THE RIVAL PRINCESS.
THE RIVAL PRINCESS:

A London Romance of To-day.

BY

JUSTIN M'CARTHY, M.P.,

AND

MRS CAMPBELL PRAED,

AUTHORS OF

'THE RIGHT HONOURABLE,' AND 'THE LADIES' GALLERY.

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THE RIVAL PRINCESS.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE LOBBY.

'MR BELLARMIN, can you tell me who that handsome girl is?' asked Lady Saxon. 'I have been watching her this long time. What is she doing here? and why does she dress in that eccentric fashion? She looks a cross between a lady-horsebreaker and Mary Queen of Scots.'

The question was put in the lobby of the House of Commons, on an evening in May, to one of the most rising young men of the Conservative party. This was Mr Rolfe Bellarmin, Lady Saxon's latest favourite. She was determined to make a victim of him, it was said, and he seemed quite willing to be victimised.

The lobby was full. A great debate was going on, and many strangers were waiting on the off-chance of somebody leaving his place in one of the galleries and going away, thereby bequeathing a seat to some fortunate successor. Lady Saxon, who was a clever woman, and regarded life from the dramatic point of view, was wont to say that to stand in this inner lobby of the House of Commons on such an occasion was to feel the pulse of England. To-night the very air was exciting. An important by-election—an election, that is to say, caused by some unexpected event, such as a resignation or a death—was going on, and its result might be made known at any moment now; and the result would be one of much moment and significance. Everyone in the lobby seemed to have the shadow of this coming event on his face; every face had its own look of importance and pre-occupation. Telegrams were flying off by the score from the clicking little room in the outer lobby. A small mob had collected round the post-office. The floor was strewn with more than its usual quantity of torn paper. Members were gathered in knots, their hats tilted over their foreheads after the approved fashion of the House of Commons, and were talking earnestly, or chaffing each other noisily. Other members passed to and fro in an alert, eager manner. Only the policeman on duty kept their stolid, bored expression.

Several ladies were dotted about among the groups. One or two, who waited against the wall while their escorts asked questions or applied for orders, looked a little shy and awkward; but for the most part the ladies in the lobby seemed sufficiently at ease,
English political life was in a curious condition just then. An ominous calm prevailed for the moment; it had followed a storm, and everyone felt that it was sure to be followed by a storm. The Tories were in office, but hardly in power. They had succeeded in turning out Sir Victor Champion, after he had held office for some years; but they had turned him out only by a small majority, and by the help of votes on which steady old-fashioned Toryism could not always count. The fire-new, energetic, and compact little band of Tory Democrats, as they chose to call themselves, supplied the votes which turned out Sir Victor Champion, Lord Saxon, and the other Liberal ministers of various shades, and put the Marquis of Bosworth, Lord Twyford, and other Tory nobles and gentlemen into office. But the Tories had lost their great statesman De Carmel, the only man who could stand up against Sir Victor Champion. Lord De Carmel's death had brought Lord Bosworth to the front as leader. Lord Bosworth was a Tory of unbending will and inveterate prejudices; the political sun must stand still for him; but then, would it stand still? people asked. In truth, there seemed a lack of some stimulating purpose on either side. Victor Champion's ministry had not been Liberal enough for the Liberals out of doors. Champion was kept back by his Whig colleagues—so his Radical adherents and his Tory opponents declared. But it seemed impossible to believe that he would not do his best to get hold of the country again. A good war-cry on either side would be a great thing, everybody said. The trouble with the Tory Government was that if the sun would not stand still for them, neither would the Tory Democrats. The trouble with the Liberals was that they lacked a cause and a cry.

The lady who asked the question of Mr Bellarmin was herself of most striking appearance. She was not in her first youth—thirty she frankly owned to, and probably she was a little older. But is it not conceded that a beautiful woman of thirty is at her most dangerous age? She was extremely handsome. Hers was a beauty that told of a passionate melodramatic temperament. The most optimistic soothsayer would hesitate to predict for Lady Saxon a life undisturbed by any whirlwind of emotion. She was luxuriant in form, tall—more than commonly tall—and her height was increased by the style in which her bright yellow, rather curly hair was brushed up from the nape of her neck and from her oval forehead, and coiled in a mass on the top of her small, very finely-set head. The upper folds of the coil were so much lighter than the hair beneath that they suggested a coronal of gold, such as might have been borne by some early Saxon princess. The coronal was placed, however, a little on one side, thus giving her a certain air of defiance and coquetry, bringing to mind, also, the rakishly-worn képi of a dare-devil young French soldier. Her dark eyebrows and large dark eyes were in curious contrast with the golden hair, which evidently did not owe its glory to art. Her mouth was ripe and red, and had a slow way of smiling that was one of her greatest fascinations. She was in evening dress, having rushed from dinner to
hear her husband speak, and wore a long plush mantle, the colour of heliotrope, which was a little thrown back, and showed glimpses of a neck and arms half veiled in lace, and of what sculptors call heroic size. Perhaps a fastidious observer might have said that there was just a little too much of her in every way; that nature had made her a little too tall, too yellow-haired, too dark-eyed, too handsome; that there was something almost oppressive in her beauty; that there was a faint suggestion of lack of refinement, as in a dinner-table too prodigally adorned with plate and hothouse flowers.

Lady Saxon was quite entitled to feel at home in this political atmosphere. She was married to the Marquis of Saxon, eldest son and heir of the great Duke of Athelstane, and one of the Whig leaders in the House of Commons. Lord Saxon had been up, and was now down, and his speech was creating some talk in the lobby. Rolfe Bellarmin, when he approached Lady Saxon, had expected that she would say something about her husband's speech, and was surprised to find her mind occupied with the unknown beauty.

He laughed pleasantly. The laugh brightened his fine-featured, poetic, almost melancholy face, which, when in repose, looked like that of a mediaeval hero of romance. But when he laughed his ringing laugh, and above all when he baited his opponents on the floor of the House in his pugnacious schoolboy style, he seemed what he was, a nineteenth-century Tory Democrat, the leader of the little party which had been instrumental in bringing the Conservatives into office.

'That young lady has every right to get herself up as Mary Queen of Scots, Lady Saxon. She is the Honourable Mary Stuart Beaton.'

'And who is the Honourable Mary Stuart Beaton?'

'You haven't heard of our new Pretendress? There was an article about her in *The Piccadilly* last week. It was called "Nineteenth-Century Jacobites."'

Lady Saxon smiled. 'I like my politics and my scandal at first hand,' she said. 'But I'm behind instead of before the newspapers in this case. Mary Stuart! what does that mean? I retract my remark about the lady-horsebreaker, since she is a friend of yours. Her majesty has a distinguished look, and is certainly very pretty. Tell me about her.'

Lady Saxon turned a critical gaze upon a little group of ladies and gentlemen who had just been brought into the lobby. Anybody could have seen at a glance that this particular lady about whom Lady Saxon was inquiring was the principal figure in the group; one could as well have failed to pick out Diana herself in the midst of a group of her maiden huntresses. There was, indeed, something of the huntress in this young woman's aspect, in her height—she, too, was taller than the ordinarily tall woman—in the erectness and freedom of her carriage, in her slimness and the poise of her head, and in the clinging robe of black velvet, which fell in straight wide folds from the waist, and looked odd and picturesque in contrast with the more inflated draperies of the fashionable London women. Whether by accident or design, the costume reminded its beholder of that style of dress which we associate with portraits of the Scottish Queen. The stiff, long bodice, made with a sort of
modern adaptation of the old-fashioned stomacher; the rosary and cross hanging from the girdle; the bonnet peaked in front and edged with large jet beads; the full lace ruffle—all harmonised with a face startlingly Stuart in outline. This nineteenth-century representative of the White Queen bore a curious resemblance to some of the best-known and most authentic portraits of her hapless prototype. She had the oval face and long, slender neck, the rather high forehead, over which dark-brown hair with a ruddy tinge through it parted in natural waves, the long, straight nose, the full, clear, almond-shaped hazel eyes, and fine arched brows, even the little pointed chin with the dimple upon it. The face was full of decision and of a certain innocent pride; it was not without the shade of proverbial Stuart melancholy. But this was only noticeable when the features were in repose, and then it gave to the countenance a pathos and feminine sweetness that was, perhaps, its greatest charm. Yet surely the tragic could have no association with this Mary Stuart, whose smile, suddenly illuminating the face, was so frank and bright, and whose manner when she talked had almost childlike animation.

'Miss Beaton is the lioness of a certain coterie,' answered Bellarmin. 'She holds a sort of court of her own, so they tell me, and gives herself, quite naturally, I suppose, the airs of exiled royalty.'

'A queen of the gipsies!' said Lady Saxon, scornfully.

'Come now, Lady Saxon, that complexion doesn't look like gipsy blood.'

'Charles the Second looked like a gipsy, didn't he?' Lady Saxon interjected.

'Well, Miss Beaton doesn't, as you see. If you were a Legitimist, I should tell you that there stands your lawful queen—your queen by divine right. You count yourself English, I suppose, now?' he added.

'I am English, of course,' replied Lady Saxon, composedly, 'though I was married to a German.'

Bellarmin bowed. Certainly Lady Saxon's pronunciation of the letter 'r' was too trill-like to bear out the current rumour that she was of Teutonic origin. Though many fanciful pen-and-ink sketches had been made of Lady Saxon in 'society' publications, nothing more was known as positive fact about her than that Lord Saxon had married her in Frankfort some eighteen months previously, and that she had been the widow of a certain Baron Langenwelt ennobled for scientific discovery.

'But tell me,' said Lady Saxon, still looking towards the quasi-royal group, 'tell me about this Miss Beaton. What are you talking of? Is it a joke or a mystification, or a case of the bend sinister?'

'Nothing of the sort. I am quite serious. That girl is the legitimate descendant of the Stuarts. You can study her genealogy in the "Almanach de Gotha," Lady Saxon, if you doubt me. She starts from Henrietta Maria, Duchess of Orleans, who, according to scandalous chronicles, was poisoned by her husband. Henrietta Maria left a daughter, married to a prince of Savoy. Miss Beaton's mother, through whom her Stuart blood runs, was a Bavarian
princess, and she married an Englishman—Lord Beaton—a Legitimist, a Tory of the old school, of the "divine right," "church and king" order.

"In short, a Conservative—like you," put in Lady Saxon, fixing her dark eyes upon the young man, and smiling one of her enigmatic smiles.

"Not in the least like me," returned Bellarmin. "Like Lord Stonehenge, if you want an illustration," and he glanced towards a tall, slight, aristocratic-looking man with a peaked Vandyke beard, who was standing near Miss Beaton, and was at the moment speaking to a portly white-haired lady, evidently one of Miss Beaton's companions. Lord Stonehenge was a Catholic, a Jacobite by education, whose ancestors paid homage at St Germains, and whose association with the English court ended when the dynasty of revolution began.

"I am interested in Lord Stonehenge," said Lady Saxon. "His place is not far from a queer little nest of mine. You don't conserve traditions, then, Mr Bellarmin?"

"I am a Tory of the new-fangled sort," replied Bellarmin; "that is, not a Tory at all in the old-fashioned sense—what Lord Saxon would call a Tory. I only conserve the traditions which are not rotten enough to crumble away of themselves. There I differ from your leader—your Champion of Christendom, as they call him—who wants to go at established institutions like St George at the dragon. Social evolution is my theory, Lady Saxon, though I and my Progressive Tory Party did turn out you Liberals the other day."

"You should be in our camp," said Lady Saxon, her eyes still gazing into his. "You have nothing in common with the Tories, and you know it. But you like to be master of the situation, Mr Bellarmin. You love a free fight. You must be always in opposition, showing up abuses, and bullying the place-holders. You have it in your power now, while the balance is so even, to turn out any government. That has been your aim and ambition. Oh, I know! It is a proud position for so young a man; but will it last?"

"Till the general election," said Rolfe, in a tone rather of question than of assertion.

"You refused a place in the ministry?" continued Lady Saxon.

"Yes; the place of a junior lord," put in Bellarmin.

"Ah, well! you see, Mr Bellarmin, I do know some political secrets which the newspapers only hint at," she went on. "You were quite right not to commit yourself, I may tell you that." There was meaning in her tone.

"I suppose I understand you, Lady Saxon. You think that Sir Victor Champion will soon have to face the country on a new issue. Well, the time may come to demolish the House of Lords—fifty years hence, perhaps, but I don't quite see it now." Bellarmin lowered his voice, and glanced cautiously round. "I am quite ready to believe that you know a great many political secrets; Lady Saxon. Perhaps you wouldn't mind giving me the straight tip about these mysterious negotiations some knowing ones are talking of—about the mine which people say Champion is springing beneath the foundations of the constitution."
Lady Saxon's eyes shot out a gleam.

'Oh, I cannot tell you anything about that,' she said, slowly. She drew a deep breath, and, involuntarily, perhaps, pressed her hand to her bosom. 'Sir Victor Champion is a great man,' she said; 'a man of indomitable will, of infinite resource. His enemies have not done him justice, nor,' she added, 'his friends.'

'Has he any friends?'

'Not so many as worse men; but those he has are true to him,' said Lady Saxon.

'Yet his secrets get out, you see!' Bellarmin answered.

'You think so?'

'I have proved it, have I not?'

'I am amazed, I confess,' said Lady Saxon, after a moment's pause. 'How did you get to know?' 'About these negotiations?'

'If you choose to call them so,' she replied.

