay.

“And now,” said my kind old friend, as we were talking over the business in his room in Gracechurch Street, “you see pretty clearly how matters stand. Arranging, as we have done, to distribute your election expenses over three years, and giving you a couple more to clear off the succession duties, you leave your capital untouched, and still have close upon two thousand five hundred a-year to start with. You won't find it a penny too much for a man in Parliament, especially if you are going to be liberal in your subscriptions and so forth, down at Leatherby; but, depend on it, you will find it every bit as easy to live on that sum as on twice the amount. Everything depends on the scale you start upon. We are all creatures of habit. So, if I may presume to offer advice on the matter, I would say, begin quietly.

There is no call to do much for the first year or two, and it will be easy enough to expand as occasion requires."

It was in furtherance of the sound advice of the same kind previously administered, with which my experience of English life so far acquired entirely agreed, for I had already discovered it was very easy to spend money, that the modest house by Queen's Gate had been selected, and our household was now organised on a scale to match. Frederic, Mr Pater-son's servant, got us a man like himself, and a cook and under-maid were procured through Mrs Herries's agency, who, with Annette, completed the establish-ment. I bought a brougham and a light phaeton for Eva, for which, following universal custom, we jobbed the horses, together with a corpulent coach-man, accustomed evidently to late hours and beer; we jobbed also a couple of saddle-horses, good for park riding.

"Now, Eva," I said, on the eventful morning when Parliament was to assemble, "I have kept the purse hitherto, and all the accounts, but I am going to be dreadfully busy henceforward, so you must take the housekeeping off my hands. See, here is a little stock-in-trade for the fair accountant," and so saying I produced a little volume bound in Russia, with gilt edges and a gilt lock and key, gilt lettered "Cash Book" on the back.

"I will try, Charlie, but I am afraid I shall make

an awful mess of it. I never could understand anything about accounts."

"I suppose you have never had much to do with them, so far, dear, but you will find it the easiest thing possible. You just put on this side all the money you receive, and on the other all you spend, and the difference will be your balance in hand."

"I'll try, Charlie; but I never could do addition of money, and I am sure I shall never be able to add up those long pages properly."

"A little practice will make it quite easy, my child. It's a mere question of practice. Look at that dashing young lady in the counting-house at the Belgravia. I don't suppose she was particularly clever, but she could add you up a bill, or turn napoleons into sovereigns at the exchange of the day, like lightning. You have only to try, and with a little practice you will be astonished at your own powers in the arithmetical line."

"Oh, it's all very well to flatter, Charlie, but you don't know how stupid I am. I am sure I shall never be able to manage it." And Eva, as she said this, leaned over the table on which the book was lying, and looked quite downcast, and almost ready to cry.

"You know, Eva," I said, after a pause, "I don't want to bother you, but a moderate degree of care in money matters makes money go much further, and will add to the comfort of both of us. You can't

want to go through life without a little trouble of this sort. All I want you to do is to make a beginning."

"It isn't the trouble I mind," said Eva; "but I am afraid of making blunders, and then you will be angry with me."

"Angry with you, my dear Eva! When have I ever been angry with you? How can you say such things?"

"No, not angry exactly; but you will look so grave if I don't manage that dreadful book properly, and then I shall get frightened, and then I shall be more stupid than ever."

"It is I who am stupid, to look so solemn without meaning anything by it. But I don't want to make these accounts very tremendous at first. I will tell you how we will arrange matters. I must keep an account of some sort with the Leatherby bank, or old St Leger will be in a huff, and Mrs Gernell will never forgive us. I will make over their cheque-book to you. You shall draw cheques upon them for all your expenditure, and then at the end of the month I will make good what you have drawn from them from my London account, so as to keep a fixed balance with them. You shall be, in fact, a fixed imprest holder, as the accountants call it."

"I dont understand what that means," said Eva; "but I think I should be able to manage the cheques much better than keeping that dreadful book."

This arrangement was accordingly determined on, and I set off to take my seat in the House. But somehow this day, to which I had been looking forward so impatiently, yet brought with it a certain sense of disappointment. Already there was a tinge of alloy in the anticipated happiness, a bitter flavour left from the morning's talk. Could I be doing my duty by my little wife if she was thus so soon getting to be afraid of my looks and words? How if a feeling of this sort had so soon arisen, when we had thus far been like lovers leading a honeymoon life, how would it be kept down amid the distractions and preoccupations of the profession I had now embarked upon? Some such uneasy reflections came unbidden into my mind as I walked down towards Westminster, but I was too much engrossed by the coming ceremony to pursue the reflection. We are fond of saying that we are the creatures of circumstance; but is it not oftener true that we allow circumstances to master us, instead of shaping them to suit our purpose? We see more or less dimly in the course of life whither we are tending, and might, if we chose, keep clear of the rocks looming ahead; but vanity, pride, oftener still indolence and a sort of mental flabbiness, from which hardly any are free, act more powerfully than the whispered murmurings of conscience, and thus too often we are content to drift on till it is too late to avert the disaster.

Sergeant Lowder was waiting for me by appoint-

ment in Westminster Hall, having just come off a case in the Common Pleas, and under his shelter I made my first entry through the side-door sacred to members. It was worth being in Parliament, I observed, if only that you can hear the debates when you like, without being subjected to the indignities undergone by visitors to the galleries. Why should the servants of the people's representatives surpass in insolence all other creatures of the beadle and verger class? And I thought if ever I became better acquainted with the Speaker, I would take the liberty of putting that question to him.

In the library we found Mr Sheepshanks, who had come up on one of his rare visits to town, and who, with the Sergeant, introduced me to the House. There were five or six members to be sworn in, and after that process, there being no room this day behind the Treasury bench, I took up my position on a back seat below the gangway on the same side, and set out from there to watch the men and manners of the place. On this first day there was little doing, although the House was very full. There was the usual address, but the speeches on it from the Opposition were brief and uninteresting; and we all got away in time for dinner. Eva and I partook of that meal at the Lowders, who had found us out immediately on our coming to town. There was a rather large party, and as the Sergeant took Eva down I overheard him say, "So, Mrs West, your

impossible had made his move in the House at last? "Yes" said Iva. "I did so often. I wish I had been there. But that is more a long story." After this I did not feel very keen about discussing my first day in Parliament with her, and we returned home. But as I remembered Iva did not forget my intention.

The popular notion about young men entering members is that they enter the House entirely with real burning to distinguish themselves and striving steadily through the debates in the hope of some chance opportunity of coming forward: or else that they work up for some great occasion when they may break out with a great oration; but that these zealous grow cool gradually on making the surprising discovery that a mere indefinite aspiration after greatness is not a specific recipe for obtaining it, and eventually settle down into humdrum members of the ordinary kind, vastly different to the creations of their early fancies. However that may be, the process of disillusion ought certainly not to take long; and, as already remarked, I had seen sufficient, even during my few visits to the gallery of the House, to admit of forming a pretty clear conception of what the reality of membership would be, the dreary waste of time, the indescribable tedium of about three-fourths of the business that went on. Nor did it take long to discover that an ordinary member need be very little there; and in fact I used at first to

attend only sufficiently often to vote when required for any important division, and to learn the ways of the House, which, after all, so far at least as regarded their effect on other people, were very soon mastered. The thing which had most interest for me was the comparative success of different members ; to analyse the reasons why some men, not particularly able or striking in their delivery, nevertheless always were listened to with attention, while others, although maybe voluble enough, were uniformly snubbed and suppressed. But the ways and manners of the House generally were an interesting study. The most noticeable thing, perhaps, was the sort of deprecating manner which members generally assumed, especially when walking through Westminster Hall or in the lobbies, between four and five o'clock, at which time the latter place usually contained a sprinkling of constituents seeking admission, or admiring the spectacle in the abstract. I do not say but that some members, who saw the obsequious policeman jostling visitors aside to make way for them, may have felt inward pride at a sense of their importance. There may perhaps have been such, possibly borough members for Liberal constituencies, but the general aspect of members was one of a deprecating character, as much as to say, Here we are, gentlemen, most unworthy misrepresentatives of you who are looking on. We feel that the difference in our positions is a most invidious one, and really if things were as they

ought to be, you would be in our places and we in yours ; but, in the mean time, pray excuse us, we are very humble. The attitude of the Ministerial members towards the rest of the House was even more apologetic, as if to say, It is really quite absurd that we should be in office and you gentlemen not ; but pray, don't suppose we take any credit to ourselves for it—a mere accident, a foolish trick of speaking has done it, or something insignificant of that sort ; pray excuse us, we are really very humble. This, however, was a mere lobby and library manner, so to speak. Inside the House the Treasury Bench could be fierce enough ; persuasive indeed, and mildly reproachful towards their erring friends below the gangway, who were disposed to be always kicking over the Treasury traces, and, in fact, gave a great deal more trouble than the Opposition, but rolling out sarcasm and defiance against honourable gentlemen on the other side of the House.

Another thing that struck me at first very keenly was the want of reality about the party struggling that went on, or, to be more accurate, the artificial nature of the contest, for the strife was sometimes real enough in one sense. I could have understood that youngsters at a debating club might grow hot over argument, profoundly impressed with the truth and importance of their own views of things ; that men just on the threshold of public life should believe there was only one side to any question, and

be unable to understand how anybody could think differently from themselves ; how in such cases passion might be made to do duty for logic, and anger take the place of articulate utterance : but I confess to a feeling of surprise when I came to look on and see who the men were that carried on this Parliamentary warfare ; that the leaders on both sides were quite old men, whose own political careers gave evidence in how many different ways the same opinions could be regarded by similar minds, not to say the same minds ; men in the decline of life, who in all other affairs had probably grown tolerant and dispassionate, free from the passions and prejudices which pervert the judgment of younger people ; men, in short, whom one would be disposed to regard as raised above the level of ordinary strife, and who might survey in undisturbed serenity the strife of less experienced and more hot-blooded mortals. Of course I knew that it actually was not so ; but then Merrifield and Braham and the rest had hitherto been mere abstractions, and it was not until I had taken my seat and noticed the sea of bald heads whenever members were uncovered, that I realised the incongruity of the proceedings. Indeed, the older the men, the more fierce the language very often. The bitterest sarcasms upon the Government used to come from a man well on the wrong side of sixty, and the most violent and recriminative rejoinders from an equally venerable opponent. In

fact, in politics men seemed always to remain young ; and the seniors, who, it might be supposed, would have preferred sitting calmly to survey our conflicts from afar, like the blameless Ethiopians of Homer, were the very Ajax and Hector of the strife. This struck me the more coming from India, where old men—that is, old Englishmen—of any sort were rare, being either civilians passed over in promotion, and therefore withdrawn from the race of official competition, or generals and governors, personages to be treated with deference and respect.

The want of reality about Parliamentary warfare struck me the more visibly, because when I entered the House parties in their original sense had ceased to exist. In former days the two great divisions represented two specific sets of altogether diverse political opinions, and a man found no difficulty in deciding to which of the two he would belong. But now there was no longer any positive difference in principle between them. The one side had given up its original *rôle* of resisting all change, the other its advocacy of constant change. Both parties now admitted that reform of any part of our institutions was advisable, if only a sufficient case could be made out for it ; opinion merely differed as to what constituted a valid case. Further, so many of the leaders had changed both their opinions and their sides at different times, even the two parties having once themselves changed places—the whilome constitu-

tionalists on one memorable occasion setting the example of taking a header over a constitutional Niagara while their opponents in vain tried to swim against the torrent—that in fact all broad lines of demarcation had become blurred and almost obliterated. The opinions of the two parties were now for the most part shaped by the views of their leaders for the time being; and as it was usually quite an open question what view each of these two distinguished men would take upon any point that arose, party politics were reduced to a perfectly incoherent condition. All that could be predicted was, that whichever side got the start in any proposal, the other would probably oppose it; one party was just as likely as the other to assume at any moment the office of drag to the political coach. But it was plain that there needed only the rise of some great question of principle in order that the House should recast itself anew; the existing party distinctions covered no longer any real differences of opinion; while the majority of the members were so essentially agreed on main principles as to present the elements for a combined party with a commanding majority, so soon as the ties of personal predilections and dislikes which still retained men in nominal bondage should be shaken off. I give these first impressions now because, although they may be by no means original, other persons having no doubt received them in their turn just in the same way, it appeared to me

that first impressions were the most accurate; for that after a certain time men in the House got to settle down into a conventional way of looking at all political matters, till at last the formalities of party government became in their eyes something inherent in the natural condition of things.

Another phenomenon which surprised me a good deal at first was the number of members who seemed to have no business in Parliament. I don't mean the young swells who entered for the fun of the thing, or as something to be done as a matter of course, just like coming of age, and who seldom showed except at four o'clock when questions were asked, or perhaps looked in for half an hour with their white ties and button-hole geraniums after dinner; nor the older county members, who, if they seldom spoke, added weight to the House, and formed a very imposing audience; nor the lawyers, whose main attention was given to their professional practice, and who looked at politics merely as a means to an end. There were a lot of men who seemed to fulfil no useful functions either in or out of the House; who knew nobody, not even each other; who seldom spoke at all and never to the point; middle-aged men for the most part with a very questionable command of the letter *h*, who sat about in obscure parts of the House, and apparently derived from that proceeding their only gratification.

It would be a trite thing to remark that if there

were not many good speakers, the House collectively made a very formidable audience, but the impression was so striking at first that it is worth recording. One felt that whatever might be the mental calibre of each particular individual, there was sure to be some one in the assembly who would detect a fallacy, some one against whose taste any fault of manner or impropriety of thought would offend. But what struck me still more forcibly, more even than the ease and readiness of the best speakers, was the tolerance of the House for bores. Certain men, indeed, for flippancy without wit, or something or other offensive in their manner, were put down without mercy; but for wearisome talking if otherwise inoffensive there appeared an infinite sufferance, although it must be added the House would often be made up of bores only, waiting for their own innings, and exercising patience on the give-and-take principle. What conceivable object these gentlemen proposed to themselves it would be difficult to understand. They had never anything original to say, nor anything original in the manner of saying it; they did not advance the cause of humanity or legislation by speaking, nor even their own, for their utterances seldom got more than a line or two of space in the newspapers, and were very often left out altogether, and what they said, or thought, or did, had not the smallest apparent influence on anybody or anything; yet night after night would these gentlemen be in

their places, springing up in coveys whenever the platform was vacant to catch the Speaker's eye, time after time, till at last by the process of elimination every one of the party had had his say, and the debate could be closed. Night after night this used to go on, and the same well-known names to appear in next morning's paper with a brief abstract tagged on to each. But different orders of beings find happiness in different ways; the jackdaw, perhaps, takes quite as much pleasure in its croaking as the nightingale in its song.

CHAPTER XXII.

A FIRST PLUNGE.

HOWEVER, I give these impressions because they only lasted for a time. After a very few days the strangeness of the life passed off ; men no longer noticed the new member in the library or other haunts of the House ; and I came and went like the rest. And then arose impatience to enter on the real business which brought me there. The point was how to set about it, for I was too keenly alive to the faults of others not to be anxious to avoid becoming a bore myself. There was of course the regular recipe of a big first speech, for a new member is always listened to ; but then a big speech might prove flat, and it would be awkward to start again with the incubus of a first failure. A better course appeared to be to warm gradually into work, beginning by casual remarks in committee, and so proceeding onwards to higher flights with practice, as the first shyness wore off, taking care, above all, never to say anything unless there were something to say. But my first

attempt was not a very happy one. The Paymaster-General to the Forces, who had just been caught, and was quite new to military business, having stated that the artillery was divided into horse and foot artillery, I rose to explain that there were three kinds of artillery recognised in Her Majesty's service—namely, horse, field, and garrison artillery; whereupon that official replied that this was just what he meant—there was the artillery with horses for duty in the field, and there was the artillery for garrison duty, which he had for convenience' sake styled the foot-artillery; but he was obliged to the honourable and gallant member for setting him right as to the more exact terminology, whereon there was a slight titter. And next Saturday the *Overseer*, a weekly paper much given to epigram and omniscience, devoted one of the smart little paragraphs that made up its first two or three pages, to this incident. "The colonels are being reinforced by the captains. The last recruit to this obstructive brigade is a Captain West of the artillery, who succeeded Lord Stowe at Leatherby (borough with of course a purely agricultural constituency), a young officer evidently endowed with a fine capacity for small regimental details, as evidenced by his flippant comment on the Paymaster-General's statement last Friday se'nnight. When will these military gentry understand that the country does not care a fig whether a thing is called a battery or a brigade, but wants men with a definite

policy on military organisation ; above all, wants brains ? Cannot they understand, too, that it is because we cannot find knowledge conjoined with ideas that the country prefers a civilian administration of the army—prefers even the vague generalities of the Paymaster-General to the small exactness of military men, who seem unable to look beyond their own parade-ground ?” This was a bad beginning ; and matters did not improve when, a day or two later, on Mr Thorowcome observing that the inspector-general of recruiting considered it a very healthy sign that the artillery were only about 1500 below their proper strength, the demon of impatience possessed me to get up and say that as a matter of fact the regiment was just 1850 short of the required recruits, and that this fact appeared in my poor judgment to indicate a very unsatisfactory state of things. Whereupon Mr Thorowcome blandly retorted that no doubt the honourable and gallant member (from whose valuable aid in these discussions he hoped the House would derive much future benefit) thought with others of his cloth that there was nothing like leather. Well, the honourable and gallant member’s statement about the strength of the artillery might very possibly be correct, although he had no reason to doubt that the return which he held in his hand was quite exact as to the facts ; but the real thing to look to was the general condition of recruiting in the British army generally, and he was able to announce that whereas

six years before, when the right honourable gentleman on the opposite bench had charge of the department [this was a hit at old Perkyman], the establishment was 5.27 per cent short of its proper strength, it was now only 4.63 per cent short, and for his part he (Mr Thorowcome) considered that this was a far from unsatisfactory result to have brought about in six years. Further, he would take the opportunity of reminding the House that whereas at the period in question the army fourth-class reserve numbered only 835 men, it now amounted to 978 men.

This was a bad beginning. At the Union Jack, indeed, my *début* was rather favourably regarded. The *Overseer* was not much read at that institution, and my attacks, as my friends there were pleased to call them, both on the Paymaster-General and the War Minister were considered to be very much to the point. "You're quite right, West, my boy," said Cobbe Smith; "the state of the regiment is perfectly disgraceful. Would you believe it? in my battery we are eleven men and a trumpeter short of our proper complement; and as for horses, why, if we were to go on a campaign to-morrow, we should have to leave a couple of guns behind. I declare to you I have been in the regiment more than twenty years, and I never saw anything like it." And Cobbe Smith was so oppressed with a sense of his inability to proceed on a campaign the next morning with all the guns of his battery, that he sat back on the ottoman

in moody silence, with his hands thrust into his trousers-pockets.

"Then look at the promotion," broke in Straight. "Just look at me, six-and-twenty years in the service, and no more chance of getting the command of a horse brigade than West here."

"But what can you expect with a parcel of civilians to manage things? Why, if you were to show old Thorowcome a gun, I'll bet he wouldn't know the breech from the muzzle."

"Well, I hope West will show them up properly, with their blunders and ignorance," added Straight; "I know I would if I were in Parliament, but I shall never have that luck."

Notwithstanding the moral support afforded by the approbation of Cobbe Smith and Straight, I felt that it would never do to remain in this false position, and determined to make a vigorous effort for escape. The opportunity arrived almost sooner than I expected, for on old Nixon's motion that the strength of the army should be reduced by ten thousand men, there was at one point of the debate a sort of slackness in the rising of members to occupy the vacancy: in a sudden access of audacity I got up, and heard my name called by the Speaker. There was no help for it now, and accordingly I made my plunge. I had made the discovery on the previous occasions when offering my unfortunate remarks, that it is not necessary for being heard to

shout at the top of your voice, and so fortunately managed to get off at once in the right sort of pitch, without bawling, or speaking so low as to be indistinct. I had my speech ready, a disquisition on general military principles, which it was easy by the interpolation of a few sentences to adapt to the point at issue—a practice, I afterwards found, which was not uncommon among honourable members, so that you give your speech all the appearance of an impromptu utterance. Yet this indeed it virtually was on the present occasion; for although I could have repeated my speech by heart, as thought over in many a walk between Westminster and Queen's Gate, somehow when once I warmed into the subject, new ways of putting my ideas rose in my mind, and I found myself going off the track I had laid out. This sort of inspiration which possesses some people when acting under the influence of an audience is quite inexplicable and incapable of being analysed, but it is, I suppose, what all men experience who have the gift of ready speaking. To have recited an impromptu speech in a room by myself would have been utterly impossible. I could not have got out half-a-dozen consecutive sentences without writing them down or stopping to think. But once on my legs in the House, and charged with specific ideas, there appeared no sort of difficulty in expressing them. The difficulty was indeed to know when to stop; and although I seemed to be on my

legs for only about ten minutes, I found by the clock that the speech had lasted for more than forty.

There could be no doubt of the success of this first effort, even if some of the morning papers had not devoted a special article to it next morning. When the House becomes so silent that nothing is to be heard but your own voice ; when members cease to go out, and the place gradually gets fuller as the speech goes on ; and when, without being able to recognise any one in particular, you become sensible of a sea of faces all turned towards you, it does not need the "hear, hear," which breaks in at intervals and follows at the end, to tell you that the effort has been effective. The Treasury Bench did not cheer, perhaps because members did not wish to commit themselves to specific approval of some of my ideas ; but there was no opposition on either side, for I had endeavoured to place the matter above a party footing, and several acquaintances from both sides offered their congratulations afterwards. My object was partly, of course, to let people know that there was one soldier at any rate who did not think that there was nothing like leather ; and when I said that the honourable proposer of the amendment appeared to have a good deal of reason on his side when he urged that the army should be reduced by ten thousand men, for that the existing establishment had been arrived at upon no definite principle, and was neither one thing nor the other—too large for peace, too

small for war—the gentlemen below the gangway gave plenty of applause, which, however, died away when I went on to say that there was no reason why the particular strength he proposed should be more suitable in the nature of things than that proposed by the Government; and that, as the burden of proof lay with those who wanted change, it would be proper to support the establishment fixed by the Government till some other specific distribution should be shown to be more suitable; then the approbation ceased in this part of the House, but was taken up on the other side. But the point of what I advanced was in the development of the argument that this mode of dealing with the army was as politically unscientific and unsafe as it was opposed to all sound economy. The time has surely arrived, I submitted, for recognising the fact that a standing army is no longer dangerous to the liberties of the country. At any rate, if danger were to arise from that quarter, it would not be from the power given to the Crown or the Government, but from an entirely different and opposite condition of things. It was surely time to recognise the fact that the old military polity of nations arming for war had passed away, and become replaced by a new state of society, under which all Europe stood ready armed. The gradual change from a peace to a war footing, which occurred in former times, was no longer met with. The change was instantaneous; and therefore for England alone to rely

on the old system, keeping up a force in peace time which was neither one thing nor the other, trusting to meeting the difficulty somehow or another, was as complete an anachronism, to say nothing of the waste and extravagance involved, as if resort were had to the practice of the middle ages, when the king called on the barons to summon their men-at-arms, and to come and invade France. It is not the case that the military liabilities of the country vary from year to year. The only variation that takes place is in the feelings of the nation, alternating between false assurance and unreasoning fear, or according to the greater or smaller attention given to Continental politics, as evidenced by the whimsical additions to and reductions of the army; but the liability remains in fact a constant quantity, being properly measured, not by our false fears or false confidence, but by the military power of other nations, which, if it alters at all, alters only to increase. What we had to do, then, was first to obtain a clear view of our liabilities, which surely it might be possible to arrive at, and then to frame our military organisation accordingly. Our insular position would, no doubt, admit of our doing this on a smaller and cheaper scale than was practicable for other nations; but if our dangers were less, our responsibilities were not; and until the national voice distinctly repudiated that responsibility, and pronounced that England's future policy should be limited to the defence of our

own shores from invasion, this playing fast and loose with the army was a childish policy, equally unworthy of a great nation, or a government responsible for the exercise of foresight. Not the least fault of such a policy was its wastefulness, for war as for peace. For war, because if one fact was plainly demonstrated by recent history, it was that war could only be waged cheaply if waged quickly; but it was plain to any one who thought about it, that our present system would oblige us, in case of war, to drift into a repetition of the fatuous mode of pursuing it which we followed at the beginning of the century, when Ministers came down to the House to propose a vote of forty thousand men as a sort of number which would furnish a good lot of fighting, and keep a few stray expeditions agoing till the next meeting of Parliament; and when people looked on a war as a sort of chronic outlet for the constitution, like a seton in a scrofulous patient, which might be kept going for an indefinite time, or at any rate till the Government went out—money and blood enough being frittered away in the long-run to have settled the matter in a single campaign if properly expended. The system was equally wasteful in peace, because economy in the establishments and more costly portions of the army was impossible, so long as the total strength of the forces was liable to these whimsical fluctuations. It did not then in the least follow that the adoption of a more definite military policy would

lead to greater cost. On the contrary, the presumption was wholly the other way. Who could practise economy in his own household if he never kept up the same number of servants for a week together? Just so with regard to the army. Fixity of system should be the direct precursor of economy, because until you know distinctly what you want, you will never find out what you don't want. Put your establishment on a permanent basis, and you will be able to lop off the excrescences, of which be sure there are plenty. You would most probably find, for one thing, that the number of men on actual service might be sensibly reduced. There is no more reason why the strength of the army and its cost should be liable to fluctuation than that of any other branch of the public service. Put an end, then, to this fatuous policy of annual votes and fluctuating estimates. Let the military establishment of the country be fixed permanently by Act of Parliament, in pursuance of a definite policy, to be deliberately considered; and when so fixed, let it be maintained intact till a new state of things arises, or until a distinctly new policy is recognised and adopted by the nation.



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