

# A PINK WEDDING.

# A PINK WEDDING.

A Novel.

BY  
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AUTHOR OF

'TOM BULLKELEY OF LISSINGTON,' 'HE WOULD BE A SOLDIER,'  
'THE GIRL HE LEFT BEHIND HIM,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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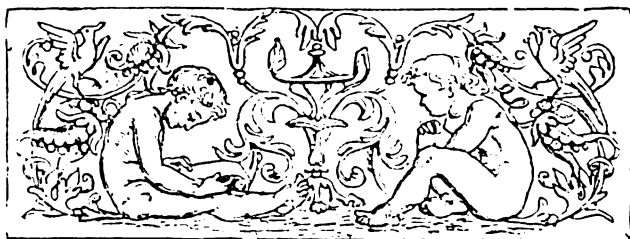


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thence. I should further have pointed out to his mind's eye the transformation that would have come over the scene had the land been in the hands of peasant proprietors, or had the *métayer* system been in operation. Instead of the extensive and beautiful green uplands there would have been potato patches; in place of the magnificent oaks and beeches and elms there would have been cabbages, turnips, and lettuces; and in lieu of the graceful and antlered monarch of the glen, the obese and odoriferous inhabitant of the sty would have larded the lean earth as it walked along. The reader will understand that my appeal would have been to his æsthetic rather than his utilitarian soul.

Hurstenholme Priory, as its name denotes, had once been an appurtenance of Holy Church; but after a century or so, mitred abbot and hooded monk had been

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expelled by some proud and powerful baron  
who

'Had come in his might, with King Henry's right  
To turn church lands to lay.'

For several centuries it had remained in the possession of the noble despoiler's direct descendants, who, apparently determined that men should not do unto them as their ancestor had done unto others, fortified and kept it against all assailants; then it had passed by marriage into another noble family; and then finally it became, by purchase about a quarter of a century ago, the property of Mr. Geoffrey Moltbury. In his hands the work of restoration, alteration, addition, and adornment had been busily carried on for years under the superintendence of the first architects of the age until it had developed into one of the show places of England.

The warlike portions of Hurstenholme

monuments of the troublous times through which the old Priory had passed, were now, by the lapse of ages and the improvement of manners, softened down into a peaceful and green old age. The turrets and battlements from which culverin and basilisk had once frowned were overgrown with ivy, and the moat was now nothing more than a grassy dell with here and there a clump of rhododendrons.

Mr. Moltbury possessed other seats in England, but Hurstenholme was the principal as well as the favourite one, and it was there that the family considered itself at 'home.'

It is at Hurstenholme Priory that the scene now opens on a certain bright day in May, about six months after the Moltburys' departure from Japan.

Down a shady glade within half a mile of the Priory, a white-headed old gentleman

walked between a plump donkey and a slim maiden. The white-headed old gentleman was Mrs. Moltbury's father, whom, the reader may recollect, she was rather fond of describing as 'the old courtier.' Perhaps the reader will also recognise in him the proprietor of 'the hereditary gout.' The slim maiden was of course our little friend Violet, who is well known to the reader, and especially blithe and winsome does she look this bright May day. The donkey requires a more ceremonious introduction. Her name was Asella, and she was the faithful friend and servant of old Mr. Moltbury and his charming little granddaughter. Asella was unmistakably inclined to *embonpoint*, but as she had never to carry anything heavier than the two small panniers now slung across her, or quicken her pace beyond the capabilities of hereditary gout, this loss of her youthful

figure in no way interfered with the conscientious performance of her duties. Asella's coat was as sleek as a donkey's coat could be; her small hoofs were well blackened; her trappings were of good brown leather; and she wore, if not a wreath of roses, at all events one very fine one in her headstall. Altogether it would have been hard—I will go farther and say it would have been impossible—to have found a sprucer donkey anywhere. One arm of the old gentleman rested affectionately on Asella's neck, and the other was passed lovingly through the arm of his granddaughter. Notwithstanding his four-score years and his complaints, the old gentleman was very chirpy this morning, and his face was wrinkled with smiles as well as with age.

‘There now, Ivy, we couldn't have a better place than this, could we?’ he re-

marked, as he placed an arresting hand on Asella's bridle, and looked admiringly on the moss-covered roots of a spreading chestnut tree which might have shaded half a dozen village smithies.

'Ivy' was the old man's name for her. She clung round an old ruin, he said.

'That we couldn't, grandpapa dear ; nothing could be nicer than this,' acquiesced Violet. 'And there's a spring, too, to fill our kettle at. Shall we bivouac here ?'

'Yes, let's bivouac here,' said the old man, his eyes glistening with the pleasure of a child playing at gipsies, and his hands trembling with excitement as he proceeded to uncoil the rope attached to Asella's headstall.

In a few moments the animal was picketed, for though the best-dispositioned donkey that ever brayed, she was still asinine, and there was no telling how far a

seductive thistle here and there might tempt her to stray from the path of duty.

The work of unpacking the panniers was now performed with despatch.

‘There’s the fire-place, grandpapa,’ said Vi, as she handed him three charred bricks.

‘Three jolly bricks, eh? I knew a public house of that name once. Very good, my dear. What’s the next article?’

‘The kettle; here it is.’

‘Very good again. Polly, put the kettle on, and we’ll all have tea. Oh, Ivy, Ivy! what happy hours these are when me and you—or I *should* say, you and me——’

‘Well, if it comes to what you *should* say, grandpapa dear, “you and I” would be the correct way of putting it.’

‘Quite right, Ivy; quite right, as you always are,’ said the old man, taking his

correction mildly. That was a rod he was always ready to kiss—'when you and I are out on these jaunts together. When we are on these sprees I forget there's such a thing as the rheumatics—gout I mean,' he added with an anxious glance towards the Priory, as if fearful some little bird might carry the remark thither.

I here take the opportunity of letting the reader know in as delicate a manner as possible that the old courtier's H's, like confidence in a blackguard, were invariably misplaced. It is sufficient to inform the reader of this infirmity of speech without constantly parading it in these pages. I may add—though it may be needless to do so—that the old gentleman had been not only, as the phrase goes, the architect, but the hodsman and everything upwards of his own fortunes.

In a short time all the materials for the



repast were laid out on the sward, and then the old man hobbled off with a great deal of bustle and glee to gather sticks. As to why they did not bring a bundle of firewood with them, the answer is they preferred to be as independent of artificial aid as possible. While the old man collected fuel and attended to the fire generally, Vi spread a small tablecloth on the grass and prepared the feast. It was a very simple affair.

A little earthenware teapot, two delf cups and saucers, a few plates of the willow pattern—the old man having a fondness for that now homely specimen of the ceramic art; a loaf of brown bread, which Vi proceeded to cut into slices and butter; a soda-water bottle full of cream, a chicken, a rice pudding, which had survived the perils of transport in a wonderful manner; a small packet of sugar, and ditto of salt,

were carefully arranged in their proper positions by Violet.

'Now, grandpapa, I've done my share of the business, so far. I'll come and help you now with yours. How are you getting on?'

'First rate, my dear,' replied the old fellow, taking off his broad-brimmed wide-awake and fanning the embers into a bright flame by way of demonstration. 'Just look at that, my dear.'

The applause which this pyrotechnic display drew forth from Violet wrinkled up the old man's countenance with delight until, to use Falstaff's simile, it was like 'a wet cloak ill laid up.'

Laughing merrily, Violet knelt down beside the old man with the devotion of a fire-worshipper, and assisted him to feed the fire by poking little sticks into the hot bright places, until in about five minutes

the kettle graciously acknowledged these warm attentions by commencing to sing gaily. On this the old gentleman positively hugged his bright, loving little granddaughter in a gentle ecstasy of joy.

‘Oh, Ivy, Ivy! blessed if I don’t think it’s the gipsies and tramps and such like that have the very cream of life after all, and not those that live in palaces and castles like that,’ he said, pointing to the ivy-clad turrets of the Priory.

‘But aren’t you very happy at the Priory, grandpapa dear?’ asked Violet, as she proceeded to make the tea.

‘Yes, Ivy, yes; but not as happy, not *near* as happy as I am here like this. I don’t think I’m quite accustomed to it yet.’

‘Not accustomed to it yet! Why, you have been there twenty years, grandpapa.’

‘Yes, but you see, it’s such a large place,

such an *uncommon* large place, Ivy, it can't be all took in—I *should* say taken in—by a slow-thinking old chap like me under a very long time.'

. 'But I've taken it all in, grandpapa—every stone of it. I know and love every stick and stone in the dear old place.'

'Ay! but you were born to it, Ivy, and that makes all the difference. Those big blue eyes of yours have been accustomed to look at things on a grand scale ever since they could look at anything. That's what's made them so big, I almost think. But mine haven't, and that's what's made them perhaps little better than slits—just a couple o' peepholes. I hadn't to open 'em very wide to take in what was in view over the edge of *my* cradle—if I had one.'

'But you're none the worse for being born in a little house, grandpapa darling,

are you ? and I none the better for having been born in a big house, am I ?' said Vi, patting and stroking his hand.

' Ah ! *you* think that, Ivy—I know you do, my little heart o' gold. But *all* people don't. Ivy, don't you think they're sometimes a little ashamed of me up there ?'

' No, no, no — a thousand times no, darling old grandpapa !' said Violet, throwing her arms round his neck and nestling her cheek against his white beard.

' I don't know. I ain't so sure of that,' said the old man, still doubtfully. ' I know they don't show it, but I can't help thinking sometimes they feel it.'

' But you *must* help thinking, because it's not right to think what isn't true. It's almost as bad as saying it. But we won't talk any more about that. The tea must be drawn now. Come along, grandpapa ; let's begin.'

The old man needed no second invitation, and at once recovering his spirits, sat down at the edge of the tablecloth. In a few moments he was gazing lovingly on Vi through the fragrant mist of a steaming cup of tea.

‘Your very good health, my darling,’ he said, nodding brightly.

He was just about to suit the action to the word, when he thought better of it, and poured a portion of the hot tea from the cup into the saucer.

‘I know it’s not exactly what’s done in polite circles,’ he observed apologetically ; ‘but the politest circles aren’t always the most comfortable.’

The meal, to all appearances, was a non-descript sort of affair. It was too substantial and at too early an hour of the day for afternoon tea, and yet the tea itself made it unlike a lunch. ~~It was a~~ lunch,

however, and the unusual introduction of tea at that meal was a concession to the old man's taste. Nothing like a cup of tea, he would say, for warming the cockles of the heart, whatever he may have meant by that. So whenever he and Vi indulged in these *al fresco* repasts—and they had been an institution of many summers—the cup that cheers but not inebriates graced their board, if I may thus catachrestically term the mossy bank or rocky ledge on which they spread their fare.

‘A pretty name, Asella, ain’t it? Means a star, don’t it, Ivy?’ said ‘the old courtier,’ waving a semi-demolished slice of bread-and-butter in the direction of the plump donkey, and speaking, I’m sorry to add, in tones farinaceously muffled.

‘No, not a star, grandpapa; nothing half so romantic as that. It is the Latin for a little donkey.’

'To be sure, to be sure! I recollect now you've told me that scores of times. And you called her Asella after that pony you used to ride in Japan?'

.'Yes,' said Vi, with a very soft, tender look in her eyes.

'Ah, Ivy, what a dreary time for me that was when you were away! If it hadn't been for your letters I don't know how I should have got on. They were more than meat and drink to me. What was the name of that chap that used to show you about?'

'Do you mean Mr. Mauleverer, grandpapa?'

'Aye, that's him. I like that chap.'

The last sentiment was uttered with considerable emphasis.

'Tell me what makes you like him, grandpapa? You have never seen him, you know.'



‘I’ve never seen him, certainly, but still I know a great deal about him. In your letters it was always Mr. Mauleverer this, Mr. Mauleverer that, Mr. Mauleverer said so and so, or Mr. Mauleverer did something else. And I could tell from that he was being kind to my little Ivy all those thousand miles away from me. And if that’s not enough to make me like a chap, I don’t know what is! Besides that, I’ve got a— a— Bother my old swizzle head! What’s that your mother’s always having, Ivy?’

‘What mamma’s always having?’

‘Yes, a fearful—— Oh, what is it?’

‘Presentiment?’

‘Aye. Only mine ain’t a fearful one. Mine’s a pleasant one. I’ve got a presentiment, Ivy, that I shall like him still more. From what you’ve written, and what you’ve told me, and what I feel, I am

convinced he is a first-rate one—quite the clean potato, in fact.’

Now this last flower, or rather I should say vegetable, of speech was just about the most complimentary expression at his command. It was far from pleasing to Mrs. Moltbury’s ears polite, and always made her shudder. Many attempts had been made to trace its origin, but without success, notwithstanding that even Mr. Moltbury himself had made more than one determined effort to do so. Violet always took it for what it was worth in the old man’s estimation, and that was a great deal.

‘We all liked Mr. Mauleverer very much, grandpapa. He was kind to all of us, and we were talking a great deal of him this very morning. Gussie has had a letter from him, and he’s coming home very soon. Expects to be home in about two months from this, in fact. He says he

looks forward very much to renewing his acquaintance with us or rather I should say friendship, for you know, grandpapa dear, owing to the force of circumstances — our being thrown so much together and being so often completely dependent on him (even papa, who is so self-reliant, was sometimes obliged to lean on Mr. Mau-leverer), that our acquaintance with him very soon ripened into friendship.’

The sentimental reader may possibly now see why Violet was so especially happy on this day.

‘Never shall I forget when Mr. Mau-leverer came to see us off on board the P. and O. ship the morning we left Japan,’ said Violet, thinking aloud rather than addressing her grandfather. ‘Our English “Good-bye” is a sad-sounding word. But, oh, the Japanese “*Saionara*” is like a soft wail. It is a sound which lingers on

the ear and in the heart with a low moaning. It keeps—will you have any more rice-pudding, grandpapa dear ?'

'No, thank you, my dear ; I've done very nicely,' replied the old man, who, to the mental exclusion of soft wails and low moanings, had been busily scraping his plate with the spoon, as if anxious to partake of the willow pattern, turtle-doves, pagoda and all.

'Very well then, I'll put away the things into the baskets while you get your pipe ready.'

No waiting-maid could have cleared away more expeditiously than Violet, and while she was thus occupied the 'old courtier' produced, loaded, and lit a pipe very much in the elaborate way that old Eccles in 'Caste,' watched with breathless interest from stall to gallery, conducts a similar operation.

‘When does ’Gustus go for a soldier?’ he asked, as soon as the pipe was under weigh.

‘He is to join in a few days, grandpapa. He leaves for town to-morrow.’

‘Belongs to those tin chaps that look as if they ought to get off and carry their horses instead of their horses carrying them, don’t he?’

‘Well, he belongs to the Life Guards, grandpapa,’ said Violet, laughing; ‘but I never heard that description of them before. I hardly think it does them justice. They are the most magnificent troops in the world, and I feel quite pleased to think that Gussie is one of them.’

‘Very well, my dear; if you’re pleased, I am.’

Conversing in all moods, on a variety of topics, the old man and his granddaughter passed an hour or so, and then

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Asella was loaded and the homeward journey was commenced.

They had not proceeded far when they descried some little way off a lady in a high dog-cart, driving tandem along the avenue at a rattling pace. By her side was a gentleman, and on the back seat were a groom and a youngster.

‘It’s Lady Mabel Slessinger and her brother, and—I don’t know who the gentleman by her side is,’ remarked Violet, as she and the old man paused under the trees to watch the vehicle spinning over the smooth roadway.

‘Things have changed a good bit since I was young,’ said the old man. ‘In *my* day young ladies didn’t sit on the box, and it wouldn’t have been thought quite the clean potato for a young man to sit beside a lady, and be driven by her. It don’t seem so strange though in this case,

perhaps, for I'm blessed if she don't seem as much at home with the reins in one hand, and flicking about that long whip with the other, as if she had been born to it.'

'Yes, they say Lady Mabel is as good on the box as in the saddle. Gussie raves about her. She certainly is very lovely—the loveliest girl, I think, I ever saw.'

'Dear, dear! what a shame not to go and furnish my Ivy's room properly,' said the old man, with a twinkle in his eye.

'What on earth do you mean, grandpapa?' asked Violet, with considerable mystification in her pretty face.

'Why, from what you've just said, my dear, they can't have provided you with a looking-glass.'

'Ah, grandpapa, those we love are of course lovely in our eyes. But Lady Mabel is lovely in everyone's eyes. She

dazzles strangers as well as friends by her beauty.'

'She be dazzled!' said the old man, warmly. 'She's not a patch on you, Ivy, any more than any girl or woman in all England is. Lady Mabel! Pish! Why, if I was to cut all your hair off, draw your teeth, paint your nose red, and your cheeks yellow, Lady Mabel couldn't even then hold a candle to you.'

'Well, under the circumstances I hope she wouldn't; not if it was lighted, at all events,' said Violet, laughing merrily. 'Oh, you dear funny old grandpapa, was there ever such a prejudiced, infatuated grandfather?'

'Don't tell *me*. You can't go putting *me* off like that. Look here, you said people thought whoever they loved lovely, didn't you, eh?'

'Yes.'



‘Well, you love *me*, don’t you?’

‘Yes, with all my heart.’

‘Very good. Now you don’t mean to say you think *me* lovely, do you?’ said the old man, shutting up one eye, and taking a monocular view of his granddaughter with the most quizzical expression that ever winkled up an old face.

‘Yes, I do.’

‘Well, well,’ said the old man, pulling up his shirt-collar with a sudden change of demeanour, as if thinking that perhaps after all the premises of his *reductio ad absurdum* had been false. ‘Well, I believe there *were* worse-looking chaps than Joey Moltbury in his day. Oh dear! oh dear! what a twinge! If it hadn’t been for you on one side and Asella on the other, my dear, I should have been down. It was all along of trying to come a bit of a prance, after that compliment of yours, Ivy.

Drat these rheumatics — ahem, gout I mean.’

In about a quarter of an hour they arrived at Asella’s *bijou* residence, where they were met by her *valet de chambre*, a rosy-cheeked, clean-looking lad, who welcomed her home with a joyous grin from ear to ear. Surely there never was such a fortunate donkey as Asella. Even her tenderest feelings were considered. She was domiciled far from the madding crowd in order that she might not be subjected to the scoffs of pampered menials, or weighed down by a sense of her own insignificance in the company of four-hundred-guinea hunters, and carriage horses who had attended royal levees and frequented the Park, and who could proudly champ their bits, and toss their heads, and stand for hours, so many Turveydrops of their species, very models of equine deport-

ment. Such society would have been uncongenial to Asella, and so Violet and her old grandfather had some years before designed, and had built under their immediate superintendence, a charming little home for their humble friend and servant. It was in the midst of a shrubbery maze, and was now covered from basement to chimney—for it had a chimney just for the look of the thing—with creepers and budding flowers.

Having seen Asella duly installed in her rustic abode by the rosy-cheeked lad who would later on, according to custom, bring the panniers and their contents to the house-keeper's room, Violet and her grandfather directed their steps homeward. As they approached the grand terraces, and came under the shade of the stately turrets, a great deal of the old man's gaiety seemed to depart from him.

‘Ah, Ivy,’ he said, as they stood within the walls of the Priory, ‘what a happy afternoon we have had—so happy, that I quite forgot until now that you go up to London to-morrow, and that this will be the last outing we’ll have for a long time!’

‘No, not for a *long* time, grandpapa dear. We shall soon be back again.’

‘An old man must not hate anything, Ivy, and I try hard to be at peace with everything and everybody; but I *do* find it hard not to hate what’s called fashion. It’s fashion that takes people from the country at its loveliest to the town at its hottest and dustiest.’

The old man was not far out.

‘Tis perhaps a pity  
When Nature wears the gown that doth become her,  
To lose the best months in a reeking city  
And wait until the nightingale grows dumber.’

‘But what am I talking about? I’m

talking like a selfish old man who forgets when he was young. It's not only dust and heat that's in London. There are parties, and dances, and theatres; and I should recollect, when I was your age, Ivy, how fond I was of all that sort of thing. And though my parties were only a dance now and then on the green, and my theatres only booths at fairs, still they were to me, in my station of life then, what salls in gilded balloons—— Dear, dear! my poor old head does sometimes jumble up the sounds so! What was it, I wonder, I wanted to say?

‘Balls in gilded saloons, perhaps, darling,’ said Violet, without a smile, for there was a tear in the old man’s eye. ‘That was what you were going to say,’ she added, drawing down his grey head and kissing his furrowed cheek.

‘Aye, aye, that was it,’ he said, suddenly

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brightening up<sup>o</sup> under the influence of the caress.

‘A tear that is wiped with a little address,  
May be followed, perhaps, with a smile.’

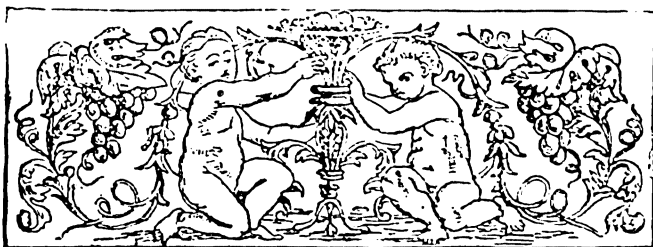
‘Yes, Ivy, my dances on the green, and my booths at the fair, and my “penny-gaffs,” were to me what your balls in gilded saloons and your operas and your theatres are now to you. And I should not speak as if I grudged you them, for I don’t. I don’t, my little sunbeam.’

‘I really don’t enjoy them, grandpapa, as much as I do our little picnics together,’ said Violet; ‘and I would willingly give up going to London this season—— At least——’

And here Violet’s heart, with a wild leap, warned her not to say anything more if, as the outspoken Hotspur put it, she would ‘tell truth and shame the devil.’

‘I suppose, old fellow, you and all your people are certain to be in town this season, in which case we shall soon meet again, the same jolly little party as at Mianoshta, for I hope to be in London at about the height of the great Vanity Fair.’

The above extract from a certain letter, received by her brother that morning, every word of which she remembered, though he had read it out only once at the breakfast-table, was what occurred to her mind and arrested her tongue.



## CHAPTER II.

### LADY MABEL.

**T**HE glimpse which the reader has already had of Lady Mabel Slessinger on the box-seat of a high dog-cart, driving tandem with artistic dash, is a decidedly characteristic view. She was inordinately addicted to sport. The guiding star of her existence was fox-hunting, and to her Melton was the capital not only of the hunting world, but of the universe.

Lady Mabel was fascinating as well as



beautiful, and possessed of a vivacity which is best described as rattling. In society, more especially in hunting circles, she had made no small stir by reason of her beauty, her bold and exquisite horsemanship, and her witty sayings. 'Have you heard Lady Mabel's last?' was nearly as frequent a remark in the shires as 'Good-morning,' or an allusion to the weather.

She was the only daughter of a nobleman, the Duke of Fotheringay, who lived several months in the year at a place called Larchington, about twelve miles from Hurstenholme. She came of a keen sporting stock. Her father, until stopped by the gout, had been a first-class man to hounds, and now, when cut off from an active participation in the pursuit he loved so keenly, remained one of its staunchest supporters by every means in his power.

Her mother, herself the daughter of a

noble master of foxhounds, had been in her day very much what her daughter was now, and had actually met her death in the hunting-field. When alluding to that sad event, Lady Mabel always spoke of her mother's 'glorious death,' just as another person might allude to a parent who had fallen on the field of 'Waterloo' or 'Inkerman'.

Having said thus much, we will now let Lady Mabel speak for herself. She is perfectly competent to do so.

'How do you do, Mrs. Moltbury?' she exclaimed, with extended arm and a frank, winning smile on her face, as, after having descended from the high dog-cart, and traversed a corridor, she entered Mrs. Moltbury's boudoir, where that lady had been, up to the moment of interruption, reading, with pride and pleasure, the *Times*' report of a successful and much-cheered speech

Mr. Moltbury had made in the House the evening before.

Mrs. Moltbury cordially shook the proffered hand, and welcomed her visitor with considerable warmth, for Lady Mabel was a great favourite at Hursteholme.

‘Let me introduce my cousin Jack to you. I know I should trot him out as Captain Slessinger, but he’s one of those men who, after you have once tasted the sweets of his society, you can’t help calling by his Christian name in its most familiar form. And this is my little brother Billy.’

Mrs. Moltbury nodded to the last-named young gentleman, and was in the middle of a gracious bow to Captain Slessinger, when, with a laughing, easy manner, very much like his cousin’s, he put out his hand and shook Mrs. Moltbury’s warmly. He was one of those men who cannot be ceremonious.

He had a smile, a joke, or a shake of the hand for everyone. In the Guards, *quorum pars fuit*, he was undoubtedly popular. A brilliant rider, in the hunting-field as well as over a steeple-chase course; a shining light at Hurlingham, an amusing *raconteur* in the smoking-room, and blessed with a flow of spirits which neither debt nor dissipation could check for one moment, he could hardly have been anything else but popular amongst the class of men forming his associates. The hunting-field, however, was decidedly his vantage-ground. In it he was what men of his prowess therein seldom are, a babbler; his tongue was always going, and occasionally it wagged in the plainest of terms. But he was privileged, and what in another would have been the flat blasphemy of the soldier, was in him merely the choleric word of the captain. No

matter what. he said, he seldom gave offence, and no one ever said anything worse of Jack Slessinger than that he was a noisy dog. There was nothing very recondite in his nature, and what was seen and heard of him was about all there was to be seen or heard.

With ladies of his acquaintance he was a tremendous favourite, and fully bore out Addison's remark one hundred and sixty-nine years ago.\* But with no woman was he such a favourite as with his own cousin, Lady Mabel. What she saw to admire in the man is, of course, patent. He was less talkative when she formed one of the company than at other times, for, as he himself said, in the first place she talked enough for both, and in the second, there was only

\* 'When we see a fellow loud and talkative, full of insipid life and laughter, we may venture to pronounce him a female favourite.'

one voice he preferred hearing to his own, and that was hers.

‘I have brought my cousin over to see your stables, Mrs. Moltbury,’ said Lady Mabel, as soon as the various members of the family had been duly inquired after. ‘We used to fancy ourselves on that point over at Larchington, I can assure you ; but Hurstholme quite throws us into the shade. He is most anxious to see them, aren’t you, Jack ?’

‘Indeed I am, Mrs. Moltbury. I hear they are quite the best in the country.’

‘Well, Mr. Moltbury is not at home,’ said Mrs. Moltbury ; ‘but Gus is somewhere about the place, and I know he will be delighted to go round with you. I’ll ring and ask where he is. Oh, thank you, thank you, Captain Slessinger !’

‘Why didn’t you jump up and ring the bell, Billy ?’ said Lady Mabel.

‘ Because I knew Jack would if I didn’t,’ replied the boy, rather sulkily.

‘ I must explain to you, Mrs. Moltbury,’ said Lady Mabel, ‘ that you see in that boy an unwilling sacrifice to Mrs. Grundy. I am sure I don’t care what that estimable lady says about me, or I should have given up hunting and all the innocent pleasures of life long ago ; but my father is weak-minded enough to, and so Billy was put on the back seat of the dog-cart for the sake of propriety, when he wanted to be off on some mischief on his own account.’

‘ He has grown very much since I saw him last. How old is he ?’ said Mrs. Moltbury.

‘ Oh ! what I call the rumble-and-squeak age,’ replied Lady Mabel.

‘ The rumble-and-squeak age ! Dear me, Lady Mabel, may I ask for an explanation ?’

‘ Well, when he gives tongue, you know, it’s quite a toss up as each word comes whether it’s a low rumble through the soles of his boots or a high squeak out of the top of his head.’

The boy commenced an indignant retort, but his opening sentence so thoroughly exemplified his sister’s statement as to raise a general laugh, in the midst of which a portly, imposing and sedate mortal, no less a personage than the butler himself, appeared in answer to the bell.

‘ Where is Mr. Augustus, do you know, Scandringham ?’

‘ Mr. Augustus is at the stables, ma’am, I believe.’

‘ Oh ! that will do splendidly, Mrs. Moltbury,’ said Lady Mabel. ‘ We’ll go and draw him, if you won’t mind our running off.’

‘ Not in the least, my dear Lady Mabel.



But you'll come back and have some tea, won't you ?

‘ Oh ! of course we shall come back ; but the Hurstenholme stables are not to be done in a hurry, especially by such critical spectators as my cousin and myself, and I fear we shall not be able to spare much time for tea, as there is a twelve-mile drive between us and dinner. But I promise you, Mrs. Moltbury, when we are in town I'll drop in as often as you like at Grosvenor Gardens for five o'clock tea.’

‘ And scandal ! Why don't you add the inevitable concomitant, Mab ? ’ said Captain Slessinger.

‘ Because I don't subscribe to that doctrine, Jack.’

‘ Quite right, Lady Mabel,’ said Mrs. Moltbury. ‘ There is no more scandal over woman's tea than there is over man's smoke.’

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Mrs. Moltbury was not far wrong. Scandal is not, after all, the feminine monopoly it is generally supposed to be. As many reputations die in the smoking-room as in the boudoir.

‘But why shouldn’t you stay and dine here?’ said Mrs. Moltbury. ‘Mr. Moltbury is coming down by the five o’clock express from town, and he will be delighted, I am sure.’

‘Well, I don’t know any just cause or impediment why we shouldn’t, do you, Jack?’

‘None whatever,’ said Captain Slesinger; ‘and speaking for myself, I shall be delighted.’

‘What do *you* say, Billy? However, you needn’t trouble yourself to say anything. You’ve no voice in the matter, for I don’t call your growls and squeaks a voice.’

‘Oh, I say, Mabel, shut up, do!’ said the juvenile Lord William.

‘I’ll send over a mounted messenger to the duke to tell him you’re going to stay,’ said Mrs. Moltbury.

‘Oh! pray don’t take the trouble, Mrs. Moltbury,’ said Lady Mabel. ‘When I go out properly escorted, as in the present instance, it is an understood thing that he is not to bother his head about me or expect me back until he sees me.’

‘Very well, as you wish, my dear Lady Mabel. Now, don’t stay another moment on my account.’

‘Thanks, thanks! Come along, Jack. Now, Billy, look sharp. *Au revoir*, Mrs. Moltbury!’

On being left alone Mrs. Moltbury took up the *Times* and resumed the perusal of her husband’s speech. With the utmost attention she read every word, and when-

ever she came to 'hear, hear,' or 'cheers,' or 'loud cheers,' with which the report was thickly interspersed, her eyes sparkled and her fair face flushed with affectionate pride. She was reading the peroration for the third time when the orator himself appeared on the scene. His parliamentary duties had tied him closely to town of late, and it was fully a fortnight since he had seen the partner of his joys. The meeting was of a most affectionate nature.

'Oh, Geoffrey, what a splendid speech you made last night! And how you were cheered! I do so wish I had been there!'

'Have you read it then, Julia, my love?'

'Yes, every word of it; and know it almost by heart.'

Mr. Moltbury gave his wife a second kiss.

'Lady Mabel, her young brother, and

her cousin—a Captain Slessinger—are here, Geoffrey dear. They are at present at the stables.’

‘That’s all right,’ said Mr. Moltbury ;  
‘and where’s Gus?’

‘He’s at the stables with them. They are going to stay and dine here.’

‘Delighted to hear it. I like and admire Lady Mabel beyond measure. Some people might, and a great many do, call her fast. I don’t. Wonderful exuberance of spirits—that’s all. In my opinion, she is as charming as she is beautiful. I tell you what, Julia, I rather think Master Gus is what young ladies term decidedly smitten in that quarter—eh ! what do you think, my love ? Ladies have sharper eyes for that sort of thing than men ; haven’t you read Gus’s secret ?’

‘Yes, I have. I believe that he’s over head and ears in love with her.’

‘ Well, well,” said Mr. Moltbury, pleasantly, ‘ this bright May-time is the season for wooing—

“ In the spring a young man’s fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love,” ’

and I should recommend Gus to make hay while the sun shines. Talking of hay, my dear Julia, let us join the party at the stables.’

Mrs. Moltbury was nothing loth, and, as the Hurstenholme stables are worth a visit, let us accompany our friends thither. There will be nothing to shock the most refined nature. The Augean stables, still moist with the cleansing wave of the Alpheus, could not have been freer from impurities. There was not a sign to be seen of the grosser accessories of a stable. There were no slovenly, unkempt, unbraced strappers wheeling barrows full of

reeking impurity, or pursuing their grooming operations with an ostentatious hissing, to be interrupted every now and again by a coarse-toned 'Coom oop,' or 'Coom over, then.' There were plenty of grooms about, but they were all neat, natty little fellows in high rounded collars and immaculate white chokers, and the numerous helpers were clean, quiet-looking men, with a proper sense of the advantages in comfort as well as in appearance to be derived from the use of braces and clean linen.

In his stable arrangements Mr. Molt-bury did not quite go to the lengths of Caligula, but I do not doubt for a moment that his horses enjoyed considerably more comfort and fared better than did that much-pampered animal Incitatus, with his marble stall, ivory manger, and golden oats. There was certainly some marble to be found on the premises, and this in a

magnificent piece of carving over the main entrance, representing the battle between the Centaurs and the Lapithæ, as described by Ovid. Mr. Moltbury himself had chosen the subject, and the work had been executed in Italy, whence it had been brought piecemeal and set up at Hurstenholme.

The stables themselves were lofty buildings, divided by oak and iron into roomy snuggeries where each horse, knee-deep in the whitest wheat-straw, could rest, and stretch, and even exercise himself. Moreover, if inclined for a little society—and all horses are fond of that—he could enjoy through the bars of his box a little *tête-à-tête* companionship with his next-door neighbour on either side without any fear of a serious disturbance if they chanced to disagree on any point. These loosest of loose boxes opened to a broad tessellated



corridor, along which the visitors moved under the guidance of the stud-groom—I am almost inclined to call him the Master of the Horse—accompanied by a couple of neat-looking helpers, ready at the great man's nod to strip the clothing from the shining beauties.

No less than a dozen hunters gladdened the eyes of Lady Mabel and her cousin, Captain Jack Slessinger. Most of them were known to her by sight, having been hunted by Augustus from Melton during the latter part of the season, and Lady Mabel was one of those very few who, when she had once taken stock of a horse, knew him again the next time she saw him. There was not a weed in the stable. All fit to carry fourteen stone over the best and biggest of countries. Then came a brace of galloping hacks, so perfect in pace and condition that they could canter

their fifteen miles within the hour without disturbing the digestion of their owner's late breakfast, or turning a hair themselves.

The inspection of these last brought that part of the show to a conclusion, and they were now handed over to the leadership of the cobby pursehead of the carriage department. This official apologised for the absence of Mrs. Moltbury's pair of big carriage horses and her phaeton ponies, which, with the park hacks and a few others, had that very morning been despatched to town for duty during the season. Nevertheless there remained enough to make a fine show.

First in the order of precedence were four black-browns, composing the team with which Augustus was to witch the London world with noble coachmanship—with a spare one to take his turn on emergency as wheeler or leader. No better

match would be turned out that year by the four-in-hand and coaching-clubs. There was no sloping from wheel to lead. Had they all been cast in one mould there could not have been stricter uniformity in size. Next in order was a showy stepping T-cart horse, also the property of Augustus; and so on, down to the superannuated old hunter, who worked out a useful and comfortable old age as dog-cart and light luggage horse.

‘Lady Mabel,’ said Augustus, seizing the opportunity of a little private talk as they were crossing the yard, which was about as big as an ordinary barrack-square, ‘there are my two chargers yet that you haven’t seen.’

‘Oh, why didn’t we do them with the others?’ said Lady Mabel, stopping short; ‘you need not have been afraid of surfeiting me, for I am never tired of looking at

horses, especially such horses as the Hurstenholme lot.'

'Well, they stand over there by themselves. We'll go and see them by *ourselves*, if you don't mind.'

'No, of course I don't. I know you're not vicious. Come along.'

'I was going to write to you all yesterday, but—but——'

'But you couldn't find your dictionary; was that it?'

'No, no! hang it, no!' said Augustus, laughing heartily. 'You're always chaffing my head off, Lady Mabel. But I don't mind it from you. On the contrary, I like it. For instance, I felt rather pleased than otherwise with the name I went by at Melton this season, simply because I knew you had given it to me, and I daresay I should have cut up rough if anybody else had christened me.'

‘What, do you mean the *sobriquet* “Compasses?” she asked, looking up with a quizzical expression.

‘Yes.’

‘Well, I believe I *was* your godmamma there.’

‘Yes, I know you were, and the name stuck to me all the time I was in the shires; and what’s more, it will stick to me for the rest of my days.’

‘I’m very sorry.’

‘I’m not.’

‘Why, do you like being called names?’

‘Yes, by you. I’d sooner be called a fool by you than a genius by another person, any day.’

• A ringing burst of laughter greeted this gallant speech.

‘I daresay, too, the nickname of “Compasses” is appropriate enough,’ said Augustus, looking with a fond eye and a

kind smile on the laughing girl by his side. 'I know I haven't got the prettiest seat in the world—not like Jack Slessinger there, for instance. I am too long in the leg, and somehow I don't get a clip of my saddle unless I ride long and with my legs pretty straight out; and so, altogether, I've not the slightest doubt I fully deserve the epithet, which isn't always the case with people who are called names. There! Here we are. Now *that's* my first charger. What do you think of him?'

A magnificent-looking animal, coal-black, and standing almost seventeen hands, here claimed Lady Mabel's attention, and drew from her a hearty tribute of praise.

'And what was it you were going to write to me about him?' she asked.

'Well, I was going to ask you, as you were so good at conferring appropriate

names, whether you would christen him for me ?

‘ Well, let’s see. I should think—— I’ve got it ! Call him Capricornus.’

‘ Capricornus ? Yes, that sounds uncommonly well. But where’s the particular application of it ?’

‘ Why, Capricornus—the goat, you know.’

‘ Well, what of that ?’ said Augustus, considerably mystified.

‘ Why, how dense you are ! You’ll be quite complete, the two of you——“ the Goat and Compasses !” ’\*

\* A well-known sign for a country inn, I beg to inform the fair reader, who probably has not so extensive an acquaintance with country inns as that which the contingencies of fox-hunting had afforded Lady Mabel Slessinger. I daresay ninety-nine per cent. of my readers know the origin of this strange sign, but for the sake of the hundredth I add that it is a curious relic of that period in our history when religion was probably more busy on the lips than in the heart ; when holy names were debased by mean and lowly application ; when soldiers impiously arrogated

‘Ha, ha, ha!’ laughed Augustus. ‘Oh, ’pon my honour that’s quite too clippingly good, even for you, Lady Mabel. By George! it’s the richest thing I ever heard. Ha, ha, ha! Capricornus he shall be from this moment. Ha, ha, ha!’

Lady Mabel looked at him half admiringly.

‘I *do* like a man who can stand chaff,’ she said, laying her hand on the sleeve of his coat.

Suddenly carried away by the magic of that touch and her beauty, Augustus seized the dainty little fingers, glittering with jewels, and stooping down tried to raise them to his lips.

‘Hold up!’ exclaimed Lady Mabel, in the

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to themselves such styles and titles as ‘Sergeant Hew-Agag-in-pieces-before-the-Lord,’ or ‘Captain Hurl-down-the-mighty-from-their-seats.’ In other words, ‘The Goat and Compasses’ is a corruption of the old Puritan sign, ‘God encompasses us.’



tone of voice she might have used to a stumbling horse, at the same time administering a ringing box on her admirer's right ear with her disengaged hand, which brought him up in the twinkling of an eye to an attitude of gaping astonishment.

‘Oh, I say!’ was his not very ready remark.

‘Excuse my having used my left hand,’ said Lady Mabel, with a sweet smile.

‘Don’t mention it, pray,’ said Augustus.

‘I could have done it so much better with my right. Right is might, you know,’ said Lady Mabel, gaily.

‘You did it quite well enough, thank you,’ replied Augustus, rubbing his ear and smiling.

‘Come along, then. Let’s get out of this, or they’ll think we’ve been spooning.



### CHAPTER III.

WITH HELMET AND PLUME.

**T**HE dinner at Hurstenholme that evening was a merry one. Mr. Moltbury kept the fun going with barely a moment's cessation. He could always adapt himself to the idiosyncrasies of his guests. Were they archæological—and the Archæological Society had met more than once at Hurstenholme, and been sumptuously regaled, mentally as well as gastronomically—he was a very Dryasdust. Were they military, his conver-

sation was 'horribly stuffed' with epithets of war.' Were they political, he was a walking Hansard. In short, he could be all things to all men. Addison used to say there was no such thing as real conversation but between two people. Mr. Moltbury held a contrary opinion. He liked a gallery. In the present instance, to suit the volatile disposition of his principal guest, he, so to speak, threw all the ballast of his nature overboard and allowed himself to toss about with a cork-like buoyancy whithersoever the light current of his fancy took him. He joked and laughed as if motley were his only wear, and he invoked that 'goddess, fair and free, in heaven yclep'd Euphrosyne'—

'Haste thee, Nymph, and bring with thee  
Jest and youthful jollity,  
Quips and cranks and wanton wiles,  
Nods and becks and wreath'd smiles.'

In brief and prose, Mr. Moltbury was this evening, as Lady Mabel herself would have said, 'in rare fettle.'

'And so you are a great advocate for travel, Mr. Moltbury?' said Lady Mabel, after having listened to a humorous account from Mr. Moltbury of what may be termed his counter-apotheosis by the simple and superstitious folk of Mianoshta.

'Yes, certainly, my dear Lady Mabel. Nothing like travel; and even if we cannot travel ourselves, we may catch through the medium of books some of the reflected experiences and pleasures of those who do. Mr. Jorrocks, who I daresay is a favourite hero of yours, observes that fox-hunting affords all the excitement of war, with only twenty-five per cent. of its danger. Now travellers' tales afford the reader a good deal of the excitement with no percentage whatsoever of the danger. For

instance, I have never practically indulged in the dangers and delights of Arctic Exploration, and yet what comfort and pleasure that North Pole has sometimes afforded me! On a piping-hot summer's day, what can be more deliciously cooling than the perusal of an Arctic voyager's log?—'January 24th. Thermometer 30° below zero. Between four and five bells of the afternoon watch the captain of the main-top carelessly attempted to remove an icicle depending from his nose. Icicle came off—nose with it. January 25th. Thermometer 50° below zero. Buried the captain of the main-top, who had touchingly remarked that he would follow his nose. Sad scene. Captain of the main-top, the darling of the crew. Nothing heard but the rattle of the frozen tears as they fell in a hail-like shower on the palæocrystic ice. January 26th.

Thermometer • burst. Provisions failed. With intellects sharpened by the pangs of hunger, make the truly wonderful Arctic discovery that a roasted icicle—thoroughly roasted, that is to say—is not a bad thing if taken in moderation, and if flanked by a dish of boiled snowflakes is capable of affording a very digestible meal;’ and so on. Now what can be nicer reading than a log like this on a hot day? It is as refreshing as sitting in a refrigerator, and a certain preventive of heat-apoplexy.’

The foregoing ‘quip,’ or ‘crank,’ or ‘wanton wile’—I am not sure which Euphrosyne herself would have called it—was received with ringing peals of laughter from the merry Lady Mabel. All through the dinner Mr. Moltbury trifled in this light vein, and with his flashes of merriment set the table on a continued roar.

The reader may have noticed the absence

of Mrs. Moltbury's father from the festive board, and in justice to Mr. and Mrs. Moltbury, against whom the suspicion may be entertained that they kept their aged relative out of the way when company were present, I beg to state that it was of his own free will that the simple-minded old gentleman dined in his own rooms. The late hour, the endless courses, the attentions of the numerous servants, and the conversation on social subjects strange and unintelligible to him, oppressed him, and he had for years preferred having a simple meal in the evening, which, by the way, was frequently shared by Violet.

Mr. and Mrs. Moltbury were not averse from this course, and the old man was by no means pressed to depart from it. In truth, he was hardly a feather in their social cap. The confusion of his tongue

with regard to that most ill-used letter in the whole of the English alphabet was an infirmity which it were better not to parade before the world ; and then—alas, that I should have to make such a statement concerning ‘ the old courtier ! ’—his knife at meals (if the gravy was very good) was as familiar in his mouth as household words.

‘ By the way, Mr. Moltbury,’ said Lady Mabel, as the gentlemen rejoined the ladies in the drawing-room after dinner, ‘ I thought you destined your son for a political career.’

‘ Well, I know of no reason, my dear Lady Mabel, why you should not continue to think so.’

‘ But you’ve made a Life-guardsman of him.’

‘ Well, Lady Mabel, was not William Pitt a member of the household cavalry at



twenty, and Prime Minister of England at twenty-five ?

‘ Oh, I see ; history is going to repeat itself. That will be very nice. In the meantime, though, I should like to see how you look in the military character, Mr. Augustus Moltbury. Can’t you go and dress yourself up in your uniform for our inspection ?’

‘ That’s right, Lady Mabel,’ said Violet. ‘ I’ve begged him over and over again to put it on for us, but he wouldn’t.’

‘ And I have also added my entreaties, and likewise in vain,’ said Mrs. Moltbury.

‘ You couldn’t have begged hard enough,’ said Lady Mabel. ‘ He can’t withstand an impassioned appeal, I’m sure.’

And here, to the amazement as well as astonishment of the circle, the pretty mad-cap sunk on one knee at Augustus’ feet, and with clasped hands and upturned im-

ploring eyes, delivered herself of the following, in mock-heroic tones :

‘Stalwart and gallant defender of her most gracious Majesty’s precious existence, will you deign to grant the humble prayer of three weak women that you should forthwith array yourself in the gorgeous trappings of your profession, and so gladden their senses with the dazzling display of your resplendent magnificence ?’

‘By George, Lady Mabel,’ said Augustus, looking down, his eyes kindling with an admiration he could not conceal—‘By George, Lady Mabel, I’d do anything in this world for you !’

‘Ha, ha, ha ! very good ! Bravo Gus, my boy ! Bravo ! You were quite equal to the occasion,’ came from Mr. Moltbury, as Augustus hurried off to grant the maiden’s prayer. ‘Ha, ha, ha ! Capital, Lady Mabel ! You stooped to conquer.

He could not withstand the heavenly rhetoric of those upturned eyes.'

Assisted by his valet, Augustus proceeded to put himself in battle array, after the manner of a modern Sardana-palus :

'Give me the cuirass—so ; my baldric, now  
My sword : I had forgot the helm, where is it ?'

And we may be pretty certain that his sentiments were similar to those of Assyria's last king as he surveyed himself in the mirror :

'This cuirass fits me well, the baldric better.  
Methinks I seem passing well in these toys.'

The appearance of Augustus *en grande tenue* was of course hailed with enthusiasm. Tall enough to have served in the ranks of his regiment, and with a fair share of good looks, he awakened no small amount of admiration in the three female breasts.

‘Suppose him in a handsome uniform ;  
A scarlet coat, blue facings, a long plume.  
Suppose him sword by side and helm in hand,  
Made up by youth, fame, and an army tailor—  
That great enchanter, at whose rod’s command  
Beauty springs forth and Nature’s self turns paler.’

‘There now,’ said Lady Mabel, after having expressed her approval of the inspection in the most flattering terms ;  
‘ Huntersholme, with all its magnificence, is not likely to produce anything more magnificent this evening, so we had better take our departure while the glorious vision is still fresh in our minds. Would you kindly order our cart to be got ready, Mr. Moltbury ?’

The late hour—the ladies had not risen from the dinner-table until past ten o’clock—and the long drive before his guests being considered, Mr. Moltbury abstained from pressing them to stay longer, and in a quarter of an hour the high dog-cart

was rattling and flashing over the turnpike road towards Larchington.

‘Really Augustus looked uncommonly well in his regimentals, did he not, my dear Julia?’ observed Mr. Moltbury, some time after the departure of his guests, on finding himself alone with his wife.

Augustus, after having exchanged his uniform for a smoking suit, was in the smoking-room, and Violet was sitting by the bedside of her grandfather reading a chapter from the Bible to him.

‘Uncommonly well! I think he looked strikingly handsome,’ said Mrs. Moltbury.

‘Well, well, the dress certainly became him wonderfully, and showed him off to the greatest advantage,’ said Mr. Moltbury, with parental pride beaming from every feature.

‘I think—in fact I am sure he made

quite an impression on Lady Mabel with his gleaming cuirass and waving plume.'

'Yes, yes; it is wonderful how that sort of thing goes down with women,' said Mr. Moltbury. 'It was nothing but a cavalier's plume that undid the Lady of Shallott. Steadily she wove at her magic web, uninterrupted by the shadows of the world which fell on her mirror. The village churls, the market girls, like so many little Red Riding Hoods; an abbot on an ambling pad, a curly shepherd lad, as the poet calls him—whether it was his hair or his legs that were curly, it is hard to gather; if the latter, it is as delicate a way of describing knock-knees as I know of—a long-haired, crimson-clad page, nocturnal funerals with lights and music, passed on to Camelot without distracting her attention from her work. Even the reflection on her mirror of two young people enjoying their honey-

moon could not tempt her from her task, though certainly the tantalising spectacle elicited from her the testy remark that she had had enough of shadows. Like the rest, however, the two young lovers passed on, without arresting for one single instant the progress of the magic web. But when Sir Launcelot's helmet-feather hove in sight it was all up with her :

‘ “She left the web, she left the loom,  
She made three paces thro’ the room,  
She saw the water-lily bloom,  
She saw the helmet and the plume.”

By which course, apparently innocent enough in itself, she drew down upon her devoted head the curse, which was, that she should steal a boat—aggravating the offence by writing her name on the stolen property—on which to float down the river and die. And all this merely because she saw the helmet and the plume of a man

who sang "Tirra lirra," which, I suppose, is the æsthetico-poetic for "Tooral-looral!" It is gratifying, however, to feel that she died tolerably happy, for she sang up to the last moment. Whether or not she too sang "Tirra, lirra" is not mentioned. Perhaps, for a change, she chanted "Falla lilla," which probably is to "Whack-falladity" what "Tirra lirra" is to "Tooral-looral."

'Geoffrey, I've no patience with you,' said Mrs. Moltbury, who, during the delivery of the above, had been freely interspersing it with ejaculations of disapproval. 'I think it beautiful, lovely. Dear me, I wish I could recollect at this moment the lines which would apply so crushingly to you and your flippant treatment of such a tender and beautiful subject—something about not annoying with your feeble wit the poet's soul, in which you are altogether out of your depth.'



‘ I think I can quote the lines for you, my dear. Are not these the ones :

“ Vex not the poet’s mind  
With your shallow wit :  
Vex not thou the poet’s mind ;  
Thou canst not fathom it.”

Is that what you meant, my love ?

‘ Yes, it is. And now, having provided yourself with a cap which fits you so well, I hope you will put it on and wear it.’

‘ But, my dear, I deny that, because you cannot fathom the meaning of a poet, that his mind is necessarily deeper than yours. If I were to shoot at random, and then point to the exact spot my bullet had struck and challenge a person to hit that self-same spot, surely, if he failed to do so, I should not be right in considering myself a better shot than he, though I had hit a mark which he had missed. The mind of the poet who deals in fancies and ingenious

conceits and pretty similes, is perpetually shooting at random, and if we cannot at once follow his trajectory and see what he is aiming at, surely we are not to conclude that we are less gifted than he ?

‘Really, Geoffrey, I sometimes think that you have more than your share of that manly attribute—conceit. Simply because a certain style of poetry is not yours, you at once not only condemn, but ridicule it. I know exactly the pompous, inflated style you would adopt if you wrote poetry—nothing simple and tender about it. If you were to take your Muse out to pick daisies, Geoffrey, you would dress her up as if she were going to a queen’s drawing-room.’ She would be all brocade, and no dimity.’

‘But I should not take my Muse out to pick daisies, my love. That would indeed be invoking the services of a goddess when

those of a very ordinary 'mortal' would suffice—

“Nec deus intersit, nisi dignus vindice nodus  
Inciderit.”

‘There you are, Geoffrey—that tiresome Horace again, I suppose. I don’t believe you could possibly keep *him* out of your compositions. If you *were* to write a poem, and *were* to introduce such a character in it as a washerwoman, I am convinced you would make her spout Horace.’

‘No, my dear. I should hold the mirror up to nature. If I were to make her spout anything, it would be her flat-irons or some article of wearing apparel.’

‘That’s coarse, Geoffrey — dreadfully coarse and low.’

‘Oh ! then I *am* capable of another style besides the “pompous and inflated” ?’

‘Well, come, Geoffrey, what *is* your style, according to your own exposition of it ?’

‘ Well, I confess that I most admire the heroic style in which Homer has taught the poets of all ages how to describe great achievements and adventures, though, of course, I can appreciate others. It is only natural that our modern poets should not shine as their predecessors did in this field. In ancient days the poets were warriors as well as bards ; they won their laurels by blood as well as ink ; and a poet who has himself performed doughty deeds, can celebrate those of others better than one who has not. *Æschylus* fought splendidly in the two most important battles by sea and land ever gained by his country—*Marathon* and *Salamis*. *Socrates* performed at *Potidæa* a devoted act of gallantry in saving the lives of his comrades, *Xenophon* and *Alcibiades*, which, had he lived in the present day and been an Englishman, would have gained for him the distinction

of the Victoria Cross. And Xenophon himself derives a double glory from the Retreat of the Immortal Ten Thousand.'

'The Upper Ten Thousand of the period, I suppose?' interpolated Mrs. Moltbury, scornfully.

'He not only conducted it as a skilful and gallant general, but also nobly commemorated it as a poet,' continued Mr. Moltbury, not heeding the interruption.

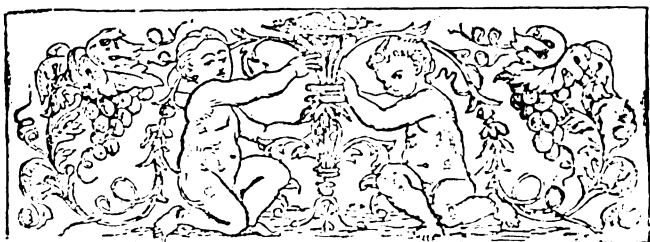
'And that is your style, Geoffrey, is it?'

'It is, my dear; and I see no reason to be ashamed of it.'

'Oh yes, Mr. Jingle's style. A 'Bang-the-field-piece-Twang-the-lyre' sort of arrangement.'

'Julia, you betray what Southey calls "the glorious assurance of impenetrable ignorance." I shall go and smoke a cigar with Augustus.'

‘Do you know, Julia is developing an abominable turn for repartee, which is—is, to say the least of it, somewhat disconcerting at times,’ soliloquised Mr. Moltbury, as he walked along a corridor on the way to the smoking-room.



## CHAPTER IV.

### LOVE'S WOUND.

**T**HE London season was far advanced, and, amongst other items of fashionable intelligence recorded by the society journals, appeared the following :

‘ Wednesday, July 21st, Mrs. Moltbury’s third and last evening party at Grosvenor Gardens.’

On this identical Wednesday, at about six o’clock p.m., a young man strolled up and down the platform on the arrival side

of the North-Western Railway Station. His bearing was soldier-like without swagger ; his dress fashionable, but not foppish ; and as he was tall of stature, and well-featured, he was a man of mark in the heterogeneous crowd around. He bore a strong resemblance to Reggy Mauleverer, which was accountable to the relationship existing between the two, the young man under present notice being no other than Reggy Mauleverer's first cousin, the Earl of Carristhorpe, who was now waiting to welcome his kinsman after his long exile from home.

Between Lord Carristhorpe and his cousin the strongest affection had existed from early boyhood. Since they had last met changes drawing the bonds still tighter had befallen them. Each had lost a father in the other's uncle, and each had been a loving nephew as well as a loving son. The



tie was thus more fraternal than cousinly. Though separated for many years, there had been no drifting asunder; a regular correspondence had kept alive their interest in and affection for each other.

Like his cousin, Lord Carristhorpe was a soldier, and held a captain's commission in the regiment of household cavalry which Augustus Moltbury had just joined. Before donning the helmet and cuirass of a Lifeguardsman, he had worn the cap and gown of a Cambridge undergraduate. He had reversed the Roman motto, *Cedant arma togæ*. You might thus, in Iago's phraseology, relish him in the scholar as well as in the soldier.

It certainly does not follow that every man who has been to a university is a scholar. But even if he is not the rose, he has lived with her, and, unless hopelessly dense, must have, in spite of himself,

picked up a little of the *genius loci*. Lord Carristhorpe had done more than this. He had taken his master's degree with honour, and, besides acquiring a fair amount of bookish lore, had evinced the practical turn of his mind by taking a high degree in 'applied sciences,' which means anything, from picking a lock to picking up the pieces of an assistant you have blown to atoms in the course of an interesting experiment. In chemistry this striking effect is generally produced by means of a vessel called a retort, which, under the circumstances, is not likely to be confounded by the victim with Touchstone's 'retort courteous.' Besides being accomplished and good-humoured, Lord Carristhorpe was rich, and his popularity may be easily conceived. He was sought after not only by the papas and mammas, but by the young ladies themselves,

‘ Whose hearts were set  
Less on a convent than a coronet.’

As a rule, the modern British father does not altogether agree with Themistocles, the doughty Athenian, who said he would rather marry his daughter to a man without an estate than to an estate without a man. In Lord Carristhorpe’s case, however, there was the man as well as the estate.

‘ Is the Liverpool express signalled yet ?’ asked his lordship, as a turn in his walk brought him near the platform superintendent.

It must be explained that Reggy Mauleverer had come home from Japan *via* San Francisco and New York.

‘ Yes, sir ; she won’t be many minutes now, sir,’ was the reply, in the usual words.

When did anyone ever ask after an over-

due train without being told that she would not be many minutes now.

Precisely at the expiration of the exactly prescribed period, the Liverpool express glided alongside the platform, and in a few moments more the two young men were heartily shaking each other by the hand.

It is on such occasions as this that, like Nelson, I am thankful I am a Briton, and have not to slobber and be slobbered over, after the fashion of our Continental brethren.

‘Welcome, ten thousand welcomes, Reggy, old boy,’ said Carristhorpe.

‘Thanks, ten thousand thanks, old fellow.’

For several moments the two young men stood hand in hand, and gazing, with slightly glistening eyes, into each other’s beaming faces. It was impossible to tell

hardly dared to hope so much as that he should see her on this very first day of his return. His heart beat with joy, but, afraid to trust himself any more with the Moltbury topic, he diverted the conversation, and kept it going on other subjects for the remainder of the drive.

After a long absence from home a man never so fully realises the pleasant fact that he is once more in the old country, as when he sits down to his first dinner. It is the material and pleasing consummation of his return. Even if he be shattered in health, his spirits will rise as he takes his seat at the board; he will forget his wretched liver as he unfurls his napkin with a triumphant air; and the colour will flicker into his yellow cheeks with his first glass of sherry. But if, as in Mauleverer's case, there be youth and health and the dearest friend opposite, the first dinner

after a long exile from home is a thing not only to be enjoyed at the time, but afterwards to be tenderly twined in 'memory's mystic band.' And if, as also in Maul-everer's case, the dinner is to be followed by the gratification of the heart's dearest longing, *à fortiori* is the meal a joyous and delightful one.

'I did not ask anyone to meet you, Reggy,' said Carristhorpe, as he and his cousin took their seats at the table. 'I thought we should enjoy ourselves best alone.'

'Quite right. I think we can be quite interesting enough to each other without assistance from others,' acquiesced Maul-everer.

They certainly did not require any conversational assistance. The reminiscences of old times when they had been boys together, and the relations of mutual adven-

tures and doings, while apart, afforded abundant material for table-talk. It was only afterwards, however, while enjoying their cigars outside on the balcony that their conversation turned on points of interest to our readers.

‘Now I’m going to let you do most of the talking,’ said Mauleverer, as, with his feet resting on the coping of the balcony, he leaned back in his comfortable chair, and blew a peaceful cloud. ‘What with your congenial companionship, your Pommery Brut, and the delicious sense of being once more in old England; my heart is too full to speak, at least to speak much. I shall sit here calmly chuckling internally, like old Mr. Weller. By the way, just to start you, how is it you have seen so much of the Moltburys?’

‘Well, not to know old Moltbury argues one’s self unknown, and I found them all so

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sweet upon you, Reggy, that that in itself was a bond of union between us. Then young Moltbury joined us about six weeks ago, and is in my troop. That was another connecting link.'

'What sort of a fellow do you find Gus Moltbury?'

'Not at all bad in his way. I don't say his way is a strikingly brilliant one, or as luminous as the milky way in the heavens, but he gets on well enough with us. But between ourselves, if I were to hint a fault, he is a little more fond of liquor than a man with his weak head should be. He won't come up to his father's expectations by a long way, even if they were considerably lower than they are. Every man has his weak point, and this is old Moltbury's, and about the only one too. He's what I call a strong man on every other point. I fancy it was owing to this overweening



fondness of and belief in his son that his trip all round the world was undertaken. What a lot of claptrap is talked nowadays about travel expanding the mind ! People have a way of talking as if travel and mental expansion were as much cause and effect as fire and smoke.'

'Yes, on that principle,' chimed in Mau-leverer, 'sailors and Queen's messengers and bagmen should be the largest-minded men going. I don't say they aren't. I merely say, are they?'

'And echo answers, are they? We are not like two foxes without tails sneering at those who have. We have both travelled. And, after all's said and done, I think the advantages of travel lie not so much in what we gain as in what we lose—a few of our narrow, insular prejudices. That wonderful expanding of the mind we hear so much about all depends on the individual.

The man who does not pick up much at home, won't pick up much more abroad. A person who has never been in a certain country, may know a great deal more of that country than another person who has lived the greater part of his life there. Do you mean to say that a permanent under-secretary of state for India does not know more of India than many an old soldier who has spent all his service there? Or that many a secretary for the colonies, who has never been out of Europe, does not know more of the world than many mariners who have sailed all round it?

‘ Well, and so you don't think that travel has done much for Gus Moltbury, eh ?’

‘ No ; I think the last few months of home have done considerably more,’ was the reply, in a very significant tone.

‘ In what way do you mean ?’

‘ Why, in that space of time he has con-

trived to get just about as much in love as any poor weak mortal could.'

'Gus Moltbury in love! Well, I liked Gus very well indeed, but still I could not be as blind to his little shortcomings as I daresay I am to my own, and I thought him a modern Narcissus too much in love with his own appearance to give Master Cupid a chance of getting a shot at him. And who is the tempting siren who has weaned his young and ardent affection from dress and jewellery?'

'Lady Mabel Slessinger. You are certain to see her there to-night.'

'Poor Gus! Not a Lady Clare Vere de Vere, I hope. What sort of a girl is she?'

'Lovely enough to turn a stronger and an older head than Gus Moltbury's; but I can't say *I* admire her altogether. She is a sort of extra fast Di Vernon, and I look upon the present fastness of our women

and girls as one of the curses of the age. However, that in no way seems to detract from her powers of fascination. On the contrary, she has more admirers at her feet than any woman in London.'

'How does poor Gus get on with the ruck? Is he a favourite?'

'Well, I shouldn't call him first favourite. That post I should assign to her cousin, Jack Slessington, of the Grenadiers. However, Gus Moltbury's millions may turn the scale in his favour. I believe old Moltbury would come down to any extent in the way of settlements, and I daresay Mammon will beat Cupid off *that* field. We who have lived in the world are not dependent on a Byron to know—though each of us may not be able to put it so poetically—that

' "Maidens, like moths, are ever caught by glare,  
And Mammon wins his way where seraphs might  
despair."

Not that Jack Slessinger's a seraph. Far from it. However, all I can say is, I would sooner she were Moltbury's wife than mine. I hate your fast women, Reggy; and if they keep up the pace I don't believe in their running straight to the end of the race. Jack Slessinger is a tremendous favourite with that sort, and I think his success with others has not a little to do with his fair and fast cousin's *penchant* for him. It is not so much winning the man as cutting out the women that is sweet to most females. He is the most popular man in London with that lot. I like him well enough just as a rattling cheery sort of an acquaintance, but I don't see much to esteem in him. He's a reckless, hard-riding, hard-flirting, good-looking sort of a fellow, with any amount of cheek. Nothing goes down with women—*most* women—like cheek, Reggy. So if you want to be a favourite

with your fair country-women, cultivate that article, my boy.'

'No, thank you, old fellow. I don't think it would be a quality much admired by anyone I should care for,' said Mau-leverer, through whose mind, all the time he had been listening to his cousin's remarks, a sweet undercurrent had flowed with the reflection that Violet was as different from these as gold from brass.

'A very striking instance of how what is called cheek goes down with women is given by Shakespeare,' resumed Carristhorpe, whom the society of his old boyfriend and cousin, together, perhaps, with that Pommery Brut, had warmed into a loquacity just a little beyond his nature. 'So I suppose that piece of bad taste on the part of the sex is not of recent growth. The instance I allude to occurs in "Twelfth Night." Do you recollect it, Reggy?'

‘No, I can’t say I do. The fact is, as a rule, there is nothing specially suggestive in the titles of those of Shakespeare’s plays which are not named after the principal character or characters ; and with all my admiration for him, and all my gratitude to him for the many hours I have spent pleasantly and profitably over his plays, I must say I think he is not so happy on his title-pages as on the others. “Twelfth Night” does not hinge—in fact has got nothing to do with a twelfth night. “All’s Well that Ends Well” would fit nine out of ten comedies that ever were written. “Much Ado about Nothing” is more a title for a farce than a play in which there is plenty of pathos and heart-breaking. “A Winter’s Tale” would not lose one single point by being told at any other season. It is no more a tale of winter than it is of summer, autumn, or spring. Just mention one or two of the principal characters of

one of the plays, and I'm all there at once, and feel inclined to sing "Should auld acquaintance be forgot?"'

'Well, the characters in "Twelfth Night" I allude to are the Countess Olivia and Violet. For years has the countess been wooed by the Duke Orsino with sighs and tears, but all to no avail. In comes a glib-tongued cheeky young fellow (as *she* thinks) who chaffs her head off, and in five minutes she falls desperately in love with him.\*

\* It is right to add that a very eminent Shakespearian commentator—Schlegel—in a critical opinion on this play, regards Lord Carristhorpe's 'glib-tongued, cheeky young fellow' as a 'modest and insinuating messenger.' Here is a difference of opinion with a vengeance. 'Modesty' and 'cheek' are as diametrically opposed as bravery and cowardice. The Countess Olivia's own remarks to the young page certainly bear out his lordship's view rather than the commentator's. The third question she puts to him is, 'Are you a comedian?' Now that is hardly the interrogation that would be suggested by a *modest* demeanour. Modesty may, and no doubt occasionally does, exist in a comedian, but it is certainly not the dis-



The fact is, Dryden was pretty right when he wrote—

“The thoughtless sex is caught by outward form,  
And empty noise, and loves itself in man.”

Now, it's the reverse with a man. He likes a woman to be, above all things, womanly. He certainly does not like himself in woman. Physical—I don't say moral: *there* I believe women are men's superiors—physical cowardice, which he abhors in his own sex, is to him anything

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tinguishing mark, the characteristic trait of the profession. (I should imagine that Mr. Toole, who may be taken as a representative comedian, has not found bashfulness a stumbling-block in the way of that success he has so brilliantly achieved.) A few moments afterwards she says to him: ‘I heard you were saucy at my gates . . . If you be not mad, ‘begone . . . ’tis not that time of moon with me to make one in so skipping a dialogue.’ Surely that is not a speech modesty would draw down upon itself. However, let the reader peruse the passage (latter half of sc. v., act 1), and judge which of the two is right on this little point—Lord Carristhorpe or Herr von Schlegel.

but a repulsive quality in the other. Take, for instance, that quarrel between Helena and Hermia in "Midsummer-Night's Dream." Any man reading that description feels his sympathy, and something stronger, irresistibly drawn to Helena by reason of her cowardice—

“I pray you, though you mock me, gentlemen,  
Let her not hurt me. . . .  
I am a right maid for my cowardice;  
Let her not strike me.”

No manly fellow could read that scene without admiring Helena's cowardice more than Hermia's pluck. No, none of your Joans of Arc and Maids of Saragossa for me. There are enough men and to spare for the fighting business. I admire Queen Eleanour, the ministering angel, more than Queen Boadicea, the destroying one. What are you laughing at, Reggy, you Japanese infidel? You're in such a

jubilant condition of mind at finding yourself once more in old England that you can't look serious for two moments together.'

'I am laughing, old boy, at the earnest way you have thrown yourself into a matter which I had not the slightest idea you cared twopence about. And you have been speaking, too, for the last few minutes so like a book, and your quotations coming so pat, that I do believe you must have thoroughly thought the subject out.'

'So I have. I have been thinking a good deal lately on that point. It used not to trouble my head a short time ago. By George! Reggy, if I were to fall in love with some of the women I know I should feel that it was unnatural; they are so like men. However, I know one exception—one bright little exception.'

'So do I,' thought Mauleverer, and his

heart leaped with joy to think that in an hour or two he should once more see his gentle, loving, winsome little Violet.

‘ I say, Reggy, old man, I am thinking seriously of matrimony, and whom do you think I am going to ask to marry me ?’

‘ Who ?’

‘ Miss Moltbury.’

Poor Reggy Mauleverer !

‘ He smarteth most that hides his smart  
And sues for no compassion.’

‘ Has she given you any encouragement then ?’ he asked, as if this had been the first time he had ever heard the name.

‘ Yes.’



## CHAPTER V.

### MAMMON WINS.

‘**W**H, Mauleverer, welcome ! Then here’s a hand, my trusty friend, and gie us a hand o’ thine. We twa will—do something or other Scotch, I can’t quite recollect what it is, but something very hearty, I know—for the sake of auld lang syne.’

So spake Mr. Moltbury, in the heartiest of his hearty tones, as he grasped Mauleverer’s hand and shook it warmly. He had just arrived from the House of Commons,

where he had been detained on important business, as Mauleverer and Carristhorpe had driven up to the door.

‘I am so pleased,’ continued Mr. Moltbury, after having greeted Carristhorpe, ‘so gratified that I should have arrived from the House just in the nick of time to welcome you on my threshold. Dear me, how the sight of you carries me back to those delightful days of novelty and incident in old Japan—that lovely land of laughing, bright-eyed *moosmies*, two-sworded *yaconins*, lacquer, shaved eyebrows, and blackened teeth! But, my dear fellow, you have left a great deal of your fresh, healthy complexion behind you. Lord Carristhorpe, he is not looking well.’

‘Quite a mistake, Mr. Moltbury,’ said Mauleverer, with a careless laugh. ‘I am in capital health and spirits. Never better in my life.’

‘Yes, you should have seen him an hour or two ago,’ said Carristhorpe. ‘You wouldn’t have thought him looking ill then. I never saw a fellow looking such a picture of health and happiness. But it’s often the case with men who have served in India or China. For years a low fever, which they have picked up and then thought they had got rid of, will lurk in their system until they come home, when suddenly it shows itself again.’

‘Well, if I don’t look well, we’ll put it down to that, at all events,’ said Mauleverer, laughing. ‘We’ll say it’s a touch of low fever, for I know of nothing else to call it.’

‘Well, we’ll take care of you,’ said Mr. Moltbury. ‘You must come down to Hurstenholme — “The deathbed to all diseases!” Ha, ha, ha! Do you remember the Kima Springs Hotel? Now, go

upstairs, Mauleverer, where a hearty welcome awaits you from Mrs. Moltbury and your old schoolfellow, Gus. And I dare say Vi will not be behindhand.

The strains of a German waltz were mingling with the buzz of conversation as Mauleverer and Carristhorpe threaded their way up the crowded staircase. Owing to the numerous acquaintances he encountered, the progress of the latter was slow, and Mauleverer was the first to present himself before the smiling and flashing hostess.

Mrs. Moltbury's welcome was hardly less warm than her husband's, and Gus Moltbury left even Lady Mabel's side to come up with the greatest warmth and shake his old schoolfellow's hand.

Violet, too, had seen him. Ever since the guests had begun to assemble her gaze had been constantly on the doorway, and



every stalwart form that had appeared had thrilled her with fear and joy, with hope and despair, lest it should be the one enshrined in her pure loving heart. She longed and yet she dreaded to see him.

‘*Can* he have forgotten?’ and ‘Oh, he *cannot* have forgotten!’ had been going on in her mind all the evening in a horrible, agonising sort of see-saw. If it should turn out that he *had* forgotten—and she would be able to tell that at a glance—there would be nothing for her to do but to summon up all her courage and strive to look as if she too had not remembered. She owed that to her sex, to herself, for there *was* a point where Violet’s gentle spirit could wax proud.

But what treason was this that was creeping into her heart? Could Reginald Mauleverer, so manly, so kind, so brave, ever play such a cruel, dastardly part as to

win a young heart and then throw it away to break? No, perish the thought!

He has arrived! He advances to her. She hardly dares to look at him. He speaks, and they shake hands.

Forgotten!

She has read it in that one glance. Can those be the eyes that gazed down upon her when they had last parted? Can that be the voice which had uttered the soft farewell word, that had haunted her ever since, in a sweet sad whisper? It is hard to realise that the man who looked and spoke that farewell—for there was farewell in his eyes as well as on his lips—is the same who stands before her now. So hard, that she has to summon with a desperate effort all her strength and courage to keep up appearances. She holds in her hand a magnificent bouquet—the choicest gatherings from the Hurstenholme hot-houses—

but what, up to a moment before, had been infinitely more prized by her, is a little bunch of violets thrust into the body of her dress. Had he not told her the morning before they parted how the violet would henceforth be his favourite flower? But he had forgotten!

With a smiling face, but a bursting heart, she surreptitiously draws the now meaningless flowers from her bosom and meekly pockets them. How she longs for that joyless revel to be over, that she may bury her face in her pillow and vent her grief in sobs:

‘Why, let the stricken deer go weep,  
The hart ungalled play;  
For some must watch, while some must sleep  
Thus runs the world away.’

They inquire very politely after each other's health, allude to a few commonplace occurrences in Japan, and then, after

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engaging her for a square dance later on, he leaves her to think in the depths of her aching heart—

‘No—he never loved me truly : love is love for evermore.’

While he, in his bitterness of spirit, feels—

‘I am shamed thro’ all my nature to have loved so slight a thing.’

And yet he cannot help loving her still. He takes up a position at a doorway, and surveys the scene with a jaundiced eye, though he possesses the good breeding and manliness not to show his feelings too openly. Since he had last been in an English ball-room the style of dancing had changed, and the *trois temps* was now new to him. He watched several couples,

‘Imparadised in one another’s arms,’

going round so slowly and yet so closely,

that their object seemed to be embracing rather than dancing.

‘Why, Mauleverer, my dear fellow, not dancing! Let me get you a partner,’ said Mr. Moltbury, coming up.

‘No, thank you, Mr. Moltbury. I am out of it altogether. I know nothing of this new style.’

‘But you will soon pick it up. It is never too late to learn. Socrates learned dancing in his old age—by the way, how Xantippe must have gone on!—and why should not a gay young *militaire*? Come, my dear fellow—

“Come and trip it as you go  
On the light fantastic toe.”

Won’t you be persuaded?’

‘Well,’ replied Mauleverer, laughingly, ‘will you let me plead disinclination as well as inability? The fact is, I can’t say I particularly admire the present style. In

Japan there is a dance which you did not see. It is executed by a number of girls, who, every time they make a mistake in the mazy figures, have to pay a forfeit in the shape of some article of their dress, which they throw aside. As the figures are very intricate, the mistakes frequent, and but little useless superfluity of apparel, the *dénuement* can easily be imagined. On the whole I consider that dance rather a modest one compared to this. And yet our people, who would turn up their eyes and shudder even to hear of such a dance as this Japanese performance, look on calmly at this.'

'My dear Mauleverer, what has come over you? How different from that Mauleverer we knew in that far-off land. *Quantum mutatus ab illo!* So genial in Japan, so cynical in England. Our young Troilus turned into an old Thersites! By

the way, there is no Cressida in the case, I hope. Come, Mauleverer, I saw enough of you to like you, to admire you, and to respect you. I love you as my friend and as my boy's friend. I would fain "minister to a mind diseased, pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow;" but to do so, I must know what the disease is. Come, be candid with an old fellow like me, who would be a father to you. Has any cruel false maiden changed that wholesome heart to gall?

'Ha, ha, há!' laughed Mauleverer gaily. 'I am not, as the victim of unrequited affection, or rejected addresses, or anything of that sort, a subject for sympathy. Still, I cannot but feel pleased and gratified for the very kind words you have spoken. I feel quite grateful to the misapprehension which has elicited them. Thank you, my dear Mr. Moltbury. I can assure

you your feelings of warm friendship are reciprocated.'

'Something has gone wrong with him all the same, I am certain,' thought Mr. Moltbury, as he turned to chat with another friend.

Later on in the evening Mauleverer danced a set of Lancers with Violet, and in the intervals of the figures they carried on a commonplace dialogue with apparent relish. After this, pleading fatigue from travel as an excuse for his early departure, he bade the family good-night and withdrew from the festive scene.

It was a fine warm night, and he preferred walking home to driving. Of course his first act on getting into the street was to light a cigar. In tribulation a smoke is to many men what a good cry is to most women. As he strolled along Piccadilly he murmured rather bitterly, 'And this is



what I have come thirteen thousand miles for !

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Two or three hours later Lord Carris-  
thorpe treads in his cousin's footsteps. He  
too, walks and smokes, and soliloquises :

‘ Well, well, I’ll swallow the bitter pill  
like a man, and shan’t go talking, or crying,  
or making wry faces over it :

“ No, when light-wing’d toys  
Of feathered Cupid seel with wanton dulness  
My speculative and active instruments,  
Let housewives make a skillet of my helm !”

And a very good skillet too ! I’ve often  
thought it would do capitally for boiling  
potatoes in. So much for having taken a  
degree in “applied sciences” at Cambridge.  
One takes a utilitarian view of everything.  
So much the better. *Alma Mater*, I thank  
thee for this calm Baconian philosophy !

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The last carriage has rolled away from the Moltburys' door, the musicians have gone, and the family are assembled in Mrs. Moltbury's *boudoir*, where many a soft word has been spoken that evening.

‘How Reginald Mauleverer has changed!’ remarked Mr. Moltbury. ‘He is certainly the same manly fellow, but he has quite lost that bright boyish look and spirit which so agreeably, so captivatingly, I may say, used to temper his manliness.’

‘Yes, I am very sorry to see it,’ said Mrs. Moltbury; ‘I too, missed that old manner of his.’

‘Yes, there’s something up with Reggy, no doubt,’ said Augustus.

‘Something down, rather, I should think,’ said Mrs. Moltbury.

Violet is the only one who does not speak. She dares not. She feels that to

say a word on *that* subject would end in a burst of tears.

‘How lovely Lady Mabel looked to-night,’ observed Mrs. Moltbury.

‘She did, indeed,’ said Mr. Moltbury.

‘She always does,’ said Violet.

This time it is Augustus who alone is silent. But his is the silence of the mariner’s parrot.

‘Didn’t you think so, Gus?’ asked Mr. Moltbury, with a significant glance from his son to his wife. ‘You saw rather more of her than we did, I fancy.’

‘Well,’ said Augustus, getting very red and looking rather sheepish, ‘I suppose I’ll see more of her still. The fact is, I—ahem!—I—in short, I proposed to Lady Mabel this evening.’

‘And what did she say?’ asked Mrs. Moltbury, while the other two listened with bated breath.

‘Well, her exact reply was that she thought we should run in double-harness quietly enough, which, I suppose, means “Yes.”’

‘Undoubtedly so, my dear boy, undoubtedly so. God bless you, my dear Gus!’ said Mr. Moltbury, with the deepest feeling, as he took his son’s hand in his, and lovingly gazed into his face. ‘Do not let your mind be troubled with misgivings. Ah, Gus! a *parent’s* love is *not* blind, and I have seen how matters were tending. I have sounded the duke, and there will be no opposition from that quarter. The course of true love will for once run smooth.’

Mrs. Moltbury’s motherly heart was too full for words, and, with brimming eyes, she kisses Gus on the forehead, and leaves the room.

But Violet was more demonstrative.

She threw her arms round her brother's neck, and sobbing out 'Oh, darling Gus, may it all be for your happiness!' nestles her pale, wet cheek against his breast.

The pent-up sorrow of the evening had at last burst the flood-gates of her tears.

'Why, one would think we were arranging a funeral,' said Gus; at the same time however putting his arm very kindly and gratefully round his sister's slim waist. 'I can't see anything to cry about.'

One reason of his not being able to see anything may be that his own eyes are too dim. Poor Gus! his happiness has risen to that height when it is rather apt to run over at those organs.

'Good-night, my dear Gus. You will be remembered in your father's prayers before he goes to rest.'

And as Mr. Moltbury leaves the room he blows his nose suspiciously.

Violet once more before she goes to bed kisses her brother affectionately, and says a few heartfelt words of congratulation. Her own happiness is wrecked, but she can still rejoice with him in his.

Augustus is in too beatified a condition for bed, and he sits outside on the balcony smoking for a considerable time. The window of his sister's room is immediately above where he sits, and as the fumes of his cigar reach her she thinks of that night in the little Japanese village far, far away, when she laid awake listening to the footsteps of some one who paced and smoked in the little courtyard beneath. How different her feelings then to now ! That night had seen the first sweet dawn of love, this had heard its knell.

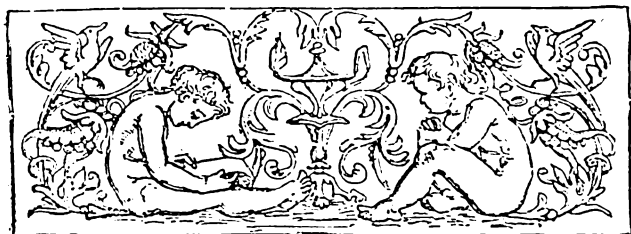
\* \* \* \* \*

Lady Mabel Slessinger, the fairest of the fair, the gayest of the gay, has dis-

missed her sleepy maid, and sits in her room, still fair, but no longer gay. She gazes on a photograph with yearning eyes, and a name, passionately uttered over and over again, escapes her soft pale lips. The photograph is of a man, but not the man to whom she has that evening plighted her troth. The name that is on her lips is not the name of Augustus Moltbury.

‘Good-bye, Jack, good-bye!’ she exclaims in piteous accents, as she rises from her seat and tears the card to pieces. Then, throwing herself, face downwards, on her bed, she cries out in a wild burst of grief:

‘Oh, Jack, Jack! why didn’t your father sell beer, build ships, or make railroads, instead of keeping open house and a pack of hounds on a younger brother’s portion?’



## CHAPTER VI.

### A BRUISED REED.

‘**V**IOLET, you are looking very pale, child. Do you still feel tired, dear?’ said Mrs. Molt-bury the forenoon after the ball, as the family, *minus* Augustus, who was riding in the Row with Lady Mabel, rose from a late breakfast.

‘Not particularly, mamma dear.’

‘Yes, Violet, you are looking very fagged. What’s the matter, little woman?’



said Mr. Moltbury, laying down the *Times* and patting his daughter's cheek.

The little act of kindness brings the tears springing to Violet's eyes; for, as our Ingoldsby, if not our own experience, tells us :

‘When the little heart is full a little sets it off.’

‘Well, perhaps I *do* feel rather tired to-day.’

‘Well, go and lie down, dear,’ said Mrs. Moltbury.

‘I think, mamma, I should take the earliest opportunity of telling you and papa something that took place last night.’

‘Of course you should, my dear,’ said Mrs. Moltbury, whose curiosity was aroused.

‘Undoubtedly so,’ remarked Mr. Moltbury, who was also curious.

Looking anything but pale now, Violet went straight to the point :

‘ Well, Lord Carristhorpe proposed to me last night, and——’

‘ My darling child !’ exclaimed Mrs. Moltbury, throwing her arms round her daughter and passionately drawing her to her capacious bosom.

‘ But,’ said Violet, struggling to be free — ‘ but I——’

‘ Yes, yes, we can now quite understand your emotion, my pet. Leave it to a mother’s fond heart to know what is in yours, my child.’ And again were Violet’s tones muffled in the maternal breast.

‘ Julia, my love,’ said Mr. Moltbury, ‘ as parents our hearts should indeed rejoice. With Gus and Violet, we have in one evening pulled off, as they say in racing parlance, a double event ; in fact, the two

greatest events of the year in the matrimonial stakes.'

'But mamma, I told him.——'

'Yes, yes, my sweet, *I* know! you referred him to me. "Ask mamma." I can quite fancy it,' gushed Mrs. Moltbury, again cutting poor little Violet short with a hug which, in the good lady's excitement, was almost ursine. 'Ah! with what tender and loving eyes I have watched you from infancy, and how well have you repaid me, darling, for all my tender care, by not only growing up in mind, as well as in body, everything that a parent could wish, but also by now crowning your career of filial devotion with an alliance of which any parent might be proud!'

'My dear Julia, before you have completely smothered our child, I should like myself to press a congratulatory kiss on her

brow. Remember there's a fond father as well as a fond mother in the case.'

On this Mrs. Moltbury released Violet, and Mr. Moltbury advanced with outstretched arms and a beaming smile.

'But,' said Violet, her soft cheek bearing the impress of several of her mother's breast-buttons, 'I refused him.'

'What?' said Mr. and Mrs. Moltbury in precisely the same tones.

'I refused him.'

'I always thought you were a little donkey, but now I am sure of it,' said Mrs. Moltbury. 'And what on earth, may I ask, made you do that?'

'Yes, why did you refuse him, Violet?'

'Because I did not love him.'

'Oh, stuff and nonsense, child!' snapped Mrs. Moltbury. 'That's an old-fashioned reason; in fact, it's so out of date, that it's no reason at all. You might as well refuse

to attend Queen Victoria's next drawing-room because Queen Anne was dead.'

'Excuse me, Julia; I think it is a reason; and none the worse for being, and more's the pity that it should be, old-fashioned. But you *should* have loved him, Violet. There is everything in him to inspire a girl with admiration, which, after all, is, more than pity, akin to love.'

'Yes', chimed in Mrs. Moltbury; 'there is not a girl in all London' who would not have jumped at him. Indeed, Lord Carris-  
thorpe might have commanded but little short of a royal alliance.'

'It is unaccountable to me,' said Mr. Moltbury. 'Everything that heaven and earth could give—rank, wealth, accomplishments, talents, popularity, youth, good looks, and, better still, good repute—are his; and yet all this was not enough for

you. I really\* cannot help quoting poor Ophelia, with one or two slight alterations :

“ O, what a nobleman is here o’erthrown !  
The courtier’s, scholar’s, soldier’s, eye, tongue, sword :  
The expectancy and rose of the fair sex ;  
The glass of fashion and the mould of form ;  
The observ’d of all observers !”

However, if, under the present circumstances, I play a Shakespearian rôle at all, it should be that of old Capulet. Why, the part would suit me down to the ground. There is a strong similarity in our cases. The description he gives of the contemned County Paris I could apply, word for word, to the rejected Lord Carristhorpe. But I am not going to call you a “puling fool,” nor a “whining mammet.”\* In the first

\* This is manifestly the passage Mr. Moltbûry had in his mind’s eye while making the above characteristic speech :

‘*Capulet*. At home, abroad, alone, in company,  
Waking or sleeping, still my care hath been

place, those are terms of reproach not in vogue at the present day ; in the second, I have no wish to say a harsh word. No, Vi, my child. I could never find fault with you for refusing to marry a man you did not love. But that you should not love what is so pre-eminently lovable, fills, I must confess, my mind with a perplexity bordering on irritation. The only solution of the mystery that occurs to me lies in the possibility of there being some Romeo in the background. Tell me, Vi, is there anyone you love more than Lord Carris-thorpe ?

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To have her match'd ; and having now provided  
A gentleman of princely parentage,  
Of fair demesnes, youthful, and nobly trained,  
Stuff'd (as they say) with honourable parts,  
Proportion'd as one's heart could wish a man—  
And then to have a wretched puling fool,  
A whining mammet, in her fortune's tender,  
To answer—*I'll not wed—I cannot love.*'

*Romeo and Juliet.*

‘How can I love anyone *more* than Lord Carristhorpe, whom I do not love at all, papa? I *like* Lord Carristhorpe extremely, but I do not *love* him in the least.’

‘Well, we’ll put it in another way, child. Is there any man who, you have reason to believe, loves *you*, and from whom you expect, or possibly have even received, an offer of marriage?’

Had he asked her that question but twenty-four hours before she could not have answered it in the negative; but now, looking him straight in the face, with pure truthful eyes, she answered from the depths of her aching heart:

‘No, papa, there is *no* such man.’

‘Very well, Vi, then I have nothing more to say on the subject; except that I am sorry if any irritable word escaped me in the first flush of not altogether pleased



surprise at your throwing away so brilliant an opportunity,' said Mr. Moltbury, as he drew his little daughter towards him and kissed her soft, white cheek. 'There is the kiss of peace, my child, after our little skirmish.'

At this point Violet completely broke down, and rushing to her mother, who for some moments had been sitting in silent and offended majesty, buried her face in her lap and sobbed out :

'Oh, don't be cross with me, mamma darling !'

'Yes, I will,' said Mrs. Moltbury, compressing her lips and tapping her foot, as if nothing in this world was ever going to induce her to forgive or forget.

'Kiss me, mamma darling, kiss me as papa has done,' said Violet.

'No, I shan't,' said Mrs. Moltbury ; 'at least, that is to say—don't cry, my darling.'

Bother Lord Carristhorpe ! I wish he had been at Jeri——’

The ‘cho’ was lost in a kiss and a hug, as Mrs. Moltbury’s motherly feelings suddenly swept over all worldly considerations as a pent-up torrent bursts an artificial barrier.

‘Never mind, my darling little Vi. I didn’t mean to be cross. There now, kiss me again.’

‘Mamma, I want you and papa to grant me a favour,’ said Vi. ‘Let me go down at once to Hurstenholme to dear old grand-papa. I am sick and tired of London and its gaiety, and I shall be much happier down there.’

‘Of course you shall go, Vi, if you like,’ said Mrs. Moltbury ; ‘and what is more, I’ll go with you, for I feel quite anxious about you, darling.’

‘No, don’t do that, mamma dear. Wait

with papa here until the session is over. I'll go down by myself. Let me go this afternoon ; in fact I am pining for the country, and feel as if I should be ill if I remained any longer in town. Let me go, will you ?'

This appeal was irresistible, and it was arranged that Violet was to start, together with her maid and one of the footmen, that very afternoon.

'Julia, my dear,' said Mr. Moltbury, as Violet left the room to superintend the preparations for her departure, 'we short-sighted mortals often go casting about far and wide for a reason when it lies under our very nose. There was I, in my self-supposed astuteness, subjecting our poor little Violet to a sort of cross-examination with a view of finding out the swain to whom she had given her heart and who had proved the stumbling-block in the path

of Lord Carriethorpe's suit, when all the time it was my child's own nature, which had been under my notice for years, her love of simplicity, her aversion from the gilded pomps and vanities of society, that prompted her to refuse this splendid offer. Ha, ha, ha ! it is quite amusing. No, I see that Vi would be happier as the wife of a country curate than as the wife of a duke. Love in a cottage is Vi's style.'

'Yes, Vi—our dear little Vi, I do feel so sorry for having been cross with her—is a regular little country mouse. For instance, don't you recollect, Geoffrey, when we were up in that pretty little Japanese village amongst the mountains, leading the life almost of cottagers, how happy, how positively radiant with joy Violet always seemed to be ?'

'Yes, I remember it perfectly. And what you have recalled to my memory

forcibly endorses what I have just said, that the reason Violet refused Lord Carristhorpe lies, not—Ha, ha, ha! I can't help laughing at the romantic conclusion I jumped at—in the pre-engagement of her affections, but in the extreme simplicity of her tastes. She will be happier at Hurstholme with her old grandfather, dragging that fat old donkey about the woods, than in London with a handsome wealthy young peer at her feet. *De gustibus non est disputandum.*'

There was one person to whom this ill wind brought, for the nonce, unalloyed joy, and that was the "old courtier." When he received the telegram conveying the joyful tidings that Violet would be down that evening, he exclaimed with tears of delight, 'God be praised, my little heart o' gold is coming back to me!'



## CHAPTER VII.

‘THE SHADOW OF A DREAM.’

**O**NE afternoon, about two months after the eventful ball—that is to say, towards the close of October—Mrs. Moltbury sat in her boudoir at Hurstenholme, deeply and perplexedly engaged in one of the hardest problems that society presents to its votaries. So hard, in fact, that it is seldom, if ever, solved satisfactorily to all parties concerned. In plain language, she was pairing off the guests bidden to a large dinner-

party that night at Hurstenholme. The occasion was an all-important one. After the London season Lady Mabel, with an aunt on whom, in the gout-enforced retirement of the duke, she was theoretically, but not practically, dependent for chaperonage, had gone up to Scotland, whither the devoted Augustus had of course also betaken himself. She had now returned to Larchington, and Hurstenholme was breaking out this evening into a large dinner-party to celebrate the engagement of the heir and to welcome its remotely future mistress.

There were a great many guests staying in the house, but with one exception they were all out. The gentlemen were amusing themselves in knocking over Mr. Moltbury's pheasants—victims to misplaced confidence in unfeathered bipeds—and the ladies had started soon after noon to join

the gentlemen in a picnic-luncheon at a picturesque *rendezvous*. The one exception was the Marquis de Millefleurs, a French nobleman, who to some extent had been a lion of the last London season, and who was now very happily and congenially employed in the drawing-room singing one of his own songs, accompanying himself on the piano, and looking at his own reflection in an opposite mirror. Violet and her father had gone out with the ladies and the luncheon-hamper ; so Mrs. Moltbury was able to concentrate all the energies of her mind on her hard task.

For the first few couples it was all plain sailing, but when she descended lower in the scale, her course was beset with difficulties.

‘There is infinitely more to do place and precedence amongst wives than in an assemblage of di



said Addison a hundred and fifty years ago, and the same can be repeated with equal truth now. On this principle our *bourgeoisie* are especially stiff-necked and thin-skinned in these matters :

‘Let school-taught pride dissemble all it can,  
Such little things are great to little man.’

What a blessing it would be to hosts and hostesses if they could settle the matter after Macbeth’s free-and-easy fashion—

‘You know your own degrees, sit down.’

For some time Mrs. Moltbury was considerably perplexed as to who ranked the higher, a French or an English marquis, as, besides the Marquis de Millefleurs, there happened to be an English big gun of the above heavy calibre — one of Augustus’ brother officers — amongst the guests. However, a prolonged shake on a high note, which reached her ears at an

opportune moment, settled the matter in favour of the French nobleman. After this she proceeded several more stages in her task, possibly without laying the foundation of any great mortification or heart-burning, until she came to a Mrs. Tarter-Rickassid, a county neighbour, who had been bidden to the feast lest, like the wicked fairy in the Duchess of Orleans’ fable, she should revenge herself for not being invited by mixing up a curse with every one of the blessings showered by other friends on the young couple. Under affront, Mrs. Tarter-Rickassid was quite capable of such a maledictory course ; for she was as clever as she was caustic, and, when her dignity was in her own opinion slighted, as unsparing as a tigress.

‘ Oh dear ! oh dear ! I know I shall put my foot into it with this abominable woman,’ moaned Mrs. Moltbury. ‘ But

she couldn't be left out. As the Japanese treat their malevolent devils, we have to propitiate her. There, I'll give her old Sir Titus Dumbleton, and if that doesn't satisfy her, I can't help it. By rights he should go to Mrs. Carhampton, but she hasn't a tongue.'

Mrs. Moltbury had just disposed of this weighty question, when Mr. Moltbury entered the room.

'Why, Geoffrey dear, home so soon?'

'Yes. I have several letters I must write before dinner, and so I came back. But before setting to work, I thought I would just drop in and see how you were getting on.'

'Oh, very well! What a nuisance—in fact, a curse which embitters all the pleasure of entertaining—is this arranging who's to take in who to dinner. It's all very well when people have titles, for there

it is in hard and fast rules, and you can't well make a mistake and give offence. . By the way, Geoffrey, when are they going to give you that peerage which the newspapers have so often "learned on the highest authority is about to be offered to you" ?

'I am sure I cannot tell you, my dear Julia. And even when it is offered, I am not at all sure that I shall accept it.'

'You surely would not be such a goose, Geoffrey,' said Mrs. Moltbury, warmly, for this was a very sweet day-dream with her. She had even fixed on the title—that of Hurstenholme—and often longed to be able to sign herself lawfully, as she had frequently done tentatively, 'Julia Hurstenholme.'

'Come, come, Julia,' said Mr. Moltbury, good-humouredly. 'In the words of

Wolsey, who had "sounded all the depths and shoals of honour," and could therefore speak with considerable experience on the subject, "I charge thee, fling away ambition; by that sin fell the angels!"'

'But I do not call wishing for a reward which you have earned a right to, ambition.'

'But really, Julia, I do not know that I *have* so thoroughly earned a peerage.'

'Not earned it! Well, who has then, I should like to know? Why, putting aside your political career, which in itself is quite enough, just look at the public benefactor you have been. You've built a hospital, endowed a school, presented a park to the people, put an organ into this church, a steeple on to that, and there is hardly a town of any importance in England into which you could not go at the present

moment and say, "I am not wholly unknown to you by my works," and point to a drinking-fountain, or an institute, or a pump, as a material corroboration of your statement. Then, too, just look at the public subscription lists on which your name figures to an amount that throws the charity of the rest completely into the shade. This style of thing: "Famine Relief Fund. Subscriptions—From one, who, having at an early age been placed on bread-and-water diet for twenty-four hours as a punishment for calling his grandmother an old cat, and who has ever since entertained the keenest sympathy for anyone suffering the pangs of hunger, 9d.; Geoffrey Moltbury, Esq., £500." "Westminster Abbey Restoration Fund: The Duke of Fotheringay, £50; Canon Pentatuke, £10; The Right Worshipful Weathercock-makers' Company, £105;

Geoffrey Moltbury, Esq., £1000." There, that's always how *you* come down.'

All this was spoken with such volubility, that even Mr. Moltbury, whose guns were not usually silenced by an opponent's fire, was utterly unable to put in a return shot until want of breath stopped the above fusilade.

'Surely, Julia, you will not say that when I put my hand into my pockets to help the starving and the needy, or to educate the poor, it has been with the idea of ulterior worldly benefit to myself?'

'No, I won't say that, Geoffrey, because I don't think it; and I always say what I think, and never say what I don't think. No, I am certain you have been open-handed with the most generous motives. But tell me, Geoffrey, in sober earnest, what you would do if you were offered a peerage to-morrow?'

‘Probably refuse it the *next* day, as I always like to sleep over a matter requiring consideration.’

The colour rose hotly to Mrs. Moltbury’s brow.

‘Look here, Geoffrey, if with that pride, the most despicable of all pride, the pride which apes humility, you were to adopt such a course, I feel—and I give you timely warning of the same—that you would be sowing the seeds of a life-lasting feud between us. I feel I could never forgive you.’

‘For shame, Julia! I believe in your own goodness of heart more than you do yourself when you utter such words. That I shall be eventually offered a peerage, if I live long enough, I have little doubt; but between this and then your ideas on the subject may undergo a change.’

‘Never!—unless, that is to say, I am in



my dotage when the tardy recognition of your public services is made.'

'My dear Julia, it is not a sign of dotardism to attach little importance to high-sounding titles. Far from it. On the contrary, it is rather the sign of a powerful intellect and an expanded mind. Take Macaulay, for instance. Did he not say the "plain addition of Mister has to our ears a more majestic sound than the proudest of the feudal titles" ?

'And did *he* refuse a peerage, Geoffrey?'

'Ahem! It is getting late. I must hurry off and write my letters.'

'Ha, ha, ha!' laughed Mrs. Moltbury, as Mr. Moltbury's rapid retreat left her mistress of the field; and then, running to the door, she popped her head out, and called after him in an insinuating tone of voice:

'Geoffrey dear!'

‘Well?’

‘Woman’s logic, my love? Was that a piece of woman’s logic?’

‘Really, Julia is getting as sharp as a needle,’ said Mr. Moltbury to himself, as, without vouchsafing a reply to her interrogation, he hurried on to his writing-room.

‘Well, I scored *that* time,’ said Mrs. Moltbury, as she threw herself on a sofa and gave vent to a ringing peal of laughter. ‘Oh dear! oh dear! I can’t help thinking of poor dear Geoffrey scuttling off as hard as he could. Ha, ha, ha! I had no idea he could become so demoralised by defeat. It’s all nonsense about his refusing. Men pretend they don’t, but they’re just as fond and think just as much of those sort of things as women. Besides, I know Geoffrey wouldn’t refuse for Gussy’s sake—his darling, precious hopeful. Dear me,

I can't help thinking of the brilliant way I beat the enemy off the field !'

Here Mrs. Moltbury again gave way to her sense of the ludicrous, and laughed until she had to press her hands to her aching sides.

It was while in this condition that she suddenly became aware of a figure standing close beside her, and looking up with a start she beheld the old courtier gazing down on her with his eyes and mouth wide open.

' Good gracious, grandpapa !'

Since the birth of her firstborn, Augustus, she had always called him 'grandpapa.'

' Good gracious, how you startled me ! In those list slippers you go about as noiselessly as a ghost.'

' Why, I have been standing looking at you here for the last two minutes, my dear, wondering what was the matter with

you.’ I thought first it was the toothache ; then I thought it was t’other ache ; and then I thought it looked something like a touch of *my* complaint, the rheumatics—ahem ! gout I *should* say.’

‘I was only laughing, grandpapa, at something Geoffrey said, and I laughed until my sides ached. But to what circumstance am I indebted for this unusual honour ? You so seldom pay a visit to these realms. Come, sit down, grandpapa dear. I must make the most of you when I *do* get hold of you in my own *sanctum*.’

With this Mrs. Moltbury plumped the old man down into the softest and most comfortable chair in the room, and then gave him a kiss.

‘Well, the fact is, Julia, my dear,’ said the old fellow, looking very pleased with his reception, ‘I have determined upon making an effort.’

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shaking the twig, Julia. 'In the natural course of events I'll hop it soon enough without.'

With these harrowing figures of speech the old man piled up the agony, until he and his daughter sunk beneath the weight of woe and freely mingled their tears together.

'Oh, grandpapa, how can you make us both so miserable! I am *not* ashamed of you. Don't think such a thing of me. You shall come to the dinner, and I shall show them all how proud I am of my dear old father.'

'No, I shan't,' said the old man, with a sudden change from the melting to the fiery mood. 'I shouldn't come now, not if you were to go on your bended knees. There! A set of stuck-up things! Ah, it's only my little heart o' gold that's not ashamed of me. *She'd* go arm-in-arm with me to Queen

Victoria’s court, and be proud of her old grandfather.’

‘So would I.’

‘No, you wouldn’t.’

And at this point the old man, in spite of Mrs. Moltbury’s entreaties, shuffled off in his list slippers at a rate which showed that indignation for the nonce had mastered the ‘rheumatics,’ *alias* the ‘hereditary gout.’

Mrs. Moltbury did not laugh at *this exit* as she had done at the last. Indeed, she was sorely troubled in mind. With a pang of self-reproach she contrasted the old man’s glee, as he had spoken of his preparations for the dinner, with the tears and indignation after he had read in her tell-tale face her feelings of absolute dismay. She felt that nothing could wipe away the bitterness of this reflection but the fulfilment of his original intention to join the dinner circle. Then, like a hideous

spectre, there arose before her mind the thought of how she had always spoken of him in the background as one of the old courtier-like school, and hinted that he was a recluse, partly owing to ill health and partly owing to the sensitiveness with which his Chesterfieldian nature shrank from contact with the free-and-easy manners of the present day. And then, after this, to draw aside the curtain and parade him before a lot of people with all his weaknesses respecting his dinner-knife, and that letter which, according to the riddle, was ‘whispered in Heaven and muttered in Hell;’ to say nothing of the early reminiscences he would probably touch upon ! and this with that keen-witted, lancet-tongued, unsparing Mrs. Tarter-Rickassid present !

Then there was another shake of the mental kaleidoscope, and the very pecu-

liarities which, a moment before seemed so repellent, now appealed the most tenderly and touchingly to her feelings. It is the small homely—I may almost say mean—memories which have the finest points. Which, do you think, would for the moment pierce deeper into the bereaved mother’s heart—the thought that had her child lived he would have been a peer of the realm with untold wealth, or the sight of a little worn-out shoe which had been his? Which object would bring the tears the more readily to her eyes—a richly-chased silver goblet, the gift perchance of a royal sponsor, or a worthless toy the little vanished hand had played with and battered? We generally wince more under the prick of a needle which leaves no mark, than under a blow which leaves a bruise for days.

‘He *shall* come to the dinner,’ said Mrs.



Moltbury. 'I shall never forgive myself if he does not. When he is gone, the scene we have just passed through will haunt me with a bitter aching to my dying hour, unless I can now succeed in chasing it from his mind.'

Having come to this determination, she at once proceeded to the old man's remote suite of rooms, and, luckily for the success of her mission, on her way there she overtook Violet, who, having just returned with the majority of the shooting and luncheon party, was making it her first care to go and amuse her old grandfather with an account of the day's doings. To her Mrs. Moltbury confided her difficulty, and Vi at once promised her her assistance.

Some readers may think that the Moltburys were treating their guests a little cavalierly in thus leaving them so much to themselves; but that is exactly what guests,

as a rule, most, like. For instance, the Marquis de Millefleurs was much happier singing and looking at himself in the glass than he would have been listening to and looking at anyone else. People accustomed, as the Moltburys were, to entertain on a large scale, soon learn this, and if they do not, they should, as it is the grand secret of entertaining successfully. A host or a hostess who is always fussing about his or her guests, never succeeds in making them feel at home. I, of course, do not allude to the guests of an evening, but the guests of days and weeks.

Violet's influence on the old man was magical, and in five minutes she quite succeeded in coaxing him into good humour. In five minutes more he had not only consented to come to the dinner, but was quite gleeful over it in anticipation.

‘There is one little drawback,’ he said; ‘I’ve got the rheumatics—ahem! gout, I *should* say—so bad in the right hand to-day that I can hardly hold anything.’

That was his knife-hand! A bright thought occurred to Mrs. Moltbury.

‘Well, grandpapa, wear it in a black silk sling, and one of the servants can cut up your meat at a side-table.’

‘But that would look so stupid, dear, in company, wouldn’t it?’

‘Not a bit. Quite the reverse, it would look interesting, and, better still, it would show how determined you had been to be present on the auspicious occasion, and that would, of course, you know, add greatly to the compliment your presence will be to Augustus and his bride-elect.’

‘Ah, so it would—so it would! I’m afraid, Julia, my dear, I was very cross and techy with you. But I’m not now,

and I feel as if I never should be again.’

‘That’s right, dear,’ said Mrs. Moltbury ; and on the strength of this avowal she ventured to put him up to a few wrinkles. ‘It’s so long since you’ve appeared in public, as I may say, that I daresay it will feel quite strange at first, won’t it ?’

‘Yes, I daresay it will. But, bless you, I shan’t mind !’

‘There is one thing, you will find people fearfully, absurdly, you may almost say idiotically, sensitive about, and that is their ages. The consequence is, no one ever dreams of alluding in society to his or her early days, because that sets everybody off thinking of his or her neighbours’ ages.’

‘Ah ! I’m glad you told me that. Now, that is kind and thoughtful of you, Julia, for I’m sure I shouldn’t like to hurt any

people's feelings, least of all your guests'. No, my dear, I shan't say a word except about what's going on at the present time.'

Mrs. Moltbury now felt that she must go and apprise her husband of the coming event.

'Geoffrey, who do you think is, most unexpectedly, going to honour us with his company at dinner this evening?' she asked, as she entered his study, where he was inditing his day's correspondence with the pen of a ready writer.

'To judge from your countenance, someone who is evidently a welcome guest, my dear Julia,' said Mr. Moltbury, laying down his pen and leaning back in his chair.

'Yes, decidedly so. But I want you to guess who it is.'

'An old friend, then, I presume.'

'I should think he was. I knew him before I knew you.'

'Then he must have been a friend of your early infancy, for I possessed the pleasure of your acquaintance when you were not the perfect mistress of your mother tongue that you now are. I really can't— You surely don't mean to say, Julia, that you allude to your esteemed father?'

'Yes, I do.'

For about the first time in his life Mr. Moltbury dared not look his wife straight in the face. He was afraid she might there read the littleness that for a moment or two was in his heart.

'Well, aren't you surprised, Geoffrey?'

'Tremendously so.'

'And aren't you pleased?'

'Still more tremendously so. Delighted

—delighted, I am sure. Capital ! Bravo !  
Hooray !

\* \* \* \* \*

‘Yes, I am quite sure I am delighted, sincerely delighted, that the old gentleman is going to put in an appearance. I was quite pleased from the very first moment when I heard it. Of course I was.’

Thus soliloquised Mr. Moltbury, on being left alone by his wife, and as he was talking to himself, it must have been himself he was trying to take in. There are times when even the stoutest-minded shrink from acting as Father Confessor to their own selves ; and those times are not so much when wickedness as when littleness creeps into the heart.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### SOCIAL SWEETS.

**T**HE dinner was of course a magnificent affair. So much so that, not having the pen of a modern Apicius, I shall leave it to the reader's imagination. One little hitch for a few moments disturbed Mrs. Moltbury's equanimity. That stupid old Sir Titus Dumbleton bungled into the wrong place, and consequently Mrs. Tarter-Rickassid sat next to the old courtier—a juxtaposition Mrs. Moltbury had been specially anxious



to avoid. However, the old fellow looked uncommonly well. With his snow-white hair, carefully brushed by Violet; his equally snow-white tie, equally carefully tied by Violet: and his black silk sling, also arranged by Violet; and with Violet by his side to inspire him with confidence, he surpassed Mrs. Moltbury's most sanguine expectations.

‘Bless his heart,’ she mentally observed, ‘he really does look quite the old courtier;’ and she actually felt quite proud after all of her old father. It was a great relief too to feel that his right hand was tied up, and as he was silent—though evidently pleased and interested with all around—there was small chance of his other little weakness coming very prominently to the front. If only that abominable Mrs. Tarter-Rickassid had not been sitting next to

him, there would not have been the least occasion for any uneasiness.

The principal guests were, of course, Lady Virginia Slessinger, Lady Mabel's aunt, who seemed to have monopolised the primness of the whole family, and left none whatever for the other members, and the Duke of Fotheringay, Lady Mabel's father, who had tottered into the reception-room, and afterwards the banqueting-hall, supported by two servants, so determined had he been to dine on this occasion with his future connections. Then there was Mr. Mark Slessinger, a kinsman, and a very favourite one too, of Lady Mabel's, a middle-aged, red-faced, red-whiskered, hard-looking man of few words, except when anyone rode over his hounds or headed a fox, and then he could be voluble enough, and often more than enough. He had hunted the duke's pack ever since the

gout had placed the noble owner *hors de combat*, and had done so with such marked success as to raise himself to the highest pinnacle of fame amongst M.F.H.'s.' He lived for fox-hunting alone, and the seat of his affections was his seat in the saddle, and an uncommonly good seat it was. His motto should have been *Fox et preterea nihil*. At all events it was the one which shaped the thoughts, words, and actions of his life. He considered his kinswoman, Lady Mabel, was completely throwing herself away, and solely on the grounds that Augustus Moltbury was not the finest rider to hounds in the United Kingdom, such a gifted individual as this last being, in his opinion, the only man fit to mate with so brilliant a horsewoman as Lady Mabel.

Another family grievance of his was that the future head of the house, the duke's eldest son, the young Marquis of Belperdale,

cared nothing for horses or dogs, was even suspected, degenerate creature, of entertaining a secret objection to his sister's prominence in the hunting-field, and spent most of his time, as well as a great deal of his money, yachting in far-distant seas, a pursuit he was now engaged in, which accounted for his absence from this gathering. Besides the Marquis de Millefleurs already mentioned, the remaining guests consisted of three or four of Augustus' brother officers, and a choice selection from the neighbouring nobility and gentry, all friends of long standing.

Lady Mabel was not so lively as she had been before her engagement, but as liveliness was a quality which she had possessed in super-abundance, she was all the better for a little less of it.

After two or three glasses of champagne the old courtier's tongue was loosed.

‘Where is her most gracious Majesty the Queen?’ he asked Mrs. Tarter-Rickassid.

‘At Balmoral,’ was the reply.

‘Oh, indeed; I’m glad to hear it. God bless her!’ said the old gentleman, as if the intelligence afforded him unbounded gratification.

‘Is the Emperor of Germany getting on pretty nicely?’ he asked about two minutes later on, addressing his *vis-à-vis* in a chatty sort of way.

‘Oh, I believe so,’ was the response.

This also seemed to afford the old courtier much pleasure.

‘If I get out of the royal circle I’m done for; stick to it, my boy,’ was the old gentleman’s mental remark, while Mrs. Moltbury’s observations to the duke sitting beside her became strangely incoherent and vapid.

‘Where’s the Princess of Wales?’ he next asked, conferring a bow and a smile on another guest.

‘The Princess has gone on a short visit to Denmark.’

‘Ah, that’s very affable and sweet ; and where’s the Prince of Wales ?’

Mrs. Moltbury trembled in the spirit lest she and her guests were about to hear our future king panegyrised as ‘quite the clean potato ;’ and when at the critical moment a servant handed a dishful of that esculent bulb to the old gentleman, as if actually doing his utmost, perverse creature, to suggest the strange metaphor, Mrs. Moltbury felt as if she could have taken the law out of her housekeeper’s hands and given him warning on the spot.

‘The Prince is to Paris,’ replied the Marquis de Millefleurs, ‘where he is as popular as in London, and where my compatriots are always ravished with joy to see him.’

‘Ah, I like to hear that,’ said the old

gentleman, who, perceiving that the eyes all round the table were upon him, felt that now or never was the time to distinguish himself. 'It—it, you know, ferments the ginger cordial, as they say, between the two nations.'

'*Comment?*' asked the marquis, thoroughly startled out of his English, on which he prided himself—a little too much perhaps the reader may think.

'I—I'm afraid I didn't quite say what I wanted to,' stammered the old gentleman with a feeble smile, adding in a perfectly audible soliloquy, 'Dear, oh dear, my poor old head does jumble up sounds so. But it was something very like that.'

After this he addressed no more remarks during dinner to the company in general; but Mrs. Moltbury noticed with an uncomfortable misgiving that Mrs. Tarter-Rick-assid was quietly engaging him in conversa-

tion, and she knew enough of the lady to feel sure that good nature was not prompting this piece of attention.

Later on in the evening, when, after that temporary separation which, shocking to relate, the gentlemen seem to bear with so much more resignation than the ladies, the whole party were re-united in the drawing-room, everybody, as is always the case at large dinner-parties, seemed more cheerfully inclined. The Marquis de Millefleurs warbled tender ditties. The duke and old Mr. Moltbury got together in a corner and became quite happy comparing each other's chalky knuckles and talking over their common enemy. Mrs. Moltbury and Lady Virginia were in conversation. Augustus was talking very earnestly to Lady Mabel at a little distance from the throng. Mr. Moltbury was edifying an admiring circle with his eloquence on various topics. Violet



was making herself generally agreeable. The remainder of the company, in twos and threes, were chatting or looking over photographs, or in various other ways amusing themselves, or rather pretending to do so, after the custom of society in like cases. The only one who did not take the trouble to look as if he liked it all, was that keen and able master of hounds Mr. Mark Slessinger. Feeling inexpressibly bored, he was just turning over in his mind whether it would be very rude if he was to slip out and spend the remainder of the evening in the stables, inspecting the Moltburys' horses, when Mrs. Moltbury, noticing his isolation, bore down upon him.

‘Oh, Mr. Slessinger, I wish you would let me introduce the Marquis de Millefleurs to you; you will be delighted with him. He paints beautifully, writes charming *vers de*

*société*, sings divinely, dances exquisitely, speaks twelve languages fluently——’

‘And can’t ride a yard. No thankee.’

Mrs. Moltbury was too well schooled in social warfare to show the least annoyance with a guest, and though she mentally remarked, ‘What a Goth!’ she smilingly asked him if he would prefer to go to the billiard-room, as, if he would, she had no doubt her son would be able to raise an opponent from amongst his young friends.

This offer Mr. Mark Slessinger thankfully accepted, and Mrs. Moltbury, after having provided him with an antagonist, betook herself to a group who were looking over a splendidly bound album. This book was the apple of her eye. On its pages illustrious and even royal hands had scribbled sentiments and signatures. The last entry was by the Marquis de Mille-

fleurs, who, in the finikin little handwriting peculiar to his countrymen, had that very morning inscribed one of what Mrs. Moltbury had just called his charming *vers de société* in six different languages.

It suddenly occurred to Mrs. Moltbury that she would propitiate the demon of evil-speaking, lying and slandering which possessed Mrs. Tarter-Rickassid by flattering that lady's vanity.

'My dear Mrs. Tarter-Rickassid, would you write something in my album for me? You know its pages are only open to a favoured few, and what you would consider a trifle from your pen would be a gem in other eyes.'

'This is the first time she has thought it worth her while to come up and speak to me this evening, the upstart! And then it's only to get me to do something for her. Yes, I'll write a trifle—a trifle too much

perhaps—in her snobbish old book for her !’

Such was the beautiful sentiment that filled Mrs. Tarter-Rickassid’s heart—or whatever performed the functions of one—as she replied, with a sweet smile :

‘ My dear Mrs. Moltbury, I feel my unworthiness, but still I cannot refuse you anything you ask me.’

The precious book was at once brought, and with pen in hand, and envy, hatred and malice in her heart—for *her* son had just married a penniless girl — Mrs. Tarter-Rickassid applied herself to her task. In about ten minutes she smilingly handed the book to Mrs. Moltbury.

‘ There, my dear Mrs. Moltbury, I do so much hope you will like this little trifle.’

‘ Thank you, oh, so much !’ said Mrs.

Moltbury, as she at once proceeded to read the effusion.

It was as follows, and will, of course, be recognised by the reader as a parody on the well-known poetical enigma :

‘H EXASPERATED.’

‘A REMINISCENCE.

‘’Twas driven from ’Ursten’olme, cruel to tell,  
Though in Larchington’s midst it was suffered to dwell,  
In Hengland and Hireland it held the first place,  
Though the ’Ighlands of Scotland it deigned not to  
grace ;

On the top of the graceful and tall mountain hash,  
It came with a most unmistakable crash.  
Though badly he treated it, strange ’twas to say,  
He kept it most carefully out of ’arm’s way.  
In the midst of the chase, yet ne’er to be found  
With the ’orse or the ’untsman, the ’are or the ’ound.’

Surely the spirit of the Spartan boy  
drawing his cloak round him to hide the  
fox gnawing into his very vitals must have  
filled Mrs. Moltbury as she said :

‘Thank you, so much. It is very clever. I am so much obliged to you.’

‘Oh, not at all. Dear me, how very stupid of me, to be sure ! I have written on what I daresay is the most precious page in the book, for I see it contains no less than five entries by some of the most illustrious personages in the land—quite the royal page of the collection, in fact. Dear, dear, what a mistake to have made ! Of course, I should have written my stupid meaningless little lines on a blank page, which could have been torn out and consigned to the fire or waste-paper basket as soon as I am gone. But now you cannot rid yourself of my trash without throwing away the very gems of the collection with it. I am so vexed.’

The thoughts and words of each lady now became so opposed, that the same column will not hold them :

## THOUGHTS.

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*Mrs. T.-R.* Can she be so dense as not to see the point? The very thought gives me quite a cold shudder of disappointment. The stupidity of some people is positively sickening.

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My dear Mrs. Tarter-Rick-assid, I can't tell you how sweet and gratifying your words sound to me. It is always so delightful to hear those you love praised, and especially, too, by a person whose opinion and friendship are valued as yours by me. Now will you do me a favour, and that is the next time you come here to write another of those delicious little stanzas in my book?

You really flatter me. I hear my carriage announced. I am so sorry to cut short so delightful an evening, but I have a long drive before me. Good-night, good-night, my dear Mrs. Moltbury.

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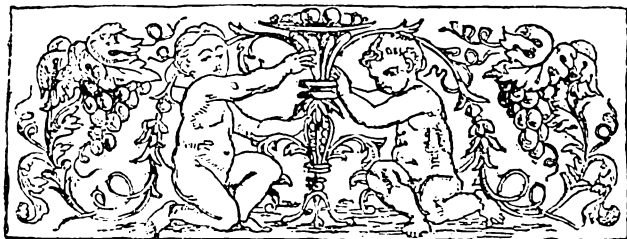
Good-night. But cannot you stay a little longer ? Now do. No ? Well, I shall not press. I hope you will reach home safely, and mind you wrap up well. And don't forget your promise to write me another of those amusing and clever little effusions. Good-night.

Here ended the little passage of arms and Mrs. Tarter-Rickassid took her departure, feeling that she had wasted her sweetness on the desert air. The miscarriage, or what she thought was such, of all this venom nearly brought on a bilious attack, and all the drive home she kept on comparing Mrs. Moltbury to a 'hog in armour,' a 'rhinoceros-hided upstart,' etc., etc.

The party now soon broke up, and Mrs. Moltbury seized the earliest opportunity of retiring to her room, and after dismissing her maid, giving vent to her feelings in a



good cry. An hour or so later she performed a pilgrimage to her father's room, and stealing softly to the side of the bed in which the old man, the innocent bone of contention, worn out by the excitement of the evening, lay placidly sleeping, she kissed him on the forehead. The action partially roused him, and with a smile he gently murmured, 'Ah, I think old Joey Moltbury showed 'em all he was quite the clean potato.'



## CHAPTER IX.

### IN THE SMOKING ROOM.

**N**UNC est fumandum' was the cry amongst the majority of the male guests staying in the house, on finding themselves deprived of the refining influence of the gentler sex. 'Et bibendum' might have been added without stretching the point. Smoking suits of various hues and patterns were donned, and a pretty general adjournment was made to the handsome and luxurious temple at Hurstenholme dedicated to the worship of St. Nicotina.

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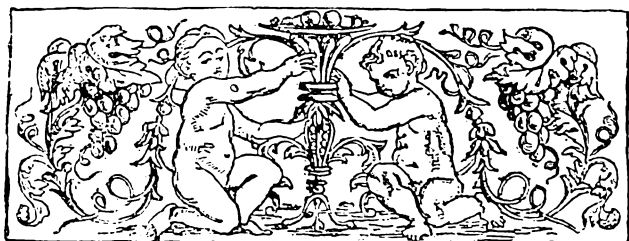
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As the sun shines forth in its most gorgeous hues just before setting, so was Augustus' last appearance in public before going to bed the most resplendent of the day. A smoking suit is the one style of dress in which a man, if he so likes, can allow his fancy to run riot in the way of colours and texture, and Augustus, his tastes lying in that direction, availed himself of the opportunity to the fullest extent. So much so that on entering the room, one of his brother officers remarked, 'By Jove, Moltbury ! if you wear a suit like that you should provide your friends with green spectacles just to tone you down a bit, unless you want them to get ophthalmia.'

'All right, old fellow,' said Augustus, quietly lighting a cigar. 'There's a sort of contract between me and my friends; I *wear* what I like, and they *say* what they like. Fire away !'

Most of the men had, like Augustus, gone to their rooms and changed their raiment from head to foot ; but others, more lazy or less exquisite, contented themselves with having their smoking-coats brought down by their servants, and there and then changing. A general illumination soon followed.

What a loosening effect on tongues the atmosphere of a smoking-room seems to have ! Men who have been silent all the evening burst forth into discussions on art, sport, literature, or politics. Taciturnity turns into garrulity. The country house smoking-room is the favourite arena of men—*young, middle-aged, and old*—who have fallen into their ‘*anecdote*,’ and in this sphere is often heard

‘A tale

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Signifying nothing.’

It is a very hot-bed for schemes, which



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On the present occasion most of the smokers consisted of the younger guests. The older men had retired for the night.

‘Well Gus, what do you generally do

after mess if you dine at the Regent's Park barracks ?' asked Mr. Moltbury, who was anxious that his son and his son's friends should enjoy themselves in their own way.

'Well, *if* I dine at mess, and *if* after mess I stay in barracks, and *if* there's any-one else besides the subaltern on duty, we chat, and smoke pretty much the same as we might do here.'

'Then there's a piano in our ante-room at the Albany barracks which isn't half bad fun sometimes,' remarked a young Lifeguardsman who was the musical genius of the regiment.

'Oh' yes, when *you're* there it's right enough, Fanshawe,' said another young officer.

Mr. Moltbury rung the bell.

'Tell Scandringham I wish to see him,' said Mr. Moltbury, as a servant almost immediately answered the summons.

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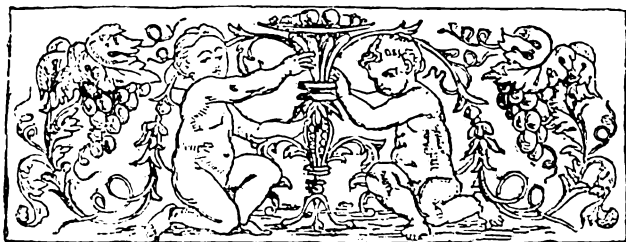
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‘Well Gus, what do you generally do

after mess if you dine at the Regent's Park barracks ?' asked Mr. Moltbury, who was anxious that his son and his son's friends should enjoy themselves in their own way.

'Well, *if* I dine at mess, and *if* after mess I stay in barracks, and *if* there's any-one else besides the subaltern on duty, we chat, and smoke pretty much the same as we might do here.'

'Then there's a piano in our ante-room at the Albany barracks which isn't half bad fun sometimes,' remarked a young Lifeguardsman who was the musical genius of the regiment.

'Oh' yes, when *you're* there it's right enough, Fanshawe,' said another young officer.

Mr. Moltbury rung the bell.

'Tell Scandringham I wish to see him,' said Mr. Moltbury, as a servant almost immediately answered the summons.

Scandringham was the butler, or rather he might be called the commander-in-chief of the Household Brigade, so numerous were the servants at Hurstenholme.

‘Scandringham,’ said Mr. Moltbury, as soon as that personage had made his appearance, ‘let a piano be placed in the adjacent writing-room at once.’

‘Yes, sir,’ said Scandringham, in the same unmoved tones in which he would have made the same reply had Mr. Moltbury said, ‘Scandringham, procure me a white elephant by this time to-morrow.’

The writing-room Mr. Moltbury alluded to was an apartment communicating with the smoking-room by a curtained archway, and to which any smoker might withdraw for the purpose of writing his letters, many men finding the labours of epistolary composition much lightened by the simple process of taking in a mouthful of smoke

at one moment and letting it out the next.

In less than ten minutes the curtain was drawn aside, and the portly though somewhat oppressively respectable figure of Scandringham appeared.

‘The piano is at your service, sir.’

Without the slightest noise or commotion, no scraping along the walls, no bumping against doorposts, no audible directions, Mr. Moltbury’s somewhat large order had been obeyed almost magically ; and when the party adjourned to the room, not only was the piano there, but also a large selection of music suited to the probable tastes and abilities of the guests. The thoroughness and expedition of the performance could hardly have been surpassed by the slave of the wonderful lamp.

Mr. Moltbury having thus started his young friends along their own line, sat

quietly smoking in an arm-chair, while hunting songs and snatches from comic operas were being rendered in various styles.

The reader may have remarked that Mr. Moltbury had been, for him, rather subdued this evening, and such had really been the case. The truth was, his mind was now at times troubled with misgivings regarding his son's future. It did not require a Steele or any other essayist to tell him that 'the married state with or without the affection suitable to it is the completest image of heaven or hell we are capable of receiving in this life.' Would that 'suitable affection' be rendered on Lady Mabel's side? was the question constantly recurring in his thoughts, and with a very dubious answer. He could not but see by a thousand indications that, as matters now stood, Augustus was contributing infinitely more than his

share of love to the sum of affection on both sides.

Breaking in upon his reverie in not the cheeriest manner possible was a song just commenced by Augustus' musical young brother officer. The air as well as the words at once struck familiarly on Mr. Moltbury's ears, and then he suddenly remembered the song as the one which Reginald Mauleverer had sung that afternoon when they had held their rural picnic by the shores of Lake Hakoni.

'I cannot endure that song,' thought Mr. Moltbury. However, out of politeness he said nothing until the singer, altering the words to apply to his own corps, came to :

'And six tall lifeguardsmen shall carry me,  
With steps mournful, solemn, and slow.'

Then Mr. Moltbury had had enough, and rose from his chair.

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‘My dear fellow,’ he said, placing a hand on the shoulder of the performer, who was accompanist as well as vocalist, ‘my dear fellow, excuse me, but if you sing such lugubrious ditties as that, you should exchange into the Blues. *Do* give us something a little livelier. By the way, how did you get hold of that mournful dirge? because I happen to know the composer.’

‘Yes, so do I—a fellow called Mauleverer,’ said the interrupted songster. ‘He was dining one evening at the mess with his cousin Carristhorpe of ours, and as the evening happened to turn out musical, he sang that song, which struck me so that I asked him for the words, which he gave me. The air I caught the first time I heard it.’

‘A nice fellow that Mauleverer,’ said Mr. Moltbury. ‘But somehow he was not

the genial, joyous, frank young fellow at home that we found him, only a few months before, abroad. He would never come down here. Always put us off with some excuse so persistently, that at last Mrs. Moltbury felt quite hurt, and I forbore to press him any more. He seems to have soon had enough of his native land, notwithstanding his long absence from it, for I hear he has gone abroad again.'

'Yes, he and Carristhorpe have gone off together on a yachting and shooting trip in the Adriatic, for the winter. It appears Albania is an old hunting-ground with Mauleverer.'

'Let us hope,' said Mr. Moltbury, 'that it will prove a happy hunting-ground. I know of no young man for whom I entertain a more sincere regard, and I may say admiration, than for Reginald Mauleverer.'

'And now, Mr. Moltbury, as you stopped



my performance I think I have a right to call upon you for a song.'

Mr. Moltbury, who could be all things to all men, recognised the justice of the claim, and at once consented. Beyond possessing a good ear for music and a powerful, deep voice, he was no songster ; but these qualifications were quite sufficient for the successful and even brilliant rendering of the hunting song, which, out of deference to the sporting proclivities of his hearers, he favoured them with: The ballad was that best and heartiest of all old hunting songs, 'John Peel,' and never was it better given than in Mr. Moltbury's rich manly tones.

The great drawback to this song is that the keener and more boisterous sporting spirits are apt to become worked up to such a pitch of enthusiasm by the statement that

'Peel's view-holloa might awaken the dead,'

as to break out into spirited imitations of the same. However, on this occasion there was an enthusiastic chorus without any stupid screeching ; for whereas a view-holloa in the hunting-field is a sound of the most exquisite melody and meaning, it is anywhere else nothing but a cacophonous and senseless shriek. There is as much difference between it in and out of season as there is between the sweet note of a nightingale and the discordant one of 'sage Minerva's fowl.'

As far, however, as the chances of awakening the sleepers on this occasion was concerned, Mr. Moltbury's guests might have thrown in the choral embellishment with impunity, for the smoking-room was far away from the sleeping apartments, with the exception, perhaps, of a few bachelor-quarters, occupied only when the house was very full.

Shortly after concluding the song Mr. Moltbury wished his young friends good-night ; and as all had been shooting during the day and were to shoot again the next, the party speedily broke up.

\* \* \* \*

Long after all others in the house had been wrapped in slumber, or at all events in their beds courting it, Augustus Moltbury sat in his room burning the midnight oil. On the table in front of him were paper and ink, and in his hand he held a pen, which assuredly in the present instance was not that of a ready writer. It scribbled on an average about half a dozen words in twice as many minutes, and then it scratched out what it scribbled. Sheet after sheet was torn up, hour after hour was struck, and still he persevered. Sometimes he drew or attempted to draw inspiration from the handle of his pen, which he sucked

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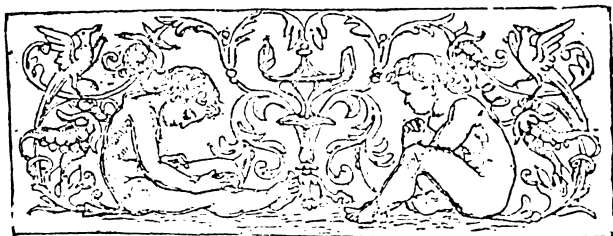
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## CHAPTER X.

NOT SUCH A FOOL AS HE LOOKS.

**I**MMEDIATELY after breakfast, Augustus, dead to the seductions of sport, drove over to Larchington. On his way thither he kept constantly drawing a piece of paper from the breast-pocket of his waistcoat, as if nervously apprehensive of losing the precious document. On turning in through the lodge-gates nearest to Hurstenholme, he found Lady Mabel on the look-out for him, according to arrangement the previous

evening, and handing over the reins to his groom, he despatched him to the stables with the cart, while he joined her ladyship in her walk.

‘You’re looking quite seedy this morning, Gus. What’s the matter? You look as if you hadn’t been littered down since I saw you last.’

‘Our Romeo hath not been in bed to-night,’

Lady Mabel might have said quite as appropriately and much more prettily; but she knew more of ‘Stonehenge’ than of Shakespeare.

‘Oh no; we were very quiet. Had a nice little musical evening in the smoking-room.’

‘Was old De Millefleurs there?’

‘Oh no. He sloped off to bed, and all the better, for I don’t think we’d have cared about *his* style of songs. By Jove! Mabel, you should hear the governor sing



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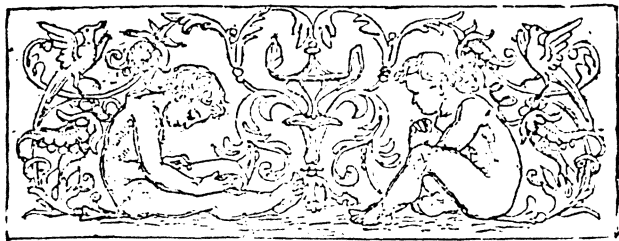
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‘Was old De Millefleurs there?’

‘Oh no. He sloped off to bed, and all the better, for I don’t think we’d have cared about *his* style of songs. By Jove! Mabel, you should hear the governor sing

"John Peel." It would, do your heart good. We'll get him to give it to us some day.'

'Mr. Moltbury does everything well, Gus. In fact, he is almost too awfully clever. Then what did you do?'

'Well, we broke up early, as we had been out shooting all day, but I—I—'

'You don't mean to say you were goose enough, Gus, to sit up smoking all night thinking of *me*, as you have told me you have done on more than one occasion?'

'Well,' said Augustus, getting very red, 'I must plead guilty to sitting up all night thinking of you; but I did something more than think about you. I—I wrote about you.'

'Wrote about me! Well, and what had you to write about me that you couldn't say to me this morning? Was it a very deep psychological—at least, I think that's

the word—study of my character, I wonder?’

‘No, not quite; it was just a little sort of—er—er——’ said Augustus, blushing, smiling, stammering, and fumbling at the piece of paper in his breast-pocket.

‘Well, have you got “the little sort of er—er” about you?’

‘Yes; but I must warn you not to expect anything very deep or psychological, you know.’

‘Bravo, Gus! you got over that five-barred gate pretty well.’

‘Yes, but you gave me a lead, remember.’

‘Ah, yes! so I did. By the way, Gus, your old grandfather—nice old chap, but he isn’t good at posts and rails, is he?’

‘How on earth do you mean? Why, he has never hunted in his life.’

‘I mean conversationally.’



‘Well, I can’t see it *now*.’

‘Dear me, how dense you are!’ said Lady Mabel, as she drew her walking-stick—she scorned umbrellas or parasols when in the country—from under her arm and traced on the ground the cabalistic sign H. ‘There what do you call that but two posts and a rail?’

‘Oh! I see now,’ said Augustus, laughing a little forcedly.

‘Kicks it down occasionally, doesn’t he?’

‘Yes; it’s owing to an attack of bronchitis he once had as a boy,’ said Augustus, rather feebly.

‘You know, Gus, I shouldn’t dream of saying such a thing of your grandfather, but, don’t you see, he’s going to be *mine* too. All the same though, I’m too impulsive and given to saying whatever comes uppermost in my head. I’m rather too

fond of rushing at my fences. You didn't think it rude of me, did you? I'm afraid you did.'

'Rude, Mabel! You *couldn't* be rude to me. I *couldn't* think anything you said or did rude. I could be a thorough Christian with you, Mabel. If you were to slap me on one cheek, I could turn the other to you with the greatest willingness and pleasure in life.'

'You don't, however, extend that beautiful spirit of forgiveness to ears apparently; for I recollect on a certain occasion when I gave you a box on the one ear, you showed no disposition whatever to turn the other.'

'Well, I suppose it must have escaped my memory at the moment. By Jove, it was a tinger!' said Augustus, laughingly rubbing his ear. 'But I recollect it made me respect and love you all the more.'

‘Thanks for the hint. I shall know now how to inculcate respect and love when you fall off in those two respects.’

‘That will never be, Mabel. I shall never—never ——’

‘Oh! come, Gus, don’t let’s have any lover’s vows. Somehow we’ve changed foxes. Let’s pick up the old scent. What’s this piece of composition you’ve to show me?’

On this Augustus again began to blush and stammer.

‘Gus, I do believe you’ve been writing poetry.’

Augustus did not deny the soft impeachment.

‘Yes, he has! Oh dear! oh dear! fancy Gus a poet!’

The idea was so exquisitely ludicrous to Lady Mabel that she stopped short, placed her hands to her sides, threw back her head, and laughed until the welkin rang.

‘Yes, the murder’s out ; it *was* poetry,’ said Gus, after having stood for some time contemplating his lady-love’s merriment with a smile which, though thoroughly good-natured, was also a little sheepish. ‘At least I suppose it’s poetry. At all events it’s meant for it.’

‘And what inspired your Muse, Gus?’

‘Why, you of course, Mabel. You’re enough to inspire any fellow’s Muse. I have been feeling for a long time the *cacoëthes scribendi*, but——’

‘The how much, Gus? Give it us in English. My classical education has been neglected.’

‘Well, it means the itch——’\*

‘Good gracious ! No, stick to the Latin,

\* I beg to inform my æsthetic reader—if such a one has persevered thus far—that Dryden, in the translation of one of Juvenal’s satires, renders the word *cacoëthes* as Mr. Augustus Moltbury did :

‘The curse of writing is an endless itch.’

Gus. It sounds better than the English translation. Well, and are you better now?

‘What a girl you are, Mabel, for chaffing a poor fellow! It means the inclination then for writing, but I was giving you the literal translation. Well, for a long time I have felt a sort of mysterious prompting to put my thoughts down in poetry, just by way of giving vent to my feelings, you know. But it wasn’t until last night that I came to the scratch.’

‘And a very natural thing too for you to do when you’ve got the *cacoëthes*,’ interpolated Lady Mabel. ‘I only wonder you didn’t do it before.’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’ laughed Gus, who was always immensely tickled by Lady Mabel’s wit. ‘That’s awfully good. Well, what brought me to the scratch was your saying last night when you were glancing over that

album of my mother's that you wondered whether I should ever be able to write poetry. Do you recollect that ?

‘Yes, but I little thought that in making such a simple remark I was giving you a leg up on to Pegasus. And what sort of a mount did you find him, eh, Gus ? A bit of a jibber with you up, I should think, isn't he ? And rather a stiff and close country with a good many blind ditches and rotten banks, I should think you found the realm of poetry, didn't you, Gus ?’

‘Well, I don't know. I think I got over my fences pretty well after all,’ said Augustus, not without a certain amount of pride. ‘I can't say that the pace, though, was particularly quick. You see one gets pounded for a time at the end of every line ; particularly when there's only one word in the English language worth rhyming to.’

‘And pray what word’s that, Gus?’

‘Why Mabel, of course.’

‘Well, hand over the composition, and let me judge for myself.’

‘Well, there it is. But wait a bit, Mabel. While you read it I’ll go and do the polite to the duke; hope he’s none the worse for his unusual dissipation last night, and all that sort of thing. Here, don’t look at it until I’m off.’

‘All right, Gus. Dear me! what an improvement it would be if all young men took to writing poetry. It seems to make them quite bashful.’

Augustus hurried off, but instead of carrying out his expressed intention of doing the polite to the duke, he worked round under cover of the trees, until from behind a friendly beech he commanded a view of Lady Mabel during her perusal of his effusions.

‘Oh! I say, she’s laughing like anything,’ said Augustas, peering round the tree with rather a sheepish countenance.

Let us peep over Lady Mabel’s shoulder, and read the couplet which had excited her merriment :

‘I could climb right up to the top of a gable,  
And then jump off for the sake of my Mabel.’

‘Well, come, that’s devotion, at all events, and a great deal of it in a very little poetry,’ said Lady Mabel, laughing. ‘Poor Gus! Now, let’s see what’s the next thing in the programme :

“‘If I sunk in the sea the whole length of a cable,  
Each bubble I’d send up would burst with ‘oh, Mabel!’”

Oh! come, he’s burst out that time into something more brilliant. That’s a decided improvement. There’s quite the spirit of poetry somewhere there. The jump off the top of the gable was just a



preliminary canter, or rather I should say flight. Let's see, though. That couplet rather suggests a reply on my part. This sort of thing :

‘ AUGUSTUS.

“ If I sunk in the sea the whole length of a cable,  
Each bubble I'd send up would burst with ‘ Oh Mabel ! ’ ”

‘ MABEL.

If beside you I sunk, when *my* bubbles went squash,  
*Their* little explosions would sound like “ Oh, bosh ! ”

However, I shan't communicate that little addition to Gus. What's his next little flutter ?

“ I must try very hard to smell of the stable,  
For I know that will please my sweet pretty Mabel. ”

Well, that's obliging and flattering, but that's about all you can say of it. Hold up, old Pegasus ! I consider you were going very dicky that journey. Ah ! here Gus shoves him at a double this time.

I wonder how he'll get over. I expect he'll come an awful cropper :

“My love is a paradox quite ;  
For, though it may sound like a fable,  
She can say, and by Jingo she's right !  
Though a daughter of Eve I am (M) Abel.”

Well done, Gus ! Bravo, old fellow !  
That's awfully good for you. Why, that  
must have taken you at least two hours.  
No wonder you looked seedy this morning.  
This *toujours* Mabel, however, becomes a  
little monotonous. Poor Gus ! Here's  
another double :

“The confusion of tongues which so suddenly fell  
On the numerous builders of Babel,  
Is nothing to mine when I struggle to tell  
All the love that I feel for my Mabel.”

Good again ! 'Pon my word, Gus isn't  
half such a fool as he looks, after all. I'm  
afraid all this wear and tear of his mind

ing Tom, eh? But I spotted you pretty sharp, didn't I, eh?

As each 'Eh?' was emphasized with a prod in the ribs from Lady Mabel's walking-stick, and as Augustus was very ticklish, the operation soon reduced him to a state of partial collapse, in which he feebly confessed he had been nervously watching her all the time she had been reading.

'Well, and what did you think of them, Mabel, eh?' he asked.

'Capital, Gus. I really didn't think you were half so clever. Now, was it all out of your own head?'

'Yes, 'pon my solemn *Davy*, it was,' said Gus, proudly; 'and what's more, there was a lot besides that I wrote, but, you see, being new to the business, I didn't quite know my own powers.'

There is no knowing how many bright gems Augustus may have thus thrown

will tell fearfully on him, though. Here we are at the last fence :

‘ “ If drinking her health would be good for my Mabel, My station in life would be—*under the table !* ”

Ha, ha, ha ! Thank you, Gus—thank you kindly, old fellow. But as far as my health is concerned you may keep your head and shoulders above the mahogany. Your long legs under it will be quite enough for me.’

Here, on looking round, she caught sight of Augustus’ head peering from behind the trunk of a tree. With a ringing and most artistic view holloa, she started off, as nimbly as a young fawn, and very soon—to borrow her own phraseology—ran into her fox.

‘ So that’s your little game, is it, eh ? That’s the way you go to do the polite to the duke, is it, eh ? Do you call that running straight, eh ? Doing a sort of Peep-

ing Tom, eh? But I spotted you pretty sharp, didn't I, eh?

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There is no knowing how many bright gems Augustus may have thus thrown

away. However, he got quite enough praise to embolden him to press Lady Mabel on the delicate and tender subject of 'naming the day.' Eventually Gus succeeded.

'But recollect, Gus, it is to be a Pink Wedding,' said Lady Mabel. 'I shouldn't feel half married otherwise.'

'A Pink Wedding!' exclaimed the beatified Augustus. 'A Rainbow Wedding, if you like, darling Mabel. Any sort of a wedding, as long as it is a wedding and OURS!'



## CHAPTER XI.

### GREAT SPORTING EVENT.

**I** THINK there is an old song called ‘Haste to the Wedding.’ Whether there is or not, let us follow the advice contained in that title. To do so, it will be necessary not only to take time by the forelock, but also to send him flying—*tempus fugit*—into the middle of the next month. By this means we at once arrive at the dull grey mid-November morning on which Lady Mabel Slessinger and Mr. Augustus Moltbury are to be joined together in holy matrimony.

Some of my readers may not know that a Pink Wedding is, in other words, a Hunting Wedding; that is to say, as much as possible of the fox-hunting element, in the way of dress and other accessories, is introduced into the occasion. It was going to be an enormous affair. Not only were Hurstenholme and Larchington full to overflowing, but many of the neighbouring country houses were also filled with guests assembled from all quarters of the United Kingdom to assist in the nuptial celebration.

The ceremony was to have been performed in the private chapel at Larchington, but as the number of the guests swelled, the scene of the operation was transferred to the bride's parish church, which was situated about midway between the two estates of Hurstenholme and Larchington, and which, not a year before,



had been considerably enlarged at Mr. Moltbury's expense.

The hour of *rendezvous* at the church was fixed for eleven—thus early, as the duke's hounds were to meet at Larchington at one o'clock ; and by a quarter past ten Mr. Moltbury, Mrs. Moltbury, and Violet—who was of course one of the bridesmaids—together with the remainder of the Hurstenholme contingent, had started. Augustus was to leave later on, accompanied by his 'best man.' Maulverer's absence abroad prevented his figuring in this position, much to the regret of Mr. Moltbury. However, his place was very conscientiously filled by one of Augustus' brother-officers. This young gentleman apparently took a very serious view of the matter. He had never acted in the capacity before, and the prevailing idea of his mind seemed to be that he had

got Augustus in custody, and was responsible for his safe-keeping. The demeanour of Augustus himself rather lent itself to this supposition. He was exceedingly nervous, and notwithstanding all his efforts to appear at his ease, he could not help looking like a criminal. Altogether his feelings were very much those of Falstaff just before the battle of Shrewsbury. When on the eve of starting, he managed for a few moments to elude the vigilance of his keeper, and found his footsteps mysteriously guided by some magnet of attraction to the dining-room, where Scandringham was engaged in some official duties.

‘I say, Scandringham, you couldn’t get me a little brandy and soda, could you?’

This is the sort of roundabout negative form people generally employ when making

a request which they are not altogether proud of. 'I suppose it wouldn't be convenient for you to let me have,' etc, is the usual way of soliciting a small loan. It is in this form, too, that people generally appeal to strangers for any trifling little accommodation. 'You don't happen to have such a thing as a light about you, have you, sir?' It is over-politeness resulting from slight nervousness.

'Certainly, sir,' replied Scandringham, in answer to Augustus' mildly-couched request.

'You were never married, were you, Scandringham?' asked Augustus, who, in his anxious frame of mind, was very eager for little crumbs of encouragement, no matter where he picked them up.

'No, sir,' replied Scandringham, with just a delicate shade of self-congratulation in his tones, as he unfastened the wire.

‘Wha — what’s *your* opinion of matrimony, Scandringham?’

‘Well, sir,’ said Scandringham, as, with his head on one side and his right thumb on the cork, he regarded Augustus fixedly, ‘I think I can perhaps convey my reply to you, sir, without putting it into words.’

Here Scandringham liberated the cork and emptied the foaming liquid into the tumbler.

‘There, sir, perhaps you will read my reply to your question in that?’

‘No, I can’t.’

‘Effervescent, sir—effervescent, I should imagine. Very sparkling at first, and very flat afterwards.’

We learn from perhaps the keenest observer of nature who ever lived that there are ‘tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones.’ But

surely none but a butler could have drawn an illustration of matrimony from a bottle of soda-water.

Having delivered himself of what may be termed this professional opinion, Scandringham betook himself to his duties with that staid composure which nothing could ruffle, while Augustus chewed the cud of reflection at the same time that he drained the cup of stimulation.

Suddenly a face, wearing an expression of anxiety which, however, was at once dissipated by the sight of Augustus, peeped in at the door, and then a young man to whom the face belonged entered hurriedly.

‘Come, I say, Moltbury,’ he remarked reproachfully, not to say angrily, ‘you shouldn’t, you know. You shouldn’t give a fellow the slip like this. I didn’t know what had become of you.’

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‘ I only just came in here for——’

‘ Yes, but you shouldn’t, you know, Moltbury, without letting me know. Come along, it’s time to be off. It won’t do for *me* to be late.’

The speaker was of course the ‘ best man ’ already mentioned. Both young men were in pink. In Augustus’ case, I may say it was the pink of perfection. He was the hunting exquisite of the first water. His boots were masterpieces. Polished jet could not surpass the refulgence of their glossy surfaces, and the delicate yet rich cream-colour of their tops might have made an Alderney cow jealous and her offspring ravenous. To have added one touch more of varnish to their black surface would have been to gild refined gold, and the slightest effort to improve the chaste purity of the tops would have been to paint the lily. His spurs were about

four inches long, and, according to the Meltonian orthodoxy of dress and hard riding, set on so high up as to give his figure an extra allowance of ankles at the expense of his calves. Immediately above the chaste tops were his knee-bows, objects of greater care and trouble than even Beau Brummel's white ties had ever been.

In vain had Augustus' valet striven that morning to give his master satisfaction on this important point, and eventually it had been Violet's little fingers that had reached the high standard of excellence required by Augustus in this particular. His leathers rivalled the driven snow in whiteness. His coat was fresh from Poole's. In the button-hole thereof was a sprig of stephanotis. His crystal fox-head pin was set in the midst of a flashing circle of diamonds. His hat, fresh from a silver-papered incar-

ceration in a bandbox, was as shiny as his boots, and with a highly poetical turn of mind—brim, I mean. The confusion of ideas when dealing with so lofty a subject is natural. In short, the hat was the finishing touch which fitly crowned the work; and what more can be said than that, I should like to know?

On arriving at the church the bridegroom and his friend found a mighty concourse of people, who cheered the former until he was nearly as red in the face as his coat. On the doorstep was a dazzling array of hunting-men in scarlet, awaiting the arrival of the principals. From these Nimrods—most of them constellations of the hunting firmament—Augustus received a very hearty greeting. During his brief campaign at Melton, the latter half of the preceding season, he had been fairly popular. His stud had been all that money could



make it, and though he may not have been a skilful rider to hounds, he was at all events a plucky one, which covers a multitude of sins, and it had been owing to no fault of his that he had not broken his neck.

Men from all parts had given up a day or so with their own packs to render the homage of their presence to so brilliant and lovely an ornament of the hunting field as Lady Mabel Slessinger. There were Pytchley men, distinguishable by their white coat-collars, and Cheshire men by their green collars, and there was a strong muster of Meltonians in plain pink. There even was that keen, well-known and sporting young aide-de-camp, who had come all the way from Bangalore in the East Indies for two months in Leicestershire, which in his opinion was only another name for Elysium, and who had this day given up a run with the Quorn—the greatest sacrifice he can think

of—for the purpose of being present on the occasion. In the afternoon, however, he will manage to console himself tolerably well with the duke's hounds. Amongst the gorgeous throng was Mr. Mark Slessinger, M.F.H., and Captain Jack Slessinger. Augustus' keeper now redoubled his vigilance and stuck to his charge like a leech.

‘Mind he doesn't give you the slip, old fellow,’ observed a red-coated friend in playful allusion to the gaoler-like mien of the best man.

‘No fear ; I'll run him in all right,’ was the reply, delivered with a grimness which raised a general laugh, whereat the best man shook his head doggedly, as much as to tell them he was not going to be caught by chaff or thrown off his guard either by it.

A roar of excitement from the crowd and the appearance of the duke's livery above the sea of heads now announced the

approach of the bridal party, and Augustus became very pale, at which his keeper debated for some moments in his own mind whether he had better not collar him.

‘We had better go inside and wait there,’ said Augustus, with a nervous cough behind his hand.

‘Well, perhaps it would be safer,’ said the custodian.

The interior of the building was crammed, and as Augustus, with his *fidus Achates* close at his elbow, walked up the aisle, he had to run the gauntlet of countless curious eyes, amidst a galling fire of whispers as audible as they were personal. ‘Oh, don’t he look genteel!’—‘My eye, ’Arry! just spot them boots!’—‘And the ’at!’—‘Ain’t his hair brushed nice, just!’—‘Looks a bit pale, don’t he?’—‘So’d you, if you was going to be turned off.’—‘He, he, he!’—‘Poor dear!’—‘So young too!’ and so on.

Of course all this was accompanied with much grinning. People with a strangely perverted sense of the fitness of things always will look upon a marriage—about the least laughable transaction in the life of man or woman—as something to be grinned at. There were three sorts of grin—the grin commiserative of those who were married ; the grin envious of those who wanted to be ; and the grin solely, wholly, and objectionably derisive.

As Augustus walked up the aisle he gradually got clear of this class, whose manners had not that repose which stamped the caste of those in the seats of honour in front. About the first half-dozen rows of pews had been reserved for those invited to witness the ceremony, and even in these more aristocratic regions every eye was turned on the bridegroom ; but there was

little whispering; and what there was could not be heard by the subject of it.

In the very front pew of all were Mr. and Mrs. Moltbury, and chatting to them was the Duke of Fotheringay, in a wheeled chair drawn up close alongside. An acute attack of the gout had completely deprived him of the use of his lower limbs; but gout or no gout, he had been determined on giving away his daughter himself, and if, as he himself said, he could not do it on his feet, he'd do it on wheels.

Both he and Mrs. Moltbury appeared in the gorgeous panoply of fox-hunting. It is many years since the former has worn what he calls 'that glorious bit of pink.'

What did *not* appear of the duke was rather more mildly clad. Under the apron of his chair were a couple of list shoes instead of a pair of top-boots. Talking of gout, old Mr. Moltbury was not present. He had

been pressed to attend, but the excitement he feared would have been too much for him, and so he had wisely stayed at home.

In the pews appropriated to the guests the scarlet-coats here and there amongst the light-coloured garments, the feathers and the lace of the ladies, looked like huge poppies in a field of waving corn.

Augustus shook hands with his future father-in-law, while Mr. and Mrs. Molt-bury gazed with glistening eyes on their son. A commotion is heard at the door, and every head is turned in that direction. Augustus' heart beats against his ribs like a hammer.

'She is coming, my dove, my dear ;  
She is coming, my life, my fate !'

Mingling with the red-coats and the shining boots, he sees a confused mass of white fabric—beautiful, floating, diapho-

nous. Out of this chaos order is at length evolved as the bride, on her brother's arm, advances, followed by a fair bevy of maids. There are twelve of these attendant nymphs, and of course our dear little friend Violet is one, and the fairest one, too !

I feel that my lady readers now expect to hear something of the bridesmaids' dresses. I am sorry to disappoint them. I am unequal to the task. 'Description is my forte,' said Byron. 'Dress-description is *not* mine,' say I. I will, however, candidly admit to my fair reader that I *did* make the attempt, but on becoming a little confused by details, I took a momentary refuge in generalities, and stated that the 'bodices were embellished with the usual trimmings.' This unfortunate expression 'the usual trimmings,' this luckless *escapade* of my pen, so fatally, so bathetically suggested

Mr. Weller's invitation from the Bath footmen,\* as to bring my soaring spirit down like a blue-rock before the unerring aim of a Hurlingham hero. 'And when I fell, I fell like Lucifer, never to hope again' for distinction in this exalted branch of descriptive writing. I daresay I may have thrown away a chance in erasing what I *had* written; for

'Writers lose half the praise they would have got,  
Were it but known what they discreetly blot.'

There was one article of adornment, however, which I will describe, and that was the locket, the gift of the bridegroom, which each bridesmaid wore. On a dull gold ground was a raised fox's head with two

\* 'A select company of the Bath footmen present their compliments to Mr. Weller, and request the pleasure of his company this evening to a friendly swarry, consisting of a boiled leg of mutton with the usual trimmings. The swarry to be on table at half-past nine o'clock punctually.'



ruby eyes. Under this were crossed two brushes, also in raised gold, and under that again the monogram of the bride and bridegroom were interwoven in a flashing, scintillating coruscation of precious stones. The reverse side was likewise brilliant with gems; and inside were the portraits of the bride and bridegroom equipped for the chase.

Young Lord William Slessinger's idea of conducting his sister to the Hymeneal altar is to drag her there as fast as he can; but a whispered, 'For goodness' sake, Billy, put the break on,' from Lady Mabel has the desired effect. He sports his maiden pink for the occasion, and that is rather a greater event in his eyes than the marriage itself. Lady Mabel's colour has quite forsaken her cheeks, and with all her usual nerve and assurance, she is now evidently agitated.

The steps of the altar are reached ; Augustus, his adhesive friend by his side, is directed, by signal from one of the officiating clergymen, to take his place on the bride's right ; Mr. and Mrs. Moltbury, together with most of the other bidden guests, leave their pews and stand round ; the duke's chair is drawn close to the altar rails ; and the red-coated throng of men crowd round as best they can. On the outskirts are the duke's huntsman and his whips, everything about them spick and span from cap to spur. It has been by Lady Mabel's special desire that they are present. The ceremony would have been incomplete without them.

A bishop officiates, and five other divines of lower degree assist.

' Well, *that* knot ought to be tied pretty tight, anyhow,' whispers a scarlet-coated gentleman behind his hand to a brother of

the brush (the vulpine, not the artistic brush).

‘Don’t know; may be a case of too many cooks,’ returns the other, using his stiff and shiny hat wherewith to direct and confine his reply to his interlocutor’s ear.

‘By the way,’ whispers a dapper-looking little Meltonian, who has overheard the first speaker’s *sotto voce* remark, ‘what is the pattern, I wonder, of this wonderful nuptial knot one hears so much about?’

‘A slip-knot, I should think,’ replies his friend.

‘Except when the Queen’s Proctor intervenes and reeves the end of the rope through a block,’ says a noble sportsman who hunts all the winter and yachts all the summer.

‘Not a bit of it; it’s a true lover’s knot of course,’ says little Sir Claude Spoonington, who has just got engaged.

‘More like a hangman’s hitch,’ mutters a

misogamist in top-boots, gently over his shoulder. The impressive tones of the bishop here cut short further speculation on this knotty point.

The service is not choral. That would have been too lengthy, and would have interfered with the meet at one o'clock. As the ceremony proceeds the solemnity of the bishop's tones and words takes hold of even the most thoughtless, and men who have almost forgotten what the inside of a church looks like find themselves listening with devout interest. Even the misogynist gradually assumes an air of respectful and deep attention. Even that brilliant horseman, Captain Blechynden, who unfortunately is as deaf as one of the posts which with their connecting rails he is in the habit of charging so gallantly, becomes strangely impressed by the unusually solemn expressions he sees on the faces of his

friends around. Feeling he must be missing a great deal, he takes a prayer-book from an adjacent pew to read the 'Regulations,' as he says, and opening the book in the wrong place, proceeds to offer up in an audible murmur a thanksgiving for his recent deliverance from a danger which, according to an immutable law of nature, he can never incur.

In little more than ten minutes, Augustus and Mabel Moltbury are man and wife; and as the bishop concludes his blessing with a supplication that they may so live together in this life that in the world to come they may have life everlasting, Mr. Moltbury's fervid 'Amen' is heard by all. And as he utters the word, never probably in all his days has he sent up a more earnest prayer to the throne of his Maker.

Jack Slessinger stands in the outer circle

of men, leaning against a pillar. His face is very white, and as he bites his moustache, he mutters bitterly :

‘I never knew how much I loved her until now, when I feel I’ve lost her for ever.’

After the usual amount of delay caused by the necessary signing of the register, the bridal procession is soon formed, all the groomsmen having been already told off to their respective bridesmaids, and down the aisle they go, while the organ peals forth the ‘Wedding March.’

Augustus’ face, instead of being a pale green, as it was when he went up the aisle, is now a warm red, and he looks transcendently proud and happy with his lovely young wife on his arm.

‘I say, old boy, I’d no idea it was such a solemn piece of business as that,’ says a good-looking young fox-hunter, who bears

the evil reputation of being a lady-killer of a highly dangerous nature, as he links his arm through that of an intimate friend. 'I don't know how, after all that hard swearing about cherishing and loving and sticking to each other through thick and thin, they manage to go wrong as they do.'



## CHAPTER XII.

GONE AWAY !

**B**OY bells, the strains of a volunteer band, banners floating, crowds cheering, school children shrilly singing, are the salient features of the drive back to Larchington.

The great attraction before the breakfast, while the company is gradually swelling to a multitudinous dimension, is the display of wedding presents. They are, of course, numerous, and in most instances magnificent. Those coming



under the head, of 'interesting' are : A service of plate, presented by the Larchington tenantry ; a set of diamond ornaments, by the Hurstenholme tenantry ; a silver-and-china five o'clock tea-service, from the Larchington household ; a turquoise-enamel dessert-service, from the Hurstenholme household ; a couple of large silver foxes' heads as drinking flagons, from the huntsman and servants of the duke's hunt ; a pincushion from the girls of the Larchington school to their noble benefactress, Lady Mabel (she had once on a bolting horse ridden through their ranks, and sent half-a-dozen sprawling) ; a pen-wiper from the boys of the Hurstenholme school to their kind benefactor, Augustus Moltbury, Esquire (he had once, when out rabbit-shooting, peppered one of them accidentally, but smartly). Then there was a splendid dinner-table centre-piece for

fruit and flowers, from Augustus' brother-officers; and last, though far from least, there was an Indian shawl, which elicited many expressions of loyalty from the beholders.

The breakfast was of course superb. There was to have been no speech-making, but after a few glasses of champagne the duke proposed the healths of the bride and bridegroom.

'May they ever,' said his sporting grace, 'take their fences of life side by side without any jealousy or ill-feeling.' (Hear, hear.) 'And if the wire of underhand slander, or the rotten banks of adversity ever imperil their happiness, may mutual trust and help carry them safely through all.' (Hear, hear.) 'May the line which that stout fox Destiny will take them be all grass and no plough.'

This was received with three cheers and

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a ringing view holloa, the time being given by Jack Slessinger, who seemed to be in even more uproarious spirits than usual.

Then Augustus rose to return thanks. At the start he was very confused and incoherent.

‘I dare say you recollect, my dear bishop,’ whispered Mr. Moltbury to that dignitary, near whom he sat, ‘Cicero’s remark, that he considered it a bad sign in an orator not to appear confused at the commencement of a speech, and that he himself, “accustomed as he was to public speaking,” never began one without considerable trepidation.’

Augustus’ speech, if the few disjointed platitudes he delivered could be called a speech, was of course much applauded ; and here the oratory on the occasion should have ceased, but having been once started, the company were not likely, with such a

speaker in their midst as Mr. Moltbury, to allow him to rest quietly on his oars.

‘Isn’t Mr. Moltbury going to speak?’ was a question so often put to the duke, and there seemed such a general anxiety to hear him, that at last his grace wrote with a pencil on the back of a *menu* card: ‘My dear Moltbury, *do* give us a speech. Everyone is as keen as pepper about it. Yours ever, F.’; and sent it round by a servant.

Of course Mr. Moltbury acceded to the request. The fountain of his oratory was never dry or even low; and for about ten minutes he enchained the attention of all hearers. The rich full-volumed voice, the graceful fluency of speech, the goodly presence, and the thorough self-possession of the man rendered him something to be looked at, as well as to be listened to, and when he finished he left his hearers wishing for more. On these occasions people applaud

at the termination of a speech more in the secret joy of their heart that it is over than for anything else, but as Mr. Moltbury sat down the applause was as hearty as it was loud.

It was fortunate that he concluded when he did, for barely had the applause subsided when a tongue, possessing for the majority present even a greater magic than Mr. Moltbury's, gave forth a note which set the whole table in confusion.

‘Bless my soul! the hounds are here,’ said the duke.

Lady Mabel and all the company rose, and there was a general move towards the windows. The sight was worth looking at. In the foreground on the lawn were the dogs with the huntsman and whips, while in all directions, as far as the eye could see across the park, horsemen of all degrees, singly and in groups, were converging towards the

centre of attraction to swell the throng, mounted and on foot, which had already assembled at the trysting-place. Vehicles of all descriptions filled up the broad roadway for several hundred yards, while scattered over the grassy expanse were enough led horses and mounted grooms to form a strong squadron of cavalry with remounts complete ; and yet the cry was still ‘They come!’

After gazing on the animated scene for some moments the ladies adjourned to the drawing-room, with the exception of Lady Mabel Moltbury who retired to don her travelling costume.

The banqueting-hall is now thrown open to all comers ; the champagne flows like water, and such a scene of feasting ensues as ancient Larchington, celebrated from time immemorial for its open-handed hospitality, has probably never before seen.

A select group are gathered round the duke's chair, which has been wheeled to a window, through which he gazes very wistfully at horse and at hound.

Jack Slessinger—‘that noisy dog Jack,’ as the duke calls him, with more regard than reprobation in his tones—is the life and soul of the entertainment. He is now busy amongst his *confrères* organising some champagne - inspired farewell ceremony, with which to give additional *éclat* to the bride's departure from her home. He seemed quite beside himself with delight, and was, in short, rather too demonstrative and noisy even for him. It is thus when we try to wear our hearts on our sleeves, to be what we are not, that we generally o'erleap ourselves. The shy man often says and does things which the man of cool assurance would never dream of. Cowardice sometimes rushes into a danger from which

Valour would shrink. An aching heart often laughs the loudest.

Half an hour soon passes away, and Lady Mabel Moltbury makes her appearance in the drawing-room, looking, if possible, more charming than ever in her travelling-dress. Augustus soon follows in a shooting-suit, and by this time the moment of departure has arrived. As the two, escorted by a numerous assemblage, descend the grand staircase, the fine old hall presents a striking spectacle.

From the foot of the staircase to the door, a distance of about fifteen yards, two rows of men in scarlet are drawn up, facing each other, with military precision. Indeed, there is a strong military leaven in the ranks, and Jack Slessinger has had little difficulty in drawing up his forces. Each man holds his hat in his left hand and his hunting-crop in his right. Down



this scarlet lane is; of course, Lady Mabel's path. As she reaches the head of the double rank, every man raises his right arm, hunting-crops are crossed over the centre, handles meeting, thongs doubled in hand, and under this arch of stalwart right arms and hunting-crops Lady Mabel walks with a beaming smile and glistening eye.\* Augustus follows a few paces behind, provoking as he goes along a great deal of unsteadiness in the ranks. Most of the men forming the demonstration are personal friends of his, and they manifest their friendly feelings by poking him in the ribs with the handles of their whips, and Augustus, amidst a great peal of good-humoured laughter, curvets down the ranks.

\* Captain Jack Slessinger evidently borrowed this idea from a masonic ceremony, termed, I believe, 'The Arch of Steel,' which is formed by knights-templars crossing their swords.

On gaining the terrace, another delicate little attention awaits Lady Mabel. The hounds, with the huntsman and whips on foot, are waiting for her close to the doorway.

‘I thought you’d like to have a last talk with them, my lady,’ says the hard-looking grizzled old huntsman, cap in hand, as he proffers a little hunting-crop, which from her childhood has always hung over his chimney-piece, ready for her ladyship, and no one else, whenever she should chance to visit the kennels.

Lady Mabel takes the small hunting-crop, with which to repress any too violent ebullitions of joy on the part of her four-footed friends, amongst whom she is immensely popular, and steps into their midst, regardless of the damage to the dainty travelling-dress inflicted by paws and noses. She is as great a proficient at what is called dog-language as the hunts-

man himself, but she confines herself to just patting those nearest to her; and as she stoops down she drops a tear on the up-turned face of an old hound, who is looking straight into her eyes with a sad, wistful, loving expression, as if saying to her, 'I'm thinking of that time when you helped to nurse me after I staked myself.'

'There, thank you, Blenkinsop; best of friends must part,' she says, as she hands the small whip back to the huntsman.

'It will always be hung up in the old place, ready for you, my lady,' he says.

'Thank you, thank you! Now, good-bye. I hope you'll have a good run this afternoon.'

'Good-bye, my lady,' he says, as he hurriedly shifts his hunting-crop into his left hand in order to shake with a respectful demeanour the little hand which she holds out to him.

‘ Good-bye, George. ‘ Good-bye, Tom.’

‘ Good-bye, my lady,’ respond each of the whips, touching their foreheads, for their caps are in their hands. They have both been born and bred on the estate.

The old duke has been brought down to the terrace in his chair, in order that he may take part in the proceedings up to the very last ; and Lady Mabel, before stepping into the carriage, gives him a hug and a kiss, which draw the tears from his eyes.

Then Augustus wishes his father-in-law ‘ Good-bye.’

‘ Good-bye, Augustus,’ says the duke, with great emotion. ‘ God bless you both ! Don’t pull her or push her at her fences, my boy. Give her her head and her own time, and she’ll run straight and clever. If you attempt to put a martingale on her, she’ll go badly. A plain snaffle, my boy,

a plain snaffle. That's my tip. God bless you !'

With these words the duke is much overcome and wipes his eyes. The ducal tears are not of the first water. I should assay them at about eighteen carats fine ; that is, out of twenty-four parts there are eighteen pure grief and six alloy. If I were pressed to state what the alloy was I should say, champagne. He is an old man, for the duke married very late in life, at least late for matrimony, and with the twinges of gout constantly harassing him the whole morning, he has been obliged to keep himself up to the mark.

The last shake of the hand has been given, and a loving hearty shake it has been between father and son ; Augustus takes his seat in the open carriage beside his wife ; and off they go amidst such a screaming of view holloas as must have

startled every fox within three miles and made him think with a palpitating heart, 'Good gracious! I wonder if they're alluding to me!'

For the first hundred yards they drive through a lane of vehicles and horsemen, the latter waving their hats and cheering lustily. As they drive round a bend of the avenue, Lady Mabel stands up in the carriage and looks back. The last thing she sees of that memorable morning's doings is Jack Slessinger, with his hat off, and with his hand up to the side of his mouth, screaming out at the top of his voice:

'Go-o-o-ne away!'

The 'happy pair' are to spend their honeymoon in the north, at the seat of a nobleman who has placed it at their disposal for that romantic purpose; and a special train is engaged to carry them

northward. At the station, which is gorgeous with bunting and crimson drugget, they are received by the stationmaster, who sports an enormous favour on his breast. The special is ready with her steam up, but in consequence of a goods train having misbehaved herself in some way, as goods trains seem so often to do, the line is blocked, and fully half an hour elapses before it is telegraphed clear.

Away they go at last! They are rattling along at full speed, when suddenly Lady Mabel jumps up excitedly and thrusts her head out of the window. In a field alongside the line the duke's hounds are running *ventre à terre* and *nez à terre* as well. There is only one man up with them, and that one man is Jack Slessinger! The remainder of the field can be seen tailing away in the distance, a riderless horse here and there careering about. As far as

being 'in it' is concerned, Jack Slessinger is huntsman, whip, and field all in one. He is having it all to himself.

'Oh, isn't that Jack a grand fellow !' says Lady Mabel, with glowing cheeks and sparkling eyes. 'Isn't he, Gus ?'

'Yes,' says Augustus, not quite so enthusiastically.

Ahead of the hounds is a fearfully formidable 'bullfinch,' but through it they all manage to scramble and take up the pace as hard as ever on the other side.

'He's never going to ride at *that* !' exclaims Lady Mabel ; and in her excitement she screams out, 'Hold hard, Jack ! Don't ride at it ! It's as black as night !'

But Jack Slessinger neither hears nor heeds her, and charges the obstacle at racing pace.

'He's riding for a fall !' she gasps.

To crash through the thick high hedge



he was riding at would have required a horse up to sixteen stone and with sixteen stone up; and as well as being a lightweight himself, Jack Slessinger's mount this day happens to be a light but wiry little mare. She rises pluckily at it, but it is not pluck the pair want (they have plenty of that, and to spare); it is weight. They certainly get through, but horse and rider are turned clean over, Jack underneath.

In one horrible flash the whole scene is photographed, so to speak, on her brain, even down to the little *minutia* of Jack's white favour fluttering in the hedge, which has snatched it from his breast.

'O, God, he's killed!' screams Lady Mabel, as, with her hands up to her white face, she falls back into Augustus' arms.

With another scream the engine plunges into a black tunnel, and with a roar and a rattle they rush on through the darkness.



## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE YOUNG COUPLE.

**W**HEN Hernando Cortés, the famous conqueror of Mexico, was marching through Honduras, he was forced to leave a sick horse behind him with a tribe of friendly Indians, whose knowledge of horseflesh was limited. They regarded it with the greatest veneration, adorned it with garlands of flowers, and tried to tempt its appetite with savoury messes of poultry. In spite of all this kindness, however, the animal became

worse, wasted away, and died. It is thus that many of us often, with the very best and kindest of intentions, minister to a mind diseased.

Poor little Violet is in my mind's eye as I now write. She has not been much before the reader lately, but my pen has been engaged with scenes in which she was not calculated to shine. Her true and gentle spirit was still smarting with the pain of love's wound. Reginald Mauleverer was as dear to her as ever. Hers was not a nature

‘To love again and be again undone.’

That resource of unrequited affection was denied her. With her, love was love for evermore. She wore her crown of sorrow sweetly and patiently. Of course, too, she kept her secret, and ‘let concealment, like a worm i' the bud, feed on her damask cheek.’

The consequence was the physicians were called in, and they prescribed for her. Poor little thing! 'she never told her love;' and they dosed her with cod-liver oil!

And now, my dear young lady friends, what is the moral of that? (For this is a book with not only a moral, but with a continuous under-current of morals, which only require a little diving below the surface to be brought to light.) What is the moral of that, I say? Why; *always* tell your love. Be particularly communicative regarding it; unless, that is to say, Dr. de Jongh is the Moët et Chandon of your tastes.

That this treatment was about as beneficial to Violet's complaint as the savoury messes of poultry were to Hernando Cortés' sick horse may be easily imagined, and she became a cause of much anxiety to her parents. Her old grandfather also noticed

the change that had come over his 'little heart o' gold,' as he so fondly called her, and, strange to say, he was the only one who guessed the cause. With a tender and loving consideration for her, however, he kept his discovery to himself, though when in conversation with his daughter and her husband concerning Violet's delicate state of health, he could not in his indignation forbear throwing out dark hints about some one not being the clean potato.

'Julia, my dear,' said Mr. Moltbury one day, just after the old man had delivered himself of this sentiment, and had then tottered off to the window, in a stertorous state of indignation against Mauleverer, 'your father has passed far beyond the prescribed limits of threescore and ten, and I much fear the secrets of his favourite metaphor's origin and precise meaning will be buried with him. I shall, however,

make one more effort" to elucidate the mystery.'

'Yes, it is very nearly as tiresome as your Horace,' said Mrs. Moltbury.

Mr. Moltbury did not notice this rejoinder, and followed the old man to the window.

'I think, my dear sir,' he blandly observed, 'that you dropped a remark about someone not being the clean potato. It is a charmingly concise expression, meaning as it does that—— eh?'

The old man was not to be caught. He closed one eye—indeed the completeness of the manœuvre was so thorough that we may say he hermetically sealed up one eye, smote the side of his nose with his forefinger, the performance going off with considerable *éclat*, and ejaculated 'Sprouts!'

'Oh, indeed,' said Mr. Moltbury. 'I think you remarked "sprouts"? Am I right?'

The old man, with one eye still tightly closed, tried to repeat the nasal part of the performance with even greater emphasis; but he just missed his nose and over-balanced himself.

‘Pray don’t be so emphatic, my dear sir,’ said Mr. Moltbury, as he steadied his rheumatic old relative on his feet. ‘You were good enough to remark “sprouts.” Now that at once throws a very strong light on the meaning of that charming little figure of speech, “quite the clean potato,” which I see now means nothing more nor less than——eh?’

Again Mr. Moltbury paused, in the expectation that the old man would be entrapped into divulging the mystery, and again was he foiled. His aged relative, with great caution this time, placed his forefinger gently on the side of his nose, and still taking a monocular view of the

questioner, articulated, 'Brussels!' and then, bursting forth into a rapid succession of chuckles, he hobbled out of the room, under the pleasing impression that he had got the best of the argument.

It was one of the hallucinations of his brain that Mr. Moltbury was no match for him in the polemical field—a hallucination that Mr. Moltbury, with the greatest good-humour, often purposely fostered.

'Brussels sprouts!' ruminated the last-named gentleman, as he watched the retreating form of the old man. 'Well, I have not received much change out of that transaction. Julia, my dear, I have heard of the language of flowers, but your esteemed father talks the language of vegetables. I must undergo a course of instruction from an intelligent market-gardener, before resuming the inquiry—— Ah, a letter from Gus!'



This last exclamation was uttered with considerable pleasure, as he took a letter from a salver handed to him by a servant.

‘Ah, short and sweet,’ observed Mr. Moltbury, glancing at the contents.

‘What does he say, Geoffrey?’

‘Well, he and Mabel are at last about to tear themselves away from the fascinations of Melton, and will be here within the next few days. The dear boy knows that I am at Hurstenholme for the Easter recess, and they have timed their visit accordingly.’

‘Well, considering they have been married for nearly five months, and that, with the exception of a flying visit at Christmas-time, we have seen nothing of them, I think it is high time that they gave us a little of their society. But doesn’t it occur to you, Geoffrey, as rather a significant coincidence that this charming

self-denial in giving up Melton for Hurstholme is simultaneous with the close of the hunting season ?’

‘Come, come, Julia, I think you are a little bitter on that point.’

‘No, I am not bitter, Geoffrey, but I do confess I think that to make hunting the guiding star of an existence, as Mabel does, is, to say the least of it, a pity.’

‘Well, since you put the case with such charming moderation I will, to a certain extent, join issue with you.. I do think it is a pity people cannot in these matters steer the happy middle course between Lord Chesterfield, who asked if men ever hunted twice, and our friend Mr. Mark Slessinger, whose sole reason for hunting six days a week is because he can’t hunt seven. But remember, Julia, the family traditions in which Mabel has been brought up. You cannot expect her to give them

up all at once. Later on, when Augustus embarks on a Parliamentary career, you will see her keen, intelligent nature will find a worthier field of interest.'

'By the way, have you heard anything of Captain Slessinger lately?'

'Yes, I forgot to mention to you that I saw in the *Field*, this very morning, that he is once more in the saddle and riding as hard as ever. He is also up at Melton, I see by the same paper.'

'Well, I'm glad to hear he's well again, poor fellow. But he's certain to kill himself some day soon.'

'Well, doing your utmost to break your neck six days out of every seven for about five months in the year is hardly conducive to longevity, I should imagine. He very nearly succeeded in terminating his existence on that eventful day. And how with concussion of the brain, a ricked spine, and

a broken collar bone he 'managed to fail, I don't know. He may thank Mabel's kind nursing for his recovery.'

'Yes, I always thought she made a great deal too much fuss over that.'

'My dear Julia, I don't think so. It would have been very unnatural had she made less. There was the man, as she thought, killed before her very eyes—her own cousin too, whom she had associated with from childhood, and who was exactly like a brother to her.'

'Yes, all the same I think that returning that very evening to Larchington, where he had been taken, was, under the circumstances, carrying cousinly and even brotherly concern to too great an extreme.'

'Well, never mind, Julia. Let the matter rest. It certainly was a horrible *contre-temps*, and I shall never hear of a "pink wedding" without a disagreeable feeling.'

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And now let us turn to Lady Mabel and consider her case ourselves. She had certainly married Augustus without love on her part, but still with sufficient liking to make her think she would get on easily with him, and that the course of their lives would perhaps run all the smoother for the absence of true love from one side. Perhaps, too, she believed in the French sophism—or what it is to be hoped is such—*il y a toujours l'un qui aime et l'autre qui est aimé*, and preferred to be the latter. He was good-natured, a devoted worshipper at her shrine, and better looking than the majority of young men. Not only was he the most devoted, but also the wealthiest suitor for her hand, and, with her, riches meant horses, and horses meant to a very great extent happiness. Then too, besides his wealth, there was a presumptive prospect, amount-

ing nearly to a certainty, of rank. For Mr. Moltbury's almost assured elevation to the peerage was one consideration amongst the many which, when Augustus was weighed in the balance with other suitors, helped to turn the scales in his favour. This was certainly not of so much gravity as with most women. For Lady Mabel would always be a duke's daughter, whatever her husband was; but still it was not overlooked in making up the grand total of his eligibility. That he was far from being strong-minded she saw at once; but this was rather a recommendation than otherwise.

It must not be supposed from this that she married Augustus with any vile notion that he was to be a *mari com-plaisant*, and Jack Slessinger a *cavalière servente*.

How fond we modest English are of clothing improprieties in a foreign garb, as

if the thing itself did not exist amongst ourselves, or was at best an exotic. We have all the sensitive delicacy of Flute the bellows-mender, who seemed anxious to mend morals as well as bellows, and who when poor Quince the carpenter is guilty of a slight *lapsus linguæ*, is down upon him with, 'You must say paragon; a paramour is, God bless us, a thing of nought.' Is this Voltaire's modesty, I wonder, '*La pudeur s'est enfuite des cœurs, et s'est réfugiée sur les lèvres*'? Let us hope not.

That, on accepting Augustus, Lady Mabel meant honestly to dismiss Jack Slessinger for ever from a lover's place in her heart, is fully evidenced by her conduct on the night when she tore up his photograph, and in a wild outburst of grief bade him farewell for ever as a lover. If any base thought had filled her mind of still harbouring this love while she was the

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wife of another, she would have taken matters more calmly. During the period of her engagement, she had striven to act up to the resolve she had made that night, and had so far succeeded as to lull herself into an idea that her future husband was becoming more and more to her, while the memory of her past love was waxing fainter and fainter. Slessinger's presence at the wedding was not pleasing to her; she had hoped he would have stayed away. However, no great mischief would have been done had it not been for that accursed catastrophe of the afternoon. When she saw him, as she thought, killed before her eyes, killed too in a way that was to her glorious while it was awful, all her old love came rushing back with irresistible force; and the subsequent nursing—most dangerous game to human hearts, that nursing and being nursed—had completely rendered her un-

able to brace her faltering spirit up to resist the insidious enemy. Her course was now a usual one under the circumstances. She deceived herself into thinking there was no harm in the constant hankering after her cousin's society. It was only platonic love. No sharper-fanged wolf ever wore sheep's clothing than this same so-called platonic love. However Lady Mabel only saw, or rather only *would* see, the soft white wool, and averted her gaze from the gleaming eyes and the sharp teeth beneath. She was living in a fool's paradise, meeting Jack Slessinger day after day, and laying the flattering unction to her soul that he was a dear friend, an affectionate cousin, and a charming companion. Rejoicing in this fancied sway over her heart, she actually was sufficiently self-duped to imagine that she was, as in duty bound, giving the lion's share of it to

her husband. In this way she was happy, and so was Augustus. For some time after the wedding the poor fellow's mind had been sadly perturbed 'twixt doting and doubting. A suspicion that the scream of agony, followed by the dead faint into his arms, on that afternoon, might have been more than cousinly solicitude would sometimes creep into his heart and turn his blood to water. But Augustus' heart was too full of love to afford the green-eyed monster sufficient working room. That he was not altogether comfortable in his mind when she and Jack Slessinger were sailing away in the hunting field while he was considerably in the rear was true, and he even went one day to the length of saying that he did not altogether approve of her hunting, which provoked a storm.

This storm had hardly cleared away from the matrimonial sky, beneath the horizon

of which the honeymoon had so recently sunk, when the two paid their promised visit to Hurstenholme.

Lady Mabel had a very high opinion of Mr. Moltbury. She not only liked, but she respected him. She knew, too, that he would be a most valuable ally in what she now saw might develop into rather a sharper struggle on the hunting question than she had supposed possible with such an antagonist as Augustus, and with her usual impetuosity she took the very first opportunity of going straight to the point.

‘Why, Mab,’ said Augustus, as she suddenly entered the smoking-room where he and his father were quietly smoking on the first evening of the visit, ‘not off to bed yet?’

‘No, I have just wished Mrs. Moltbury and Vi good-night, but I thought I’d just have a peep at you both. The fact is, Mr. Moltbury, I want to ask you a question.’

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‘Dear me, and what is it?’ said Mr. Moltbury. .

‘Do *you* think, Mr. Moltbury, as *some* people seem to do, that hunting is an impropriety amounting almost to downright immorality in a woman?’

‘My dear Mabel,’ said Mr. Moltbury gallantly, ‘was not Diana the goddess of chastity as well as of the chase?’

‘There!’ said Lady Mabel triumphantly. ‘There, Gus, you goose! do you hear that? Good-night, Mr. Moltbury; you’re just quite the very nicest father-in-law a girl could have. Kiss me. There. Good-night. Now, Gus, I hope you will be a good boy in future, and always do what your father tells you.’ And then, after administering a playful but still pretty smart slap on the side of Augustus’ head, she ran out of the room, laughing gaily.



## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE ASCOT WEEK.

**T**HE course of events in the lives of our characters for the next fifteen months is such as, with just a dark hint to strike the key-note, may be left to the imagination of the reader. Things were not going on very smoothly with the young couple. This is the dark hint.

The lapse of fifteen months takes us into the middle of a certain July, a very few years ago. Augustus' regiment is quartered

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at Windsor, and he with his wife are domiciled in a large house within a few miles of that town. The house is full of guests for the Ascot race meeting, which this very day has been brought to a close. It has been a week of dissipation. Every morning Augustus has driven his guests to the Four-in-hand enclosure on the course, to pass the day as they list amidst the attractions of the ring, the boxes, the lawn, the Royal enclosure, or the long lines of drags. Of course, Augustus' drag is the *point d'appui* of his own party's operations for the day, and they keep turning up at intervals. There is also a constant succession of visitors, and three Ganymedes in the Molt-bury livery are living examples of perpetual motion, as they dispense hospitality to all comers, for Augustus' and Lady Mabel's friends are legion.

Lady Mabel herself is ubiquitous ; some-



times in the Royal enclosure, sometimes on the lawn, sometimes on the top of her own drag, sometimes on a friend's, and sometimes in another part of the course altogether to witness a start, but always with Jack Slessinger beside her; while Augustus laughs merrily and drinks deeply to hide and drown the bitter aching in his heart. He loves his wife as passionately as ever, which is, to say the least of it, unfortunate for his peace of mind. He had flatly refused to have Jack Slessinger at his house for the week, and this had raised a storm before which Augustus had weakly bowed. Poor Augustus was weak. But had he been stronger minded he would not have done much more than he did with such a wilful headstrong nature as Lady Mabel's.

As I have said before, the last day of the meeting had closed, and for the last time before dispersing to other festive scenes

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the guests were assembled round the dinner-table. There had been two casualties in 'Lady Mabel's contingent' during the week. One gentleman had suddenly and mysteriously disappeared after having lost on the course about three times as much as he had in the world, and it was strongly suspected that he had thus unobtrusively retired to settle the difficulty at the bottom of some pond, or through the medium of 'villanous saltpetre' and lead. Another young gentleman, having that very morning betrayed unmistakable symptoms of *delirium tremens*, had been promptly relegated, under the surveillance of his valet, to other scenes a little farther from the madding crowd. With the exception of these two, the party was the same that had sat down night after night for the last five days at the festive board. They were a reckless crew. There were several married ladies,

but they all belonged to that fast set of which Lady Mabel was now a leader, and they never spoke except in the jargon of the racing-stable and the betting-ring. Women who affect this style always outdo the men in it.

There is a tremendous amount of loud talking and laughter, Jack Slessinger playing Yorick, and setting the table on a roar with his flashes of merriment. There is also between him and Lady Mabel what may be termed a subtabular performance. They sit opposite to each other, and a nearly constant interchange of foot pressures is going on between them, a form of dalliance which at all events possesses the respectability of age, having been mentioned by no less a personage than the father of English poetry.\*

Augustus laughs loud and drinks deep.

\* Chaucer, in 'The Remedy of Love.'

He is miserable, but a little less so perhaps to-night, for on the morrow the party breaks up, and Jack Slessinger leaves with the rest. He tries hard to tell a story to those nearest him. By the way, it is that self-same story about, 'go it, old calico tails,' etc., which the reader may remember he so keenly appreciated when he heard it for the first time on board the *Great Republic*, and which Mr. Moltbury so completely failed to see the point of. Under the most favourable circumstances Augustus is not a brilliant *raconteur*, but the contemplation of a man making fierce love to the wife of his bosom would render even the most sparkling anecdotist's efforts a little laboured, perhaps, and Augustus' story falls flatter than usual. He is feeling all the time he tells it as if he could not from moment to moment restrain himself from jumping up and hurling a glass into

Jack Slessinger's fate, but he shrinks from making a scene, and pluckily wears a smile on his face, while love, jealousy, and rage swell his heart to bursting. At times his countenance is livid, at others flushed. Once Lady Mabel catches his eye fixed on her in sorrow rather than in anger, and for fully ten minutes afterwards Jack Slessinger's foot is engaged in a game of hunt the slipper, and seeks the dainty little shoe in vain.

The evening is warm, and the French windows leading out on to the lawn are all wide open. Through them the strains of music suddenly float. Not music of a high order. It is simply just a bar of a popular music-hall melody performed by four or five violins, a harp, and a cornopean. It is just a musical way of saying 'Here we are !'

'Hallo, there's Tapioca!'

proceeds from

different parts of the table, in tones which tell that Tapioca's presence is welcomed.

'Tell Tapioca to come to the window,' says Augustus to one of the servants.

In a few moments Tapioca appears at the open window in response to the summons. His hat is very shiny, and his breast is covered with medals.

'Good-evening, my ladies and my lords,' says Tapioca, as he takes off his hat with a bold sweep, and bows low. After which he stands uncovered, awaiting remark.

'I say, Tapioca,' says a very young man with a very flushed face, as he turns round in his chair.

'Yes, my lord,' responds Tapioca.

It does not follow that everyone whom Tapioca calls my lord is one. Mr. Pitt was for conferring a peerage on anyone with twenty thousand a year. Tapioca is much more accommodating. He will raise

you to that august body on receipt of one forty thousandth part of that sum down. However, in this especial case he is right in every way.

‘What did you get that medal for, Tapioca?’

‘This one, my lord?’

‘Yes,’ says the very young nobleman, beginning to feel rather sorry he has commenced, as he sees from the faces all round that his discomfiture is confidently expected as well as anxiously awaited.

‘Well, this one,’ says Tapioca, in a very telling attitude, his left arm akimbo, with the shining hat under it, his right arm across his breast, forefinger delicately indicating the decoration in question: ‘*This* one, my lord, was for a song, of my composition—a sonata in Q flat—which obtained the first prize at the Crystal Palace Poultry Show.’

A roar of laughter greets this sally, during which Tapioca, still preserving his telling attitude, looks round with an easy smile, as much as to say, 'Will anyone else have the temerity to ask another question on this point? If so, I am quite ready for him.'

Someone else *has* the temerity, the young Earl of Hurlingham.

'Well, how did you get that one with the red riband?' he asks.

'This one, sir?'

The rank of the questioner is perfectly well known to Tapioca, but with the bright yellow colour of his lordship's money he is not equally well acquainted. Like Bassanio, Tapioca will have 'none of thee, thou pale and common drudge 'tween man and man.' But unlike Bassanio, he prefers the 'hard food for Midas.' I do not say that if you were to offer Tapioca a half-crown he would



not pocket the affront, but he would not ennoble you for it. He might possibly promote you to the command of a company, troop, or battery in her Majesty's service, but nothing more.

‘This one, sir, with the red riband, sir? Well, there is rather a longer history attached to *this* medal, sir. It was conferred upon me on the fashionable “general strike” principle. In the midst of an engagement at Windsor Castle, my harpist struck a wrong note; horror-struck, I struck an attitude; and her Majesty was so struck by my gallantry on the occasion that she struck a medal to commemorate it, sir.’

Another burst of laughter ensues, and Tapioca is asked no more questions concerning the fountain of honour which has showered this plethora of distinction upon his breast.

‘Isay, Tapioca, give us your topical song,’ says Augustus.

‘Excuse me, my lord,’ says Tapioca, whose services Augustus has secured for the evening by an advance of five pounds on an offer of twenty-five from the Marquis of Scatterby, who is entertaining another select and rather fast circle of acquaintances in the neighbourhood of Ascot. ‘Excuse me, my lord, for correcting you.’

‘Certainly ; what is it ?’ says Augustus.

‘Well, my lord, ordinary “comiques,” music-hall fellows, do, I believe, sing a description of song they term topical. . But Tapioca’s are *tip*-topical, my lord.’

‘Well, tip us your tip-topical song then,’ says Augustus.

Tapioca bows low, gives his shiny hat a tremendous flourish, places it on the side of his head, to which it adheres by a miracle, and swaggers off to his musicians on the lawn.

The tip-topical song was an improvised commentary in doggerel on each and all of the party, whom the *improvisatore* could of course see from his station on the lawn. The allusions to each were purely of a personal nature, and Tapioca was listened to with great attention and merriment as

‘He poured to lord and lady gay  
His unpremeditated lay.’

At the termination of the song, a servant takes a bottle of champagne and a tumbler out to Tapioca, who suffers from a slight dryness in the throat after any vocal exertion.

‘Oh, Jerusalem! Corked!’ exclaims Tapioca, with a shudder, as he hands back the brimming tumbler, after just having put his lips to it. ‘Here, take it back, Freddy.’

‘Corked, is it?’ says the servant, whose name is no more Frederick than it is

Pisistratus. 'Then I'll just chuck this bottle into the shrubbery, and go and get you another,' he adds, suiting the action to his words.

'Hi! Whew! I say, don't forget my accompanists, you know,' says Tapioca, after whistling the man back.

'Why, do *they* drink champagne?'

'Drink it, young man! Why, they *swims* in it. Each of 'em has a swimming bath of it at his own private residence, filled every morning direct from the Mansion House cellars by means of soup-tureenian pipes. And I say, Freddy, look here—we like it *dry*.'

It is past eleven before the company rise from dinner, and Tapioca with his satellites are relegated to the servants' hall, where a dance is at once improvised, with Tapioca as the master of the ceremonies, and his musicians as orchestra.

‘Ah! Lady Mabel, charmed to make your acquaintance,’ says Tapioca. ‘Allow me the felicity of your ladyship’s hand in this quadrille.’

This is to Lady Mabel’s maid, who graciously accepts.

‘Hurlingham, old boy,’ says Tapioca, ‘be our *vis-à-vis*, will you?’

This is to Lord Hurlingham’s valet, who replies :

‘Well, I was so pumped in my last varsoviana with Lady Caroline, that I hardly intended dancing this; but hold on till I see if the marchioness is disengaged.’

But what is it amidst this scene of revelry that clouds the usually serene brow of Augustus’ butler! Is it nasal dislocation, consequent on Tapioca’s appearance? No. Supper will shortly be announced, and he has not yet been able to

decide whether the Countess of Hurlingham (*i.e.*, the Countess of Hurlingham's maid) should go in before or after the Countess of Plungerton's; for he had an idea that the Countess of Plungerton's husband, though holding the title only of an earl, is the eldest son of a duke, in which case his wife would of course take precedence of the Countess of Hurlingham, though Lord Hurlingham is a peer and Lord Plungerton is not.

'Dear, dear,' soliloquised the butler, as he paced the room in a brown study; 'it's a most provoking *congtertong* that I should have mislaid my "Peerage," and of course it's out of the question for me to ask the parties themselves. It is one of the most annoying things that has ever happened to me. I'd sooner have backed the wrong horse throughout the whole meeting than that this should have occurred. If I do

the wrong thing, it will lead to so much jealousy and ill-feeling, besides being such a slur on my character.'

While this play of high life below stairs is being enacted, the company above are dispersed through the billiard, the card, and the drawing rooms. Some are playing pool, some *baccarat*, and some are listening or engaging in vocal or instrumental music. Lady Mabel and Jack Slessinger\* carefully abstain from joining any party until Augustus has embarked in a game of pool, when she elects to listen to the music in the drawing-room, upon which, by a curious coincidence, Jack Slessinger, though an accomplished pool-player and inordinately addicted to cards, suddenly develops strong musical proclivities.

Augustus soon misses them both from the billiard-room, and he does his utmost, without appearing too suicidal, to lose his

lives, in order that he may go and see after them. But do what he will, his ball will not miss or run into the pocket. At last in desperation he hits savagely, and purposely misses the object-ball by a hair's breadth.

'There, I have lost a life,' he says, with a sigh of relief.

'Let it run! let it run!' exclaims an officious friend.

'Oh no, it doesn't matter,' says Augustus, reaching out his arm to stop the ball with his cue.

But a bystander, thinking his host is merely acting in a spirit of generosity, strikes up his cue at the critical moment with: 'Oh yes, let it run on, old fellow; it will hit after all, I *do* believe.' And hit after all it does.

Augustus' next attempt at self-destruction is to send his ball off the table, but



the cushions are too good and in too prime order for that. Generally speaking, his usual stroke at pool is a losing hazard, but on this occasion he 'holes' everything he aims at, and every time he plays the butt-ends of his friends' cues rattle on the floor in a deafening salvo of applause.

'By Jove! we never knew Moltbury could play like this!' is said over and over again, as the half-sovereigns are extracted from waistcoat pockets. They are playing sovereign and half-sovereign points.

At last, however, the pool is finished, and Augustus, who has taken the whole of it, excuses himself from playing another by saying he is going to have a look at what they are up to in the card-room, and hurries off without taking his winnings.

There are four fair ones at play in the card-room, but a sharp glance is sufficient to tell him that the fair one he seeks is not

one of them. That still passionately loved face he can pick out in a moment in any crowd. Neither is Jack Slessinger there.

He goes to the drawing-room, where people are *listening to the music!* The music is a one-fingered attempt to pick out 'Sweethearts' on the piano, the performer being Augustus' last-joined young brother-officer, and the audience are listening with such rapt attention that they have retired by twos to various shady corners and dark recesses, where the light is not so likely to distract their aural faculties. After the glare on the billiard-table, the drawing-room with its soft-shaded lamps seems so dark to Augustus, and the couples sit in such seclusion, that he makes a complete circuit of the room before he feels certain that the one or rather the two he seeks are not there.

More than one significant glance is ex-

changed between the couples as he passes them, for Jack Slessinger's attentions to Lady Mabel are now notorious.

As Augustus pauses in his search by an open window, he descries two figures just disappearing behind a turn in the path through the shrubbery, and he steps out. In his light evening shoes, his footsteps fall noiselessly on the velvet-like lawn as he strides across it. In a few moments he turns the corner of the path, just in time to see Jack Slessinger's lips hastily withdrawn from Lady Mabel's, and his arm from her waist. Three strides of Augustus' long legs, a dull crashing thud, which makes Lady Mabel wince as if she herself had received it on her face, and Jack Slessinger is sprawling on his back in the midst of a laurel-bush.

'You brute!' says Lady Mabel. 'You have forgotten he's your guest.'

‘He has forgotten I’m his host, and you have forgotten you are my wife!’ says Augustus, with dilated nostril and livid cheek. ‘Go in, Mabel.’

‘Yes, go in, Mabel,’ says Slessinger, as he picks himself up. ‘This is no place for a lady now.’

More in obedience to the latter than the former mandate, Lady Mabel hurries into the house in a wild tumult of feelings.

For a few moments the two men stand facing each other in silent rage, and I am not sorry to add that Jack Slessinger’s beauty is considerably marred by a red bump, which Augustus has very neatly placed exactly between the two eyes, and which is in a condition of rapid tumescence. The spot where they stand is adjacent to that part of the building in which the servants are holding high revel, and Tapioca’s tip-topical—or rather, at this late period of

the festivities it may be called his tipsy-topsical — song is being rendered amidst roars of laughter, which seem to mock the two men in their rage. Augustus is the first to speak.

‘You scoundrel ! The fault is *all* yours!’

To Augustus’ credit be it said, he visits the sin entirely on Slessinger’s head. Though in his heart there is the bitterest rage that can stir the human heart, it is all directed against the man.

‘Look here,’ says Slessinger, with intense coolness, though none the less is he smarting in spirit under the blow which felled him to the earth. ‘I’m not going in for a regular mill with you ; because, though I flatter myself I am as good a plucked one as you—I should think so at least, if there’s anything in blood,’ he adds with a sneer ; ‘still you’re a hulking great brute compared to me ; but——’

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‘I’ll give you any satisfaction you want, you villain—and that, too, before another sun shines on both of us, if you like,’ says Augustus, feeling as if a bullet in his aching heart would be just about the luxury he would like best at that moment.

‘That’s just what I was going to propose.’

The two men were not only mad with rage, but they were maddened by drink. The whole week had been little less than one continued debauch.

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Three hours afterwards, in the early morning, a dog-cart drives up with Augustus and a friend in it. The former is very pale, and the latter, who holds the reins, looks depressed. They hurriedly descend and walk indoors, while the groom, who has been awaiting their arrival, shakes his head several times, and then takes the cart

round to the stables. The house is hushed, and the friends wish each other 'good-night,' or rather 'good morning,' and Augustus hurries to his wife's apartments. The tell-tale wheels have apprised her of his arrival, and she confronts him directly he enters the room. She is ready-dressed for any emergency.

'Mabel—Mabel!' he says imploringly, 'let us forget this wretched night. I will never, never allude to it. Not a word of reproach will ever escape my lips.'

'What have you been doing, Augustus?' she asks, in hard tones and with a set face. 'Have you and my cousin, Captain Slesinger, been fighting—with pistols, I mean, not with fists, like navvies?'

'We exchanged shots.'

'And is he hit?'

'I have never kept a secret from you, Mabel, and I never shall. He is hit. But

he is being looked after all right at the infantry barracks at Windsor.'

Fixedly looking in front of her, she moves towards the door like one walking in her sleep.

'Mabel, where are you going?' he asks, interposing himself between her and the door.

'To the barracks at Windsor. Stand aside and let me pass, please.'

The French have a trope in which they say there are tears in a person's voice. There was marble in Lady Mabel's.

'You shan't go, Mabel: I swear you shan't! I'll save you from yourself. I'm your husband, Mabel—your own loving husband.'

'Let me go!' she says.

'Neyer. You do not know what you are doing,' he replies, placing his back against the door, and looking at her with a be-



seething gaze, which might have touched her heart had she seen it. But she sees nothing but what is before her mind's eye.

‘Stand aside, I tell you!’ she says, with an imperious flashing in her eyes.

‘No, Mabel.’

She raises her hand, and strikes him in the face.

No prize-fighter's hard, brawny fist ever delivered so crushing a blow as the one dealt by that small, clenched hand. The sharp brilliants cut the skin, and the blood trickles down Augustus' white cheek. A dazed look of agony comes into his face, and for some moments he is bereft of his senses. When he recovers himself she has gone.

He takes a step with the intention of going after her, but a look of blank despair settles on his countenance, and he falls for-

ward with his head resting against a chair. He remains motionless, and from his left arm, which hangs down by his side, the blood falls drop by drop, making a little pool on the carpet. He too has been hit, but he would not appear before her with his arm bandaged, for fear of frightening *her* !



## CHAPTER XV.

BORN OF A WOMAN.

**V**IOLET had not left Hurstenholme at all this season, and Mrs. Moltbury had made a very short campaign in the metropolis.

On the Monday following the Ascot week, Mr. Moltbury sat in the writing-room of the House of Commons inditing a letter to Augustus. His friend, Mr. Slowton, the member for Slumbury, a Norwickshire borough, had just informed him of his desire to apply at some early date for the

stewardship of the Chiltern Hundreds. The seat, when thus vacated, Mr. Moltbury meditated popping Augustus into. Indeed, Mr. Moltbury, for some time now, had been nursing the borough of Slumbury for Augustus, and Mr. Slowton had been doing little more than just keeping it warm for him. Augustus' return was a foregone conclusion, for Slumbury was completely dominated by the Larchington and Hurst-enholme influences, and the interests of both houses concentrated in our young friend.

That he would, later on, represent a rather more important constituency was of course Mr. Moltbury's intention, but for the present Slumbury would do very well for the young Lifeguardsman, just as the insignificant borough of Old Sarum had sufficiently answered the purpose of introducing a young cornet of the Blues into political life.\*

\* William Pitt.

‘For the next two or three years Augustus’ military and parliamentary duties need not clash, and though he will be one of the youngest members of the House, still he will be quite as useful as old Slowton; and if he does not speak, the time can very profitably be employed in mastering the rules and customs, and, I may say, tricks of the House.’

Thus thought Mr. Moltbury, and he also thought, with a glow of affection and pride stirring his heart, that he and his boy would furnish the unusual circumstance of a father and son sitting together in Parliament.

These were the castles in the air—if what seemed so certain could be thus called—which pleasantly floated through Mr. Moltbury’s rich imagination, as he wrote on the subject to Augustus, asking him to

come up to town and talk it over. He was just signing himself, 'Your ever affectionate father,' when a messenger handed him a telegram which had been brought from his residence in Grosvenor Gardens. The reddish-yellow envelope had no terrors for Mr. Moltbury, such as it seems to have for quiet-going folk, who generally take their private tidings by the pennyworth, and who always associate a telegram—on the principle that ill news travels fast—with sudden disaster. Mr. Moltbury was accustomed to telegrams, and he allowed this one to lie unopened by his side until his letter was addressed, closed and stamped, ready for the post. With a careless remark to a brother member who passed his chair at the moment, he then opened the envelope and read the telegram as follows :

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‘From	‘To
Lord Carristhorpe,	Geoffrey Moltbury, Esq., M.P.,
Spital Barracks,	Grosvenor Gardens,
Windsor.	S.W.

‘Come at once. Your son is here seriously ill. Do not delay. Wire probable time of arrival, and will meet you at the station.’

‘I’m afraid Moltbury has had some very bad news by that telegram,’ remarked one member to another, as the subject of the observation hurriedly left the room.

‘Yes,’ returned the other; ‘I had no idea a man of his iron nerves could look so completely knocked over as he did for a moment or two.’

There had been no necessity for Carristhorpe’s injunction, ‘Do not delay.’ ‘Your son seriously ill’ would have brought Mr. Moltbury from the farthest ends of the earth at the utmost speed.

As quickly as a ‘special’ could take him Mr. Moltbury was whirled down to Wind-

sor, and at the station he was met by Lord Carristhorpe, to whom he had telegraphed as requested, and the colonel of the regiment. As the train drew up Mr. Moltbury eagerly scanned their faces, and what he read there made his heart sink within him.

‘How is he?’ he asked, as he sprang out of the carriage.

‘No better,’ replied Carristhorpe.

‘Dying? Don’t hesitate. Let me know the worst at once.’

‘I fear so,’ said the colonel.

‘Take me to him, please.’

They conducted him to a carriage in waiting, and they took their seats in it with him.

‘But what is it? an accident? And where is his wife? And why is he not at his own home? She of course has been communicated with and is by his bedside?’



asked Mr. Moltbury, mastering his emotions with an iron will.

‘Carristhorpe,’ said the colonel, ‘you have the advantage of me in intimacy with Mr. Moltbury. *You* tell him, my dear fellow.’

‘Tell me everything, Lord Carristhorpe. Let me know the worst. I can bear it.’

‘It is the old, old story, Mr. Moltbury—a woman at the bottom of it; and that woman is Lady Mabel. It appears that for some time now, your son has been wretched in the suspicion that his wife entertained a guilty love for her cousin Captain Slessinger. On last Friday night the suspicion became a certainty, and he there and then inflicted personal chastisement on his wife’s paramour. A mad, reckless, semi-drunken, I may call it, duel was immediately arranged, in which both were hit—Captain Slessinger

slightly, your son more seriously. The former was driven to the Infantry Barracks here, where his battalion is quartered, and the latter returned home and saw his wife, to whom he communicated the fact of her cousin having been hit. Immediately after doing so he tells me that owing to his wound and fatigue he fainted, and when he recovered himself his wife had gone. She at once joined Captain Slessinger, and the two have since disappeared. Your son left his desolate and now hateful home that very day, and took up his quarters in barracks. I was the only one who saw anything of him, and that very little. He particularly requested to be left to himself for a few days, and, as you may imagine, his wish was sacredly observed. There was no lack of friends ready and anxious to cheer him, for he was decidedly popular in the regiment.

‘Most decidedly so,’ said the colonel.

‘But, as I have said before, we respected his wish to be left alone, and we could quite understand it. What with sorrow, his wound, and I must add drink, for it appears he drank deeply to deaden his grief, he was this day seized with delirium, in which condition he — God help you, dear Mr. Moltbury——’

‘What ! tell me ?’ gasped the unfortunate father, as he leaned forward and looked into Carristhorpe’s face with starting eyes.

‘He shot himself.’

The blow was too crushing even for Mr. Moltbury’s iron nerves.

‘O God !’ he exclaimed, as he buried his face in his hands, ‘my worst fears never conjured up anything like *that* ! Death, I had nerved myself to bear with resignation to Thy will, but, O God ! *not* self-murder. This is more than Thy servant can bear.’

‘It cannot be said, my dear sir,’ said the colonel in gentle and kind tones, ‘that he raised his hand against himself, for Gus Moltbury’ was *not* himself when he fired that shot.’

‘Thank you, thank you,’ said Mr. Moltbury, in his agony still sensible of sympathy. ‘Oh Gus, Gus, my boy, why didn’t you, wounded in spirit and body, deserted by her who had sworn to love and cherish you, come to me?’

On arriving at the barracks Mr. Moltbury was quite calm outwardly, and they at once proceeded to the quarters occupied by the ill-starred Augustus. They were met outside in the passage by the surgeon in attendance, who had observed their arrival from the window.

‘He is quite conscious now,’ he said, ‘and every moment asking for you.’

‘No hope?’ asked the father.

The surgeon shook his head sadly.

‘None ; you are just in time, my dear sir ; and that is all.’

Here a plaintive moan from the sick-chamber pierces Mr. Moltbury’s heart.

‘Oh, when *will* he come ?’

In a moment Mr. Moltbury is by the bedside.

‘He is here, my own loved son.’

Augustus fixes an intense, yearning gaze on his father.

‘Forgive me,’ he whispers, at the same time feebly putting out his hand, and with, oh, such a wistful longing in his face for what he asks !

Mr. Moltbury’s utterance is choked, but his reply is more eloquent than words. He takes the hand—the hand that did the deed—and presses it to his lips.

For several moments Augustus lies perfectly still with his hand in his father’s,

resting himself, as it were, for a further effort. Poor Augustus! Destiny has indeed dealt hard with him. He lies there, a soldier with three wounds; but—and ‘Oh the pity of it!’—none are honourable. One has been inflicted by the hand of a trusted friend; the other, through which his life is fast ebbing, by his own hand; and that cut on his pale cheek, over which the salt tears are slowly coursing, by the little hand he loved, and still loves so passionately, the dainty jewelled little hand he held in his at God’s altar.

‘Father,’ says Augustus, at last, ‘forgive her. Forgive Mabel. Oh, promise me to, father! Promise me.’

‘I will.’

‘Seek her out, father; find her; be her friend through life. Promise me that, father, before I die.’

‘Yes, my son, I will.’

A gentle pressure from Augustus' hand and a smile convey his thanks.

'Tell mother,' he goes on, 'and tell Vi to take Mabel in their arms and kiss her for *me*.'

The only answer Augustus receives is a pressure on his hand and a stifled sob.

He himself now becomes speechless, and the surgeon, coming in at the moment, administers a powerful restorative, which will fan the vital spark into another short flicker ; for he reads in the fast-dimming eyes a wish to say more.

'Father,' Augustus says, after a few moments, and in a strong voice, 'let them bury me like a soldier.'

A pressure of the hand tells him his wish is heard and registered in the grieving heart beside him.

'Reggy Mauleverer's song, eh ? How well I recollect it now ! I wish he and Vi

had loved each other. I often thought of that. He so true and manly, she so loving and gentle. It would have been a happier marriage than mine. But it wasn't to be.'

Here his strength again fails, and for a few moments he lies exhausted. Then with a last effort he raises himself and says rather wildly :

'Father, remember your promise to shake Mabel's hand. Tell her my dying prayer was for her. Help her to be good. Promise me all that, my own dear father.'

'I do, my own loved son. I solemnly promise you.'

'As to Jack Slessinger, who——'

For a moment or two his eyes flash, and his mouth works, and then sinking back on his pillow, his face becomes peaceful, and, soft as an angel's whisper, come the



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words—‘Well, father, shake *his* hand too for *me*.’

All was over.

‘Thank God for those last words!’ exclaimed Mr. Moltbury on his knees. ‘And may his trespass be forgiven him as he has forgiven the man who so grievously trespassed against him.’



## CHAPTER XVI.

‘NOT AS THE PHARISEES.’

**T**HE strains of the ‘Dead March’ in *Saul* were wafted heavenwards, and the soft summer air was heavy with sadness as an officer’s funeral procession moved from the cavalry barracks at Windsor with ‘steps mournful, solemn and slow.’ The sword, the gauntlets, and the plumed helmet on the flag-covered coffin, and the jack-boots slung reversed over the led charger’s back, proclaimed that the deceased had held a commission in Her Majesty’s Lifeguards.

In the place of chief mourner walked Mr. Moltbury, with Lord Carristhorpe and the colonel on either side of him. After them marched the officers of the regiment and those belonging to the battalion of Guards stationed at Windsor, besides many others of the Household Brigade who had come down from London for the purpose. Dense crowds hung round the flanks of the mournful *cortège*, and many whispers ran from mouth to mouth about a coroner's inquest, and a verdict of temporary insanity, for a portion of the sad story had of course found its way into the papers.

They had not proceeded far when a railway fly drew up at the side of the street, and from the window of the humble vehicle a horror-stricken, yet lovely face gazed with straining eyes : and suddenly, as those eyes rested on Mr. Moltbury, a scream

arose above the wailing notes of the 'Dead March.'

'Kindly send someone to ascertain where I shall find her on our return,' said Mr. Moltbury to Carristhorpe, who at once dropped out of the ranks to carry out the wish.

In a short time he regained his place beside Mr. Moltbury and whispered :

'Our surgeon, who is personally acquainted with her, has fallen out to render every necessary assistance. She is in a dead-faint. He will let you know where to find her when we return.'

'Thank you,' said Mr. Moltbury ; and it was some consolation to feel that he would so soon be able to carry out the last wish of his son.

As has already been observed in these pages, it is the memory of trifles that often cuts the deepest. It was with such minor

recollections that Mr. Moltbury's soul was harrowed as he followed all that remained of what had been so loved. There, with its long white plume slightly stirred with the summer breeze, was the helmet which his son had put on that night when *she* had begged him to dress in his uniform; and the whole scene floated before him—the laughing, lovely girl on one knee and the tall, fair-haired young man looking down upon her with a kindling eye. As he looked at the charger with the empty boots dangling with a horrible lifelessness by his sides, he could hear the ringing laugh with which his late owner had so often told the story of how *she* had christened him. Then the festivities of the Pink Wedding rose to his mind's eye, and made the present picture all the more dreary and awful. Then he thought of Reggy Mauleverer's song, and though he did not believe in presentiments,

he could not but remember how it had always filled his mind with a sad foreboding.

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After the firing-party, furnished from Lord Carristhorpe's troop, with which Augustus' short military career had been associated, had paid the last funeral rites with the usual three volleys, Mr. Moltbury hastened away, intending to revisit the spot later on by himself.

A carriage was in waiting for him, and the footman handed him a note from the regimental surgeon which contained the promised information regarding Lady Mabel. Mr. Moltbury at once directed to be driven to the hotel mentioned in the note.

On arriving, he was met by the surgeon, who told him that her ladyship had recovered consciousness, and then straight-

way conducted him to the room where she was.

As Mr. Moltbury entered, Lady Mabel, impetuous in her grief and repentance as she had been in her pleasures and her sin, rushed across the room and threw herself at his feet.

'I've come back,' she cried, clasping him round the knees and looking up with a wild, beseeching face; 'I've come back to atone, to try to atone, for what I have done. I was abroad, and saw what had happened in the papers, and that he was dying. I travelled night and day to see him once more, and to ask him to forgive me. I arrived only an hour ago. I was afraid to ask for any news at the station. Then, when I heard the 'Dead March' and met the funeral, and saw by the white plumes far above the heads of the crowd that it was his regiment, I thought my

heart would have stopped beating. But I did not know for certain it was *his* funeral until I saw your poor white face, so full of agony and yet so brave looking. You, who loved him so ! Oh, have pity on me ! I didn't know what I was doing that wretched morning. It had been a week of dissipation and folly, day and night, and the brains of most of us were turned, I believe. I don't think I was in my senses. Oh, do have pity on me ! I cannot ask you for forgiveness. That would be too much to ask, too much to expect yet. But oh, how I long for it !

Here she covered her face with her hands and sobbed wildly. Mr. Moltbury took her by the hand, and was about to raise her, when through the open windows the band of the regiment was heard playing the funeral party back to quarters. The air to which they marched was the in-



expressibly sad and very appropriate one of the old song, 'Love not.'

With a shudder Lady Mabel drew her hand from Mr. Moltbury's and stopped both her ears.

'Oh, that would send me mad if I were to listen to it !' she exclaimed.

It was a pitiable picture : the sorrow-stricken Mr. Moltbury standing looking down on the erst gay and madcap Lady Mabel crouching on the floor at his feet with her hands to her ears, vainly trying to shut out the strains on which the words of the song were borne with such painful force to both their aching hearts :

'Love not, love not : the thing you love may die.'

That Mr. Moltbury was able to cleanse his heart of all bitterness towards the unfortunate girl at his feet, would have been too much to expect from human nature.

But he thought of his dying son's last words ; he thought of the yearning longing look which accompanied them ; and his heart was softened at the same time that it received strength.

‘ Mabel,’ he said, raising her, and looking steadfastly at her downcast face, ‘ I not only grant you my forgiveness, but I am also the bearer to you of my son's. He told me on his death-bed to shake you by the hand.’

Here Mr. Moltbury took her hand and held it in his, while her drooping head rested on his shoulder.

“ ‘ Help her to be good, father,” was his solemn injunction to me ; and he added, “ Tell mother and Vi to take her in their arms and kiss her for *me*.” ’

‘ Oh, Gus, Gus, how noble and forgiving of you !’ she moaned.

‘ Mabel, you will come with me, will you not ?’

‘Yes, I will,’ she said, looking up into his face, and clinging to him. ‘I will do anything you tell me to atone for my sin, and to repay you for what you have done to-day. I feel that with you to help me, and sustain me, and advise me, I shall have strength to do whatever you tell me.’

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Towards the evening Mr. Moltbury and Lady Mabel stood hand in hand by the side of the newly made grave, and later on they proceeded to town.

Leaving her at his home in Grosvenor Gardens for a little rest and refreshment, Mr. Moltbury at once repaired to the hotel in Jermyn Street where Lady Mabel had informed him her cousin was staying.

Captain Slessinger had just finished a solitary dinner in a private room, and was smoking a cigar with a sad countenance—for, to do him justice, he keenly felt the

awful results of his wickedness—when Mr. Moltbury was announced.

To give him his due, no braver man ever wore the British uniform than Slessinger ; but conscience made a coward of him, and at the very name of his visitor his heart beat as if he had been a timid girl. He dared not even look him in the face. Rising hurriedly from his seat, he took up a standing position on the rug, with his left arm resting on the mantelpiece and his back half-turned to Mr. Moltbury. His right arm was in a sling. So utterly taken aback was he that for some moments the absurd idea possessed him that his personal chastisement was Mr. Moltbury's object.

‘ *His* blow I shall take without any retaliation,’ thought Jack Slessinger ; ‘ I never thought I could have stood a blow from any man, but I will from *him*.’

‘ Captain Slessinger,’ said Mr. Moltbury,

in his calm, deep-toned voice, as he advanced across the room.

‘Sir,’ replied Slessinger, without looking round.

‘Will you allow me to shake your hand?’

Jack Slessinger wheeled round on his heels and looked perfectly dazed.

‘Shake my hand, Mr. Moltbury?’

‘Yes!’

‘*My* hand? No, you don’t mean that.’

‘Yes, *your* hand, Captain Slessinger,’ said Mr. Moltbury, holding out his.

‘Excuse its being the left one,’ stammered Slessinger.

‘Captain Slessinger,’ said Mr. Moltbury, as he stood hand in hand with the destroyer of his son’s happiness, of his son’s life, ‘I am now fulfilling the last dying request of the man whom you wronged. With his very last words my son granted you his forgiveness, and bade me to shake your hand.’

Jack Slessinger silently pressed the hand in his, and, turning his face away, tried to reach his eyes with his maimed hand.

‘Thank you, thank you,’ he at last said. ‘This is so unexpected as well as so undeserved, that I am unable to express my feelings as I should wish. But of this you may be sure, that I feel the keenest remorse for what has happened.’

‘Lady Mabel remains with *me*.’ (Jack Slessinger started, and turned even paler.) ‘She returns with me to Hurstholme this night. The awful event which has brought her guilt home to her so acutely, has filled her heart with a penitence which, with help from some stronger nature on which she can rely, will be, I feel certain, more than a mere transient feeling of remorse. I promised my son to befriend her, and in the fulfilment of my promise I shall guard her from temptation and evil with all my heart

and strength. I know the world too well to expect that Lady Mabel will settle down, as the lovely and penitent sinners in novels do, to visiting the poor and tending the sick for the remainder of her natural life. I must recollect I am dealing with flesh and blood. You unfortunately succeeded in weaning her affections away——'

'Yes,' said Jack Slessinger, 'put it all down to me, Mr. Moltbury. The whole villany rests on my shoulders. Don't spare me, sir.'

'I do not mean to ; for to spare your feelings would be to shrink from the course I wish to pursue for her ulterior good. I say you most unfortunately succeeded in weaning her affections from their lawful object. You are, I am sorry to say, the only man in the world whom she could ever marry with any propriety, or with any chance of happiness. You have black-

ened her fair fame throughout the length and breadth of the land. Captain Slessinger, try and lead an earnest true life while Lady Mabel expiates her share in your joint sin, and the time may yet come when you may be able to lead her to the altar with the sanction of him whose love, whose hopes you have buried in the grave. I have to add that I am the bearer of a few lines from Lady Mabel herself.'

With a slightly trembling hand Jack Slessinger took the proffered note. One glance was sufficient to master the contents.

'I place myself implicitly in his hands. I implore you to do whatever he tells you. ' MABEL.'

'Mr. Moltbury,' said Slessinger, 'what would you have me do? You tell me to lead an earnest and true life; tell me how. To use your own phrase a few moments



ago, recollect you are dealing with flesh and blood. One cannot jump all at once from the sinner to the saint. Tell me how to lead an earnest true life, without at the very outset choking me off with an impracticable fence. Excuse me if I have not the same command of words that you possess. I feel none the less deeply however.'

'I have already taken the view you have, Captain Slessinger; I mean to bear in mind that I am dealing with flesh and blood—and flesh, too, that has had, perhaps, more than its share of frailty. I have made my plans accordingly. I am about to organise and maintain a surveying and exploring party, whose field of operations will lie between the eastern shores of the Caspian Sea and Central Asia. The work will involve hardship, some danger, and an absence of at least one year from England.

All will be prepared within a month. Will you take the military command of the party ?

Jack Slessinger fortified himself with one more glance at the words ‘I implore you to do whatever he tells you. Mabel,’ and then, after a pause, replied in a firm voice :

‘I accept your offer, Mr. Moltbury.’

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It was late that night before Mr. Moltbury and Lady Mabel reached Hurstholme. Mrs. Moltbury, prostrated by the shock, was ill in bed ; but Violet, though utterly worn out with grief, was waiting to receive her father, who had telegraphed to her. She had not seen him since the blow had fallen upon them, and she could only hang round his neck and sob.

‘Vi,’ said Mr. Moltbury, ‘our poor loved and lost one has bequeathed a duty to you with his last breath.’

Violet checked her sobs, and turned her tearful eyes in tender and silent inquiry up to her father's face.

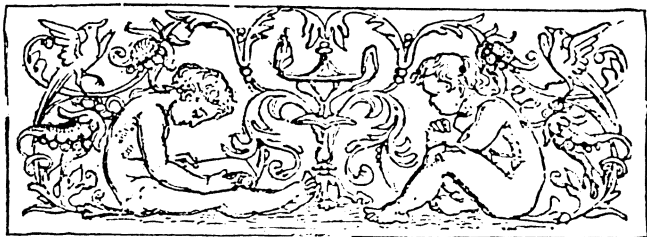
“‘Tell Vi,” he said, to take Mabel in her arms, and kiss her for *me*.’”

‘Oh Vi, darling, good little Vi,’ said Lady Mabel, who up to this moment had sat with her face buried in her hands, ‘*can* you—*can* you?’

‘Yes,’ said Violet, softly, as she put her arms round her erring but penitent sister, and kissed her cold, wet cheek.

‘There, my darling child, I leave her to you now,’ said Mr. Moltbury.

All through the night Lady Mabel lay in Violet's arms, in which pure little haven of rest she sank into the first slumber she had known for many weary nights.



## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE OLD COURTIER AGAIN.

**L**ADY MABEL'S cup of bitterness was not yet full. All the papers alluding to the 'Tragedy in high life,' as some of them called it, were carefully kept by various devices from the Duke of Fotheringay ; but Mrs. Tarter-Rickassid, as soon as she heard the dire intelligence, drove sixteen miles to Larchington, bursting with the news, and, like a shell with an accurately-timed fuse, exploded directly she arrived at her destina-

tion. She was fully rewarded, even beyond her most sanguine expectations, kind, gentle soul, with a fit of apoplexy on the part of the duke, followed by his demise within twenty-four hours.

A couple of months rolled on. Lady Mabel was a recluse at Hurstenholme. Jack Slessinger was in Central Asia working hard at his task. The world had forgotten the sad event; another young aspirant to military fame had joined the corps, '*vice* Augustus Moltbury, deceased;' but Hurstenholme still remained a house of mourning.

Poor little Violet was sadly broken-down; but, as violets often do, she seemed sweetest when crushed. A long letter of tender but manly sympathy was received by Mr. Moltbury from Mauleverer, who was abroad. He had left the service, and at the instigation of Carristhorpe, as well

as on the invitation from the constituents of a certain borough which was almost a family seat, he had consented to stand for the same when the resignation of the sitting member or a general election should afford him the opportunity. In the meantime he was travelling on the frontiers of Asiatic Turkey with the object of studying at first hand the Eastern Question, which he had an idea of making his political speciality. In his inner heart, however, blighted affection had rather more to do with the travels than the Eastern Question. He found it impossible to drive Violet from his heart, as he thought she had driven him from hers. In this uncomfortable frame of mind he had thought,

‘I myself must mix with action, lest I wither by  
despair,’

and had consequently gone off to Asia Minor. But mixing with action is a

source of relief generally denied to a woman in *her* despair, and poor little Violet, like most of her love-lorn sisters, had to bear her wound in dispiriting inaction. The old courtier, as I have said before, was the only one who guessed her secret, and as he saw his 'little Ivy,' his 'little heart o' gold,' drooping and sad, bitter indignation against the author of all this silent woe became a fixed but smothered sentiment of his existence. This feeling was intensified when one day Mr. Moltbury received a letter from Mauleverer saying, amongst other items, that he had just returned to London from abroad. All that day Violet seemed more sorrowful than ever, and the old man surprised her reading the letter with bitter tears coursing down her cheeks.

'I'm getting an old man,' soliloquised the old courtier, as he hobbled away from

the heartrending spectacle, 'and I feel I must kick somebody before I die.'

With this pious wish still warm in his heart he sought out Mr. Moltbury, and beseeched his escort up to London, where he had some pressing business of a strictly private and delicate nature to transact.

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On a certain morning within a week of his return from abroad, Mauleverer sat writing letters in his own rooms just off Piccadilly, when the door was opened and his servant announced 'Mr. Moltbury.'

With an exclamation of pleasure Mauleverer jumped from his seat, expecting to see his old schoolfellow's father, when to his astonishment there shuffled into the room instead a very infirm old gentleman, with a white head and a by no means amiable expression.

'This must be "the old courtier," as Mrs.



Moltbury used to call him,' was the very natural conclusion Mauleverer at once mentally jumped at.

'Delighted to make your acquaintance, sir,' said Mauleverer, advancing with an outheld hand and a frank smile.

'More than I am to make yours,' returned the old courtier, with anything but a friendly spirit beaming from his eyes.

'Pray be seated,' said Mauleverer, mastering his astonishment as well as he could, and rolling an arm-chair close up to the old gentleman, who did not seem very firm on his legs.

'No, I thank you; I mean to stand,' replied the uncompromising visitor, as he rested one hand on the table and the other on a stout walking-stick.

For several moments he stood scowling, snorting, and puffing; and having thus got

the steam up, he delivered himself of the following remark :

‘I suppose you consider yourself a regular Jack the giant-killer, eh?’

The old gentleman meant to twit Mauleverer on his self-fancied prowess as a lady-killer, but he did not always say what he meant, as with him the sound often ran away with the sense. An attempt at a sarcastic smile which accompanied this remark, and which was like a paralytic seizure of the facial muscles, did not throw much additional light on his meaning.

‘Well, really,’ replied Mauleverer very politely, though lost in amazement at the eccentricity of his aged visitor, ‘I can safely say that I have never compared myself to the individual you name.’

‘Oh, dear me!’ said the old courtier, dropping the sarcastic smile and assuming a finikin air of coxcombry which was

positively ghastly in its incongruity ; ‘ dear me, how handsome we are ! Oh dear, don’t we play old gooseberry with the girls’ hearts just ! I suppose we think ourselves quite the clean potato !’

‘ Have you no remark to make to me, Mr. Moltbury, of a somewhat more comprehensible nature ?’ asked Mauleverer, without the least show of anger, for the very sufficient reason that he felt none. He was simply amazed and perplexed.

‘ Yes, I *have* another remark to make to you.’

And here the old gentleman laid his stick on the table, tottered forward a few steps, snapped his finger and thumb within an inch of Mauleverer’s nose, and ejaculated :

‘ Conceited young skip-jack !’

‘ I am really very sorry you have such a bad opinion of me, Mr. Moltbury,’ said

Mauleverer, as he wiped away a tear engendered by a few particles of snuff which had flown into his eye from the old courtier's finger and thumb; 'but I am in hopes I may yet rise in your estimation.'

But these soft words failed to turn away the wrath of the old gentleman.

'Jackanapes!' was the next epithet he applied to Mauleverer; and then, after saying 'You may consider yourself precious lucky I haven't give you the soundest thrashing you ever had in all your born days,' turned on his heel and shuffled off towards the door.

'Mr. Moltbury,' said Mauleverer, interposing himself between the retiring visitor and the door; 'excuse me, but there is some great misconception on your part which I must clear away before you leave. You will, at all events, tell me the grounds on which you have based this opinion of me.'

‘I’ll see you jolly well blowed first,’ said the old courtier. ‘Here, get out of the way, or I’ll send you flying through your own door.’

Mauleverer could not repress a smile at this threat.

‘Confounded young puppy!’ added the old man in an audible soliloquy; ‘when I think of his stealing my darling little Ivy’s heart o’ gold, and then leaving her to pine and droop while he stands there grinning like a Cheshire cheese, I feel as if I couldn’t keep my hands off him.’

These words, which the old gentleman fancied he had been uttering in the depths of his heart, produced a strange effect on Mauleverer.

‘Mr. Moltbury, if you are under the impression that I have been trifling with your granddaughter’s affections, never did mortal labour under a greater mistake.

I will simply tell you that your love for her—and she has often told me how fondly you loved her—is nothing compared to mine.’

In five minutes the old man was shaking Mauleverer’s hand, and begging in the most penitent tones to be allowed to withdraw the epithets ‘giant-killer,’ ‘skipjack,’ and ‘jackanapes.’

\* \* \* \*

Violet was sitting silent and sad in the lonely oriel of her own little *boudoir* at Hurstenholme on the afternoon of the day following the old gentleman’s departure for town.

‘What *can* have taken grandpapa up to London?’ said Violet to herself, for about the hundredth time since the old man’s departure. ‘Until yesterday I should have thought it quite as likely that London should come down to grandpapa, as that grandpapa should go up to London. And

the strangest part of the mystery is the way in which he has kept his object from me.'

Giving up the solution of these riddles, she attempted to resume the perusal of a book from which she was endeavouring to draw hope and comfort in her tribulation. The tears, however, would come, until the words were so blurred and indistinct that she laid the book down, and looked out of the window.

'Oh! will any of us ever be happy—only a little happy even—in this world again?' said Violet, as she gazed out into the dull grey afternoon.

Two figures were coming along the terrace, but Violet's eyes were so full of tears that she could only take what may be termed a dissolving view of the two approaching pedestrians. After some blinking, however, and a few savage little dabs with her handkerchief, she exclaimed :

‘Grandpapa and—and Mr. Mauleverer!’

In a few minutes footsteps were heard in the corridor, and then a voice :

‘This way, Reginald. This way, my boy!’

‘Grandpapa calling Mr. Mauleverer by his Christian name! What can it all mean? I’m dreaming.’

The door is opened, and the two enter.

‘Go it, Reginald! she’s yours,’ says the old man, in a kind of jocular sob.

Violet’s senses reel. She rises to her feet, but she is trembling so she can hardly stand.

The sight of her—pale, trembling, and clad in deep mourning—appeals so piteously to Mauleverer, that he simply strides forward, clasps her in his arms, and in a voice trembling with emotion says, ‘Violet, my darling, loved little Vi! The misunderstanding that has kept us apart, and



made my life almost too miserable for endurance, is now removed. I came all the way from Japan to tell you that I could not live without you; but on the first evening of my return all my hopes were dashed. My cousin Carristhorpe told me he loved you, and that he intended to ask you to marry him. We have never spoken together on the subject since, and I have been under the impression all this dreary time that there was an engagement between you. He told me on that first evening that you had given him encouragement, and I met you as if I had forgotten what had passed between us. I see now how he fell into the error. But let me hear it from those pale quivering little lips.'

· 'He was so like you, he loved you so, and was always speaking so fondly of you, that I loved to be with him for *your* sake. I loved to hear him mention you with

such affection. I loved to hear him tell of things you had done as a boy——’

Here Violet broke down, and could only look up into his face.

‘ And now tell *me*, Vi, something *I* shall love to hear. Tell me that you will be my own loving little wife. Will you, Vi ?’

There is not the slightest doubt that Vi’s reply was in the affirmative, but it was drowned by an outburst of feeling from the old courtier. For some moments he had been busily shedding tears of joy into a bandana handkerchief that might have served on an emergency as the royal standard, but now, unable any longer to control his feelings in silence, he gave them full vent in a remark which proceeded from the folds of the bandana handkerchief in something between a muffled bellow and a stifled sob :

‘ He’s quite the clean potato after all !’

The most out-and-out *cle-e-anest* potato I ever came across !

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A little procession, numbering three persons, travels along the corridors leading from Violet's *boudoir* to the room where Mr. Moltbury, who has also returned from town, is sitting. The old courtier leads the way in a high state of fussy elation, Reggy Mauleverer and Violet following.

The little tale of love is soon told to Mr. Moltbury.

‘Now God be thanked!’ he exclaims  
 ‘The dearest wish of my heart—the wish that my boy expressed on his deathbed—is now fulfilled, as if by a miracle. I have now another son in the place of the dear one I have lost!’

And then Mr. Moltbury told them what poor Gus had said.



## CONCLUSION.

**J**ULIA dear,' said Mr. Moltbury one day, soon after the little ray of light described in the last chapter had broken in upon the gloom of sorrow which hung over Hurstenholme ; ' Julia dear, here is a letter which you shall tell me how to answer.'

'What is it, Geoffrey dear?' said Mrs. Moltbury, whose face sorrow had sweetened at the same time that it had planted a few lines of care.

'You shall read it for yourself, dear,' said Mr. Moltbury, as he handed the letter

—which was from no less a personage than the Prime Minister, and was as follows :

*‘Private.*

‘MY DEAR MOLTURY,

‘Her Majesty is desirous of conferring some mark of her favour upon you as a recognition of the valuable services which, in your long and brilliant political career, you have rendered to the country, and of the munificence with which you have benefited so many thousands of her subjects. This mark of the Royal favour will take the form of an elevation to the peerage, under the title of a viscount of the United Kingdom. Before, however, offering the same formally to you, I should like to know your wishes on the subject,’ etc., etc.

‘And does the answer rest with me, Geoffrey?’ asked Mrs. Moltury.

‘Yes, Julia, wholly and solely with you.’

‘Then,’ said Mrs. Moltbury, as she rose and placed her arm round her husband’s neck, and her cheek against his, ‘the answer I give is “No.” You told me once, Geoffrey, that the time might come when I should think little of such things, and I laughed you to scorn. But you were right, darling, and I was wrong. The time *has* come.’

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There is not much more to be told. There was a quiet little wedding—not a pink one—at which Carristhorpe was best man, and, besides the two principals, only Mr. and Mrs. Moltbury and the old courtier were present. There is no occasion, I presume, to inform the reader who the two principals were.

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Jack Slessinger worked conscientiously at his duties in Asia Minor, but before the year was out he fell a victim to the plague

which was ravaging the district he was in Lady Mabel divides her time between Hurstenholme and her brother's yacht. She never appears in the gay world now, having no heart for its revels. Her affection for Mr. Moltbury is that of a loving daughter.

Mr. Moltbury himself is, to all appearances, not nearly as much changed as the reader might suppose. His deep sonorous voice is heard the same as ever in the House of Commons; and he goes about the duties of life in a hearty way. He even cracks an occasional joke after the fashion with which the reader is familiar; for though there is a void in his heart which will never be filled up, he feels that 'moderate lamentation is the right of the dead, excessive grief the enemy of the living.'

THE END.