'What else could anyone call them?'

'Well, no matter what they are called; don't fence with me. Surely we know each other too well for that. How did you get to know?'

The shadow of an emotion passed over Bellarmin's face at her appeal, but he shook it off. He was evidently under constraint, and tried to hide what he was feeling under a mask of conventional banter. He laughed.

'Come, isn't that rather cool on your part, Lady Saxon? You want me to tell you everything. And you, who hint at a great deal, but will never really tell one a political secret.'

'I don't so much want to find out what you know, as how you came to know,' Lady Saxon said, emphatically. 'After all—if there are traitors in Sir Victor's confidence—men who reveal his most secret purposes—'

Lady Saxon seemed moved to generous anger.

'Lady Saxon,' said Bellarmin, gravely, 'there was nothing of the kind. There was no underhand revelation of anything. There was no treachery of any sort.'

Lady Saxon's eyes flashed with a delight which she hastened to conceal. All this talk had been a little fencing match between her and Bellarmin, and, quite unconsciously, Bellarmin had been vanquished. Lady Saxon had never before heard one word of any negotiations going on between Sir Victor and any set of politicians. Bellarmin had taken it for granted that she must be aware of the whole matter through her husband, and had had a hope that, by playing a bold game, he might get to know something of Lord Saxon's purposes. He gained no addition to his stock of information. She gained much. She learned that there were negotiations. She knew that her husband had not been told anything about them, and from Bellarmin's last answer she also learned that the negotiations were carried on semi-officially with him on behalf of his party. That was the only construction to be put on his declaration that there had been no treachery.

'Let us come back to our princess,' said Bellarmin, as if he wished to turn the conversation. 'See how these men are doing
homage to her, here in the lobby of the House of Commons,' he laughed. 'There's something odd and incongruous and picturesque about the whole thing, Lady Saxon. It takes my fancy. It is going back to Sir Walter Scott and Flora MacIvor, and all that sort of thing. It's dramatic; it's refreshing in these days of the Birmingham caucus and the divided skirt; don't you think so?'

'I agree with you that Miss Mary Stuart Beaton has a sense of the dramatic,' said Lady Saxon, rather-absently.

She would have preferred to talk about this unknown scheme of Champion's, the leader of the Opposition—this great coup which people said he was meditating, and which was to shatter or cement the Liberal Party. She wanted to talk about practical politics, and not about visionary dynasties. The interest she had felt in Mary Stuart Beaton was imperiously expelled by another and more powerful interest—an interest that lay deep, deep at the core of Josephine Saxon's heart. She herself became conscious that her bosom was answering to an emotion not warranted by the mere casual mention of her husband's chief, and she tried to pull herself together. Making a peremptory little sign to Bellarmin to await her pleasure, she suddenly nodded and smiled to a lady who came up at that moment.

'How do you do, Lady Mavis?'

There was a half-whispered colloquy.

'Just come from Polesmere. It was too terrible. We are getting as serious as the Bostonians. Everybody in corners with dictionaries, trying to see how many words they could make out of Sardanapalus—that sort of thing. Then guessing words: somebody gave Cupid and Psyche, and Lady Polesmere—the bride—who they say learns her lesson by heart every morning, and is too stupid and too lovely for anything, said, 'But who is Psyche? I never heard of Psyche.'"

'Had she ever heard of Cupid?'

'Well, my dear, she couldn't come to a better person than you to learn about him. Have you begun your parties yet? Ask me soon to a little dinner, only don't put me beside one of your horrid Radicals. Since you gave Hodge his vote the Ladies' Gallery has become a bear-garden—a pair of Radical shoemakeresses talking so loudly that it was impossible to hear any of our side. I spoke to the doorkeeper, but it was of no use; he couldn't do anything.'

'Oh, poor Mr Samuelson,' Lady Saxon said. 'I didn't ever suppose that he had any Radical tendencies.'

'All creatures of that sort have Radical tendencies,' Lady Mavis affirmed, in a manner that ought to have settled the question.

'I always fancied that he was a mild Conservative,' Lady Saxon said.

'My opinion is,' Lady Mavis Redhouse gravely declared, 'that doorkeepers ought not to have any political ideas of their own. I do not believe that politics were meant for doorkeepers.'

Lady Saxon bantered her friend upon certain Primrose League proceedings in the provinces. It was evident that the Tory Party depended mainly upon Lady Mavis Redhouse for its maintenance and consolidation.
Bellarmin marvelled at the frivolity of woman—especially of political woman.

There were barbed congratulations on Lord Saxon's speech, and parting allusions to coffee on the Terrace.

Rolfe Bellarmin, watching Lady Saxon's face, fancied that he had a clue to the changes in her manner. He did not doubt that she was acquainted with the springs which moved the figures in this game of politics. It was whispered that Lord Saxon, heavy Whig, and unimaginative, unambitious leader of the less progressive Liberals, was not in complete sympathy with Champion's bold views on the subject of reform. Bellarmin suspected that, whatever coup Champion might be meditating, he had not the absolute certainty of Lord Saxon's support. He made a shrewd guess that Champion calculated upon startling Lord Saxon into acquiescence, or upon his power of educating his party so secretly and so rapidly that Lord Saxon would one day find himself in the rear, and comparatively powerless. But in that case, what was Lady Saxon's attitude? She was too clever to be kept in the dark. There were not two opinions on the subject of Lady Saxon's cleverness, though it was often said that she lacked self-control, that she made her likes and her hates too apparent to outsiders. Some of her words just now in reference to Champion gave the impression of unguarded and devoted admiration. Bellarmin had not, however, observed any sign of intimacy between the Liberal chief and the wife of Lord Saxon. Sir Victor was not met in Lady Saxon's drawing-room. Though they were, of course, acquaintances, it would seem that their acquaintance was only superficial. To be sure, there had been hitherto but few opportunities for social intercourse. Lord Saxon's marriage had taken place the last autumn but one. The Liberal ministry had come into short power in the following summer, and during part of their term of office Lady Saxon had been kept out of the whirl of London life by the birth and death of her first child—a son. She had only taken her place as a leader of fashion in London a few months ago. Her social prominence had been coincident with the dawn of her friendship with Bellarmin.

This friendship had constituted a sort of crisis in Bellarmin's career. He began to find out that, like other men, he seemed to have a dual nature. He sometimes wondered whether it was to his best or his worst self that Lady Saxon appealed. There were moments when he felt a sense of passionate revolt against her influence, moments when he had thought of marriage as a possible refuge or corrective. But her ascendancy remained. No other woman, so far, had been able to enchain even temporarily the young politician's affections. The political atmosphere was to him so keen and so necessary a stimulant, that to love outside its radius appeared to him an impossibility. Unmarried girls he found painfully insipid. This is a conclusion to which many a London man arrives, even without the splendid contrast presented by a Lady Saxon. The whole situation was piquant. There was a double charm in the fact that the lady of his admiration stood in the first rank of his opponents. Could she win him over? Dared he trust himself within the enemy's lines? Was she playing
with him, or was she in heroic earnest? Was she goddess or diplomatist, or mere every-day excitement-loving coquette? All this speculation heightened the charm and danger of the position. No definite word had been spoken. The draught was too strong to be taken without consideration of consequences. Bellarmin dallied with the cup; but the fumes from it were mounting.

Lady Saxon turned again to Bellarmin, and lightly touched his arm with her gloved finger.

'When are you coming to see me, to talk of important things? To-morrow?'

'You have only to name your own time, always provided that it is not an hour when the division bell is likely to ring.'

'To-morrow; it is an off-day. At six o'clock. I have a great deal to say to you about serious things. Your eyes keep wandering to your Stuart Princess,' she added, in a bantering tone. 'Take care; rembember the fate of Chastelard. Who is that tall man with her—the man with the white moustache and the scar on his forehead? He looks the dignified parent in a play. Is he her father?'

'Oh, no! Her father is dead. That is General Falcon, an Englishman, I believe, who was in the Austrian service, and has given up everything to act as her—what shall I say?—I really don't know—Prime Minister, Master of the Horse, Chief Secretary, manager, factotum—anything you like to call him.'

'I don't particularly want to call him anything,' answered Lady Saxon, a little disdainfully. 'I can understand what the office is. A pretty young Pretendress—is that what you called her?—wants just such a picturesque and stately and unimpeachable sort of personage to introduce her, and manage her affairs. Oh, yes, one knows all that!' There was a tinge of bitterness in Lady Saxon's tone. Her hearer might almost have fancied that she herself had known what it was to face the world without an introducer. 'Unprotected youth and beauty are at a disadvantage in these days. Well, I should imagine that General Falcon's figure and moustache would count for ever so much with a jury of British Philistines, and will impress society greatly. Is your Stuart Princess going to assert her claims to the throne of England?'

'Oh, no!' said Bellarmin, again with more eagerness than was quite pleasing to Lady Saxon, for it showed too strong a measure of interest in the lovely unknown. 'I can't think that anything so absurd is dreamed of. She has very sensible friends in this country, I hear—some of the Tory Catholic set—and they won't let her be led into nonsense. There is a notion that she has come over to claim some money or estates, or something that once belonged to the ancestral Stuarts.'

'You seem to be well up in her affairs. Have you been presented at her court?'

'Not yet; but I shall get an introduction. I think the whole thing is most interesting.'

'Do you? I don't, somehow. I can remember the Tichborne case; that excited me a little at first, but it became so tiresome. Claimants to anything are bores.'
I would rather look at my Mary Stuart than at the gentleman who called himself Sir Roger Tichborne,' said Bellarmin.

'No doubt,' Lady Saxon answered, coldly.

'One can't help admiring her,' Rolfe went on, injudiciously.

'I think I detest her already,' Lady Saxon said. 'I hate shams of every kind. Perhaps, she added, with a curious burst of candour, which was characteristic of the woman, 'because I'm a good deal of a sham myself.'

Lady Saxon, in truth, was a little out of tune. When will men learn, or will they never learn, that women do not delight in hearing the praises of other women, especially when these praises come from masculine lips that might be employed in saying more appropriate things?

Meanwhile Miss Mary Stuart Beaton was conducted by Lord Stonehenge, the gentleman with the Vandyke beard, and some members of the House of Commons, to the entrance of the Legislative Chamber, in order that she might have a front view of the debate. Passing through the outer door, between the great leather chairs where the twin doorkeepers sit, one comes on a sort of hall, out of which the division lobbies run, the 'No' lobby on the right of the visitor, the 'Aye' on the left; straight in front are the swinging brazen doors which open only to members of Parliament, and within which is the debating chamber itself. On the extreme left of the left-hand door is a kind of niche, with a small leather seat. On this seat, in this niche, it is the privilege of women, and only women, to stand. They are escorted in there, not more than two at a time, by a member of the House; and, standing on that perch, and looking through the plate-glass encased in the brass of the door, they can see Mr Speaker on his throne, and the members of the government on the Treasury bench at his right, and leaders of the Opposition at his left, and leaders of independent parties below the gangway. The Ladies' Gallery, be it observed, is above and behind the Speaker's chair, and Miss Beaton might go there for ever and not see what the occupant of the Speaker's chair is like, or how the House looks from the natural or pictorial point of view.

Miss Beaton had not looked upon this sight before, and she ran across the tessellated pavement of the lobby with the eagerness of a girl anxious to see something new, and the careless freedom of one who has got it well into her mind that she is at liberty to do anything that she likes in the way that pleases her. Her escort, Mr Leven, a Scotch member, descended from a family which had forfeited its title in the rebellion of 1745, was a little behind her; and her skirts were long and trailing, and he was afraid of treading on them. He had to plunge forward, however, for she was positively about opening the brass door, and calmly entering the sacred precincts of the House itself, where the apparition of a woman would create as much bewilderment and consternation as her intrusion into the Mosque of Omar while the services of the Mahometans were going on.

'This way, please,' he said, breathlessly; 'not into the House. This little perch—this perch here.'
In the Lobby.

'Oh! am I to mount on that?'
'If you please. Do you know that you were going into the House of Commons itself?'

Mary laughed, not in the least abashed by the knowledge of the sacrilege she had so nearly perpetrated. She mounted lightly to the perch, and studied the front view of the House for a moment in silence.

'I feel rather ridiculous here,' she said, looking down on Lord Stonehenge. 'I am like a schoolgirl mounted on a penitential stool. I think I am rather too tall for this sort of perch; I'll get down. Oh! what is happening?'

Two members were rushing wildly past, and thrusting their way into the House. One of them was waving a telegram in his hand. Miss Beaton remained on her perch for the moment, eager to see and hear. She saw the member who bore the telegram break through the groups who were standing at the Bar, and while the doors of the House were yet swinging open, she could hear him say in quite a loud and excited tone, 'Fourteen hundred majority for Tressel!' Then there was a tremendous burst of cheering from the Opposition benches, which was again and again renewed. It utterly bewildered a member of the government who was haranguing from the Treasury bench. He could not at first understand the meaning of this strange interruption; did not know what had happened, and stumbled hopelessly in his oration.

Mary dropped lightly to the floor without touching Lord Stonehenge's reverential hand. She and her escort came out into the lobby again, and Mr Leven explained the meaning of the telegram and the cheering. The election had gone in favour of the Radical candidate by a large majority. But that was not all. The victorious candidate was Tommy Tressel, a very advanced and audacious Radical, an independent, eccentric sort of man. But that was not all. Tressel had been representative of the constituency for a long time; but his Radical opinions had been growing more and more pronounced of late, and he had been making furious attacks upon the House of Lords. His opponents taunted him with having betrayed his constituents, and promised him that he should never get into the House again—at least for that constituency. The general election, whenever it came, would settle him, they said. Whereupon Tressel promptly applied for the Chiltern Hundreds—in other words, resigned his seat—and came forward again as a candidate for the same place, in order to give his constituents a chance of saying whether they approved of what he had said and done or not. And now, behold, he is sent back to the House with an immense and wholly unexpected majority to encourage him. No wonder the Radicals cheered.

Yet another incident occurred. Sir Victor Champion and Lord Saxon were passing out in deep conversation, and the moment Sir Victor was seen all the Radical members in the lobby set up a wild cheer; and other Radicals came rushing out of the House, and joined in the cheer, and soon quite a crowd formed around Sir Victor, cheering for him as if he were the hero of the hour. Sir Victor looked pleased; Lord Saxon scowled.
'What's the row about now?' Lord Saxon asked, when the cheering had at last subsided.

'Oh, Tressel's election, of course!' Sir Victor said, carelessly.

'But I don't see what we have to do with that; I mean, what you have to do with it. Why should they cheer you because Tressel has been elected?'

Sir Victor said nothing. Lord Stonehenge whispered a word or two to Mary, who nodded assent; and then he stopped the two statesmen, and presented each to Miss Beaton. Lord Saxon, a tall, heavy-jawed man, with a stolid face deeply flushed, a full, reddish beard, and a shambling, groomlike way of walking, felt awkward, and looked it, and said only a formal word or two. Sir Victor's eyes darted upon Miss Beaton, and fastened on her face. He felt and showed the deepest interest in the meeting, and before many seconds he had made it clear to Mary that he understood all about her history and genealogy. Lady Saxon and Bellarmin watched the movements and gestures of the little group.

'Come, you had better take your turn, and do homage with the rest,' Lady Saxon said. She was willing to do without Bellarmin now; she wanted to come in the way of Sir Victor Champion.

The interview between Miss Beaton and Champion was over. Lord Saxon saw his wife, and came across and spoke to her.

'I want to know why Sir Victor has not been to see me,' said Lady Saxon, in a low, rapid tone. 'Make him come here. You seem annoyed, Saxon. Has anything happened?'

'Nothing much—talk to you by and by,' Lord Saxon said, brightening a little.

Then he turned and motioned to Sir Victor, who was about to pass on, merely lifting his hat to Lady Saxon.

'My wife wants to speak to you,' he said. Lady Saxon moved forward and held out her hand. Sir Victor joined them.

Lady Saxon's opportunity had come.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE TERRACE.

SIR VICTOR was a man the first sight of whom gave one the idea that he trod the earth with a peculiarly firm tread. His walk was not a stride nor a plunge, but an assured, rapid, masterful walk, each foot seeming to take a steady hold of the ground until the other had found its place. Sir Victor moved with the air of one who believes that all he sees belongs to him. He had a large forehead, strongly marked features, heavy eyebrows, and quick gleaming eyes. His face was almost smooth-shaven. He kept his head thrown back as he walked. He was not handsome, but he was commanding in appearance, and few who looked at him would have thought of mentally inquiring whether he was handsome or not. There was something stern, something tragic about his face. His forehead seemed scarred with the thunder. As with Marcellus
in Virgil's poem, darksome night appeared, amid all his triumph, to gather its black shadow around his head. Women admired him, that was certain—admired him and were afraid of him—admired him the more because they were afraid of him.

He had been a very successful man thus far. He had entered public life with some fortune to back him, but with no aristocratic connections. He had married both fortune and rank. His wife had died after a year, but his success was assured. His marriage had been the turning-point in his career. Now he had come to be the maker of peers, and the patron even of dukes. He had a consuming ambition. His friends said it was a noble ambition; his enemies said that it was an ambition ruinous to his country. It was not a selfish ambition in the lowest sense, but if it led him wrong, it would be likely to do infinitely more harm than any merely selfish ambition could have wrought in such a position as that of a modern English statesman. Had Sir Victor only coveted office, rank, power, influence, for himself, and been content with such acquisitions, he might have had enough to sate the most greedy ambition, and yet have done no great harm to anything except his own nature and his own soul. But the ambition of Sir Victor Champion was to have his own name inseparably associated in time to come with some great change wrought in the condition of his country. His admirers insisted that his only desire was to have his name remembered in connection with some great good deed done by or for England. But his enemies would have it that he was resolved to be remembered in history at England's expense, if he could not be remembered in blessings. Both sides, it is likely, were partly right; were seized of half the truth. The ambition which identifies our country's glory with our own does not always regard our own glory as identical with that of our country. The aspiring youth who fired the Ephesian dome was only a fool for his pains, or a madman; it is a comfort to reflect that there are not many ambitions like his. But a man of very different quality might have set fire to the temple under the impression that he was only illuminating it while inscribing his own name in letters of flame round its dome.

Lady Saxon, having got her opportunity, was determined not to lose it. She wanted to bring Sir Victor Champion to her side here in the full light of the House of Commons lobby. She had deeper and much stronger reasons for this desire, but one of her minor and superficial reasons was to inflict a sort of punishment on Bellarmin, who had been thinking a great deal too much about Miss Beaton, and her claims and her beauty.

'We have not met for a long time, Sir Victor,' Lady Saxon said, turning her eyes upon him, and then letting them droop, 'except in the most casual and commonplace way. We have not met to talk.'

'No, we have not been floated together,' Sir Victor answered, in a deep, melodious voice, which fell caressingly on her ear, and made the blood rush for an instant to her cheek. 'I am glad to find you in town.'

Lady Saxon looked up again straight into his face. There was something at once seductive and defiant in her glance. Her expression was peculiar. She seemed to be commanding Sir Victor's
attention, and to be appealing, at the same time, to a claim upon his sentimental regard, which only he and she understood. Lord Saxon, it was evident, suspected no such claim. His heavy head was bent, showing the bull-like conformation of neck, and giving him an appearance of dull obstinacy, in striking contrast with the alert, dominant expression of the Liberal chief. The eyes of both Sir Victor and Lady Saxon turned for a second upon him, and met again. Lady Saxon laughed in a forced manner, but her voice faltered in spite of herself.

'The current has drifted us together at last,' she said; 'but you might have found me before.'

'Look here, Josephine,' Lord Saxon broke in, 'I have got to go away for a while, you know. I daresay Champion won't mind seeing you back to the Ladies' Gallery, or the Terrace, if you want to go. I'll meet you later on at Lady Dorrington's.'

'Very well,' she answered, and gave him a smile as she added, 'that means there will be nothing much going on here, and that there is to be a political caucus at the Dorringtons' instead. Saxon doesn't often go with me to an evening party.'

Lord Saxon strode away.

'I don't think I need give you the trouble of mounting up to the Ladies' Gallery with me, Sir Victor; I have heard enough for one night, and it is hot and stuffy up there. Why do you gaze up in that sort of way? I think I had better get home, and go on to Lady Dorrington's. Shall I see you there?'

Sir Victor shook his head. He seemed to be hesitating as to what he should say next. She watched him narrowly. She was eager to see whether he would take her at her word and let her go.

'Will you come for a turn on the Terrace?' he asked at last, in a low tone. 'The night is delightful.'

She could hardly restrain a deep breath of exultation.

'Yes, thanks, since you are so good. Indeed, I told one or two women that I should be on the Terrace.'

'Come this way,' Sir Victor said, and she swept out of the lobby with him, making, as she passed, a parting bow to Bellarmin, who had just been presented to the mysterious Stuart girl, and who appeared by no means unhappy, even though Lady Saxon was leaving him.

Lady Saxon and Sir Victor passed out of the lobby into a corridor lined on both sides with the schoolboard-like numbered lockers in which members kept their papers. They went through a swinging brass door on the left, and made their way down a tortuous staircase, darksome as that of a jail; and at the bottom of this sordid staircase to another door, which conducted to a stone passage on the right. Wheeling round to the left again, they were at a gate through which they suddenly passed into all the beauty and glory of the soft night of early summer, and found themselves on the Terrace, where the river washes the southern walls of Westminster Palace. There was a moon shining, but its brightness was dimmed by the amber glow which poured down from the library windows above, and the lamps set at intervals along the balustrade illuminating the wide stone walk. A fitful breeze swept up from the water. The
On the Terrace.

river, closed in here by the two stone bridges with their cavern-like arches and triangular jets of light, had a ripple on it, and looked alive. The reflections of the lanterns in the barges lying along the embankment seemed to dance in the depths. Opposite rose the great square blocks of St Thomas' Hospital with their spectral windows, and the tall grey shot-tower, lower down, lost itself in the mist. A little steamer puffing and groaning, and the roar of the Charing Cross train, gave life and commonplace reality to the scene, which otherwise had a curious solemnity and impressiveness.

'I am always ashamed of that vile, dark staircase,' Champion said, in his conventional manner, as they walked up to the end and turned again; 'and yet, I think we ought to keep it as it is, if only for the reason that the Terrace looks so much more attractive because of the caverns through which we have to get to it. Don't you think so, Lady Saxon?'

'I have been thinking of many things since we came out, but not of that,' she answered.

Perhaps Sir Victor did not wish to notice the significance of her tone; or perhaps his mind was occupied with the late election and Tressel's majority; or, perhaps, he had thrown off the statesman for a moment, and was enjoying the picturesqueness of the place and of the evening.

Sir Victor Champion had a quick and vivid interest in almost everything. Certainly there was hardly anything in which he could not promptly get up a genuine interest. He had a liberal knowledge of art, science, history, poetry, romance, the acting drama, architecture, Japanese colouring, and old china. His power of throwing himself from subject to subject gave some excuse for the allegation of his enemies, that a fatal levity, a want of depth and adhesiveness, was destined to mar his best gifts, and make his career dangerous to his country. He soon became conscious of the beauty of the scene, and found a pleasure in expatiating on it to Lady Saxon. As they walked along the Terrace he began pointing out to her what he regarded as the most interesting objects, and he was launching into quite an eloquent dissertation on the history of Lambeth Palace and the Lollards' Tower. Lady Saxon's bosom heaved with impatience. She had not come there to be told of the Lollards' Tower.

'We walk together side by side, the first time for years,' she said, in a low tone of impassioned remonstrance; 'and you can only talk to me about Lambeth Palace. Victor!'

Her voice dropped to the lowest, softest, most plaintive note of appeal as she looked into the statesman's face and called him by his name. He stopped, and turned to her in some surprise.

'Lady Saxon—' he was beginning to say.

'Lady Saxon!' she repeated, in low, wistful protest.

'Josephine,' he said. 'Josephine! How many years is it since I called you by that name?'

She did not answer. They had reached the end of the Terrace and turned. Sir Victor glanced at his companion. Lady Saxon in her splendid beauty, with her stately carriage, her arms folded in her rich mantle, and her eyes gazing earnestly into the night, had about her a suggestion of the dramatic which was not without
attraction for Sir Victor. His temperament required the stimulant of drama. He wondered what was passing in her mind. He half expected some theatrical outburst; but it did not come then.

'Have you noticed those thin, white tracks along the lattice-work pattern of the pavement?' she asked, quietly. 'There are three of them. See! the middle one is very distinct.'

'They are the marks of many footsteps,' he replied; 'the tracks of the men who have walked up and down here.'

'The tracks of the men who have made and are making history. You are of them, Victor. I think that if I were a writer, I could compose a poem or a satire by the inspiration of those three narrow paths. Think of the big schemes that have been worked out here in the brains of ambitious men; and think of the agonies of disappointment some of those men must have suffered as they paced these stones, when their schemes had come to nothing.'

'Yes,' said Sir Victor. 'You have a quick imagination, Josephine. These stones could tell many a soul's story.'

'Think of the women who have walked here, too!' Lady Saxon went on; 'of the hopes that might be spoken, and of those that might not even be whispered; the fears and the ambitions for the husband, or for the lover—I wonder how much oftener for the lover—the light flirtations, the intrigues, the heart tragedies. But I don't want to talk of intrigues; the heart tragedies! Oh, I've seen enough of the House of Commons, Victor, to know that love often walks along this place masquerading as policy.'

'Not with me. I am not one of the politicians who turn the House of Commons into the background of a flirtation.'

'Why not? Politicians, I suppose, are but human, and want some pastime in the intervals of their serious business. Mr Bellarmin is not the only one of you who finds it here ready to hand.'

'What makes you instance Bellarmin?'

'He comes naturally to one's mind. People are talking of him just now. He is young, handsome, and a power in his way; and he will be a greater power still before very long. Remember, he is the leader of the party which turned us out of office. He has a future.'

'You are right,' said Champion, thoughtfully.

'A woman who bound him with her chains might feel proud of her captive,' said Lady Saxon.

'Report speaks of you as that woman, doesn't it?'

'Is that why you have avoided me?' she asked in a different tone. 'Let us be frank with one another. Surely we have known each other too well for masks to be necessary now.'

'It would be more prudent to wear them, would it not—at any rate in this place?' he replied, waiting till they had passed through the knots of people who were gathered about the various little tables in the middle of the Terrace.

'Not at all,' she said. 'No one would be surprised that I should be here with my husband's friend and leader. But tell me, why have you avoided me?'

'Because, Josephine, I felt that there might be danger in our intimacy.'

'Danger!' she repeated; 'to which of us?'
I scarcely know. I was afraid that the position might be painful to you. Our past has some troublous associations. I thought it probable that, as Lady Saxon, you might wish that past forgotten—or at least ignored.

Not one memory of it which links me with you. I cherish those associations; they are sweeter to me than rank or riches—sweeter to me than anything on this earth. They are myself.

Josephine!

If all that makes the good or ill of my life were to crumble into nothingness they would remain. She paused and placed herself with her back against the balustrade which fronted the river. The two were in shadow, and far out of hearing of the merry groups scattered here and there by the tea-tables. Do you ever think of those old days, Victor? she went on, in a voice of smothered emotion; those dear old days when we were so much to each other!

I have remembered them always, Josephine, with tenderness and gratitude.

He, too, spoke with emotion. To a critical listener it might have seemed only the echo of her emotion.

You loved me? she asked, eagerly; even though you left me.

I loved you indeed; and for many a long day I missed you. But—He hesitated. You put the case harshly—

Well, be frank. You owe me that. She spoke with agitated insistence.

I find a greater difficulty in touching upon the past with Lady Saxon than I might have done with—Madame Langenwelt.

You know that Langenwelt married me after that—because I refused to accept him on any other terms, she put in coolly. I had become indispensable to him. The trade would have collapsed without me.

He was ennobled?

Oh, yes, a patent of nobility bought out of the proceeds of quack medicines! She laughed an odd, tuneless laugh. It's a queer sort of career, isn't it? Not altogether unlike that of Emma Harte, Lady Hamilton—you remember—only I'm better educated. I have to thank Langenwelt for that; and I'm not going to make a mess of the wind-up as she did. Good heavens! In the days when I exhibited at sixpence a head, who would have dreamed that I should ever have the right to go into dinner before your wife?

Josephine, said Champion, in some embarrassment and much pity, it pains and perplexes me to hear you talk in this wild way. Your outspokenness is alarming. I beg you for your own sake—

Oh! she interrupted, with a gesture of her hands as if she would fling away pretences. Outspokenness is the most highly prized of luxuries to me. I can't afford to indulge in it often. You shouldn't grudge it to me on an occasion like this. You and I, Victor, have the faculty of appreciating a situation—as they say in the theatres—at least I used to think so. There's something dramatic about our meeting to-night, isn't there! And to be in this place—of all places—the theatre of your glory! You sacrificed me that you might play your part here; and it's only fair, now my
turn has come, that I should be allowed to do a little melodramatic spouting of my own.'

Again she laughed.

Just then some passing member took off his hat. Lady Saxon bowed.

'A lovely night,' she remarked, indifferently, 'and so warm for the time of year! Do we lose anything by enjoying this delicious air? Who is speaking?'

'You have lost nothing; only old What's-his-name hammering away still for the government. He was awfully put out by the cheers for Tommy Tressel's election—hasn't quite recovered even yet.'

The member moved on. Lady Saxon turned again to Champion. She put out her hand and touched his for a second as it rested on the balustrade.

'You don't know how I've longed for this meeting. I've dreamed of it—I've rehearsed it. I've—' She broke off with a low, passionate ejaculation. 'You don't seem moved. You are your old self still—impassive—carried away sometimes by your intellect—never by your heart.'

'And you are still your old self, too,' he answered, gently—'impulsive and emotional as you always were.'

'To you all this is nothing,' she went on, bitterly. 'A mere episode in a parliamentary session—as I was in days gone by. But I'm going to be something more than an episode now, Victor. We meet on equal ground. I can be of use to you. I can further your projects. I can be a valuable ally instead of the shame and hinderance you once thought me.'

'Ah, Josephine, your reproaches cut me like a knife.' His deep voice, which in debate or invective was Sir Victor's most powerful weapon, thrilled Lady Saxon's ear and heart. 'Think of our position then, and you will admit that they are a little unjust. Come. Can we not bury the past? Can we not make a compact from this night to be friends—dear friends and comrades?'

'You must hear first what I have got to say. Oh, I'm not reproaching you. I think I admire you for your impassiveness, and the cool judgment which made even love subordinate to political ambition. I always knew that I couldn't love a man unless he were my master.'

'Surely your husband is a man whom you can love, and who might make himself your master?'

Lady Saxon threw her head back with a cynical, disdainful uplifting of her chin. 'My husband! I once read of a woman of whose husband it was said that he was "her slave, her drudge, and her convenience." Lord Saxon is my slave, and my convenience.'

There was silence between them for a few moments. Lady Saxon was the first to break it.

'I have never loved any man but you, Victor. I may tell you this, even though my frankness alarms you. You and I are above shams. I only ask you to be frank with me—brutally frank, if that is to tell the truth.'

'I'll be as frank with you, Josephine, as your courage and generosity deserve.'
That is well. Let us talk our minds out for a few moments only. Yes, I loved you, Victor—as I can love; and at first, when you left me, I hated you. I wanted to be revenged on you. Then, as I watched your career, I admired you for what you had done. I felt glad and proud that you had bought success even by the sacrifice of me. At a distance, I began to understand you better—to see what your genius had seen so quickly and unerringly. Your time had come. Your opportunity was before you to seize or to leave. It was a choice between giving up me and giving up a grand future. You chose wisely. You gave up—me. You gave up your Agnes Sorel, your Aspasia. Don't you think that is a pretty way of putting it? she said, suddenly, with a scornful laugh. 'Well, I thank you. If you hadn't chosen so, what should I be now, instead of being what I am? You made me Lady Saxon, and I shall have made you Dictator of England.'

'No one has ever understood me as you understand me,' he said, with low-toned fervour. 'You have a noble, sympathetic soul, Josephine. You, too, feel that compelling force which drives our destinies, and which I have always felt so strongly within me. I have a mission which to me is more than love.'

'I know it. I know that I, too, have a mission. Yes, we stand on equal ground now, Victor. We will fight side by side. We must fight—either for or against each other. We breathe the same political atmosphere. Your life is mine. The current has drifted us together. You say, “Let us make a compact for this night to be friends and comrades.” Yes; but on one condition.'

'Name it. Whatever you ask shall be agreed to.'

'You loved me once. I had great influence over you. I am content to take a secondary place; but I must have no rival there. We will not talk of love—you and I. My burst of melodrama is over. This only I ask you. I know you too well to doubt the truth of your answer. Do you love any other woman?'

'I love no woman in the world, Josephine, unless it be yourself. Since my wife's death I have given myself up completely to politics, and I have no thought of marrying again. The first place is yours.'

'The second place,' she corrected. 'I will yield the first to England; but I will not yield it to a woman. There shall be no misunderstanding. This is not a drawing-room conspiracy. I have said that we will not talk of love. Let us bury the past, then. So! The compact is made. Your hand upon it.'

They clasped hands silently. His was cool and firm. He could feel hers through her glove trembling and feverish.

CHAPTER III.

'WHO SHALL SEPARATE US?'

'Now tell me of your plans,' she said, impulsively. 'What is in your mind? What are the prospects of the party? I want to understand your ambitions—your personal ambition.'
'Personal ambition?' he said, doubtfully. 'I don't say that a man is bound to shut his mind and heart against such a feeling; no, I don't go so far as to say that. But is it not his duty to foster within himself only that truer and nobler ambition which devotes itself to the real greatness of his country, and the abiding happiness of her people?'

There was a ring of the House of Commons peroration which did not please Lady Saxon. 'Are you ashamed of acknowledging your personal ambition to me?' she said, turning the full light of her eyes upon his. 'Did I not always know you were ambitious? Did I not always urge you to give your ambition full play? You took me at my word then? Did I not admire you all the more? Well, yes, let it be admire—did I not admire you all the more because of your ambition? Ah! times and things may have changed, but I shall never forget—I have never forgotten—the days when it was allowed me to share your ambition. I share no ambition now.'

'Yet surely you have conquered for yourself as splendid a position as an Englishwoman could achieve. You are Lady Saxon. You will be Duchess of Athelstane.'

'Yes,' she answered; 'and the triumph is sweet to me, though sometimes—sometimes, Victor, I ask myself whether Bohemia wasn't a pleasanter place to live in than Mayfair. I exult in it, and I scorn it at the same time; for that sort of thing isn't my highest ambition, and never was, and you know it. But we have dropped the curtain on old scenes. My husband cares about nothing except in a dull, heavy, prosaic way. He doesn't care one straw for the highest prize and the highest fame that political life could give. I always longed to be the wife and the comrade of a fighting man; and now—well, I don't want to talk of myself, I want to talk of you. You are meditating a great stroke. I know that much. I don't ask you what it is; I only ask if I can help you in it.'

'Help me? Without knowing what it is? without asking?'

'Yes, without knowing; without asking, if you wish. It will be enough for me to know that I am helping you in some scheme that holds your heart.

'Josephine, you deserve my full confidence, and you shall have it. Yes, I am sick of being one of a party; I am sick of compromise, and cold counsel, and postponement, and—and surrender. I am determined to make a great Radical Party, and to lead it, as I have never yet been able to lead. The time has come to appeal to the imagination and the passion of the English people. How could such a people be enthusiastic about petty modifications of the suffrage and peddling schemes about local government and county boards? We have no longer a great party, because we have no longer a great principle. I mean to appeal to the English people on behalf of the first step to the creation of a commonwealth, of an educated democracy.'

'The first step?' she asked, with all the seeming of breathless interest.

'The abolition of the House of Lords. Let us have our sovereign and our people; the sovereign of the people, with no privi-
leged class or chamber to intervene. Loose the bonds of England, and let her go. Then for the first time we shall see what an English commonwealth is capable of attempting and achieving. We shall gather our colonies round us as the bird gathers her young. Come the three corners of the world in arms, and we shall shock them.'

He spoke in a tone kept purposely low, and his voice dropped to a whisper now and then, as they passed in their walk some other promenaders. But his look and manner were full of enthusiasm. He always spoke like a man addressing an audience whom he has to persuade and carry with him.

'Have you spoken to anyone of this as yet?' she asked.

'Not as yet; at least not in any distinct way, 

'Not to Lord Saxon?'

'Not to Lord Saxon. He is your husband; but you won't mind my saying that he is not a man to warm to such a scheme. At least, he is not a man with imagination to take to it at once.'

'You see, it would pull down the House of which he is one day to be a member,' said Lady Saxon, thoughtfully.

'Do you know, I don't think such a consideration would influence Saxon in the least,' he said. 'I do him that justice. I am sure that, if it could only be got into his mind that it would be for the good of England, he would give the scheme his heartiest support. I hope to be able to convince him that it is for the good of England; but I don't believe it would do to flash such a proposal on him at the present moment. When it takes shape, and he finds that it is a reality, he may then come to it.'

'He will never come to it,' Lady Saxon said, firmly. 'You may make up your mind to that, Victor. Sooner or later you will have to separate from him.'

'You think so?'

'I am convinced of it. It might be possible, perhaps, through my influence, to pull Saxon up to a division on some general declaration of a wish for some reform of that kind.' She paused. 'Beyond that I doubt.'

'Your influence over him is strong.'

'I suppose so. I have not cared to exercise it in political matters.' She seemed to be reflecting. 'I don't know; it might be possible to carry him over the crisis which would oust the Tories. That, even, would be something worth trying for. I suppose it is your idea ultimately to go to the country.'

'Yes, when I have declared my purpose in the House.'

'You will not take Saxon with you. There is bound to be a split of the party. Well, what then, if it be strengthened from another source? At the worst, you can separate from him. You will be better without the Whigs.'

He looked at her earnestly, full of admiration for her courage and her quick decision. He could not help thinking to himself, 'If I had such a wife!'

'I know what was passing through your mind this moment,' she said. 'You were thinking how it would be with you if you had a wife with courage and ambition.'

'I was, indeed. How did you know?'
I knew—oh, well, because I was thinking at that moment—if I had a husband with courage and ambition. Well, I can help you, I think, Victor.'

'I should welcome help from you,'

'I know there is one man whom you would like to bring to your side; a very different sort of man from my husband.'

'There is one man,' Champion said, slowly, 'to whom I have even made a sort of overture, because he has talents and imagination, and any amount of courage, and, I presume, ambition, and because he has a mind free from stupid tradition and inane party prejudice.'

'Yes; we mean the same man,' she said, composedly.

'Are you sure?' he said, with a certain degree of hesitation.

'Ve both mean Mr Bellarmin.'

'Yes; you were right just now, when you said he had a future. I think highly of him. He is forming a party which he has purposely pledged to nothing but a name; and I do not see why Progressive Toryism and Educated Democracy should not be accepted as meaning one and the same thing.'

Lady Saxon looked keenly into his face, to see whether he was speaking these words in irony or sarcasm. But he was not; he was quite in earnest. He had little of the humorist in him. He was considering in all gravity whether the two designations might not, by bold and clever manipulation, be made out to mean the same thing for political purposes.

'What has Mr Bellarmin said?' she asked.

'Hardly anything, so far.'

'Of course you don't speak to him yourself?'

'Oh, no; that would never do. It is too early for that. I got a man to open the thing to him in a tentative sort of way.'

'Who was the man, Victor? Tell me.'

The manner in which she took possession of his confidence had a certain fascination for him. He had for so long been such a lonely man that her frank assumption of camaraderie and companionship had a sweet and soothing sound in his ears.

'Of course I will tell you. It was Tressel.'

'That man! Victor, you have made a mistake. Bellarmin would never treat as serious anything coming through Tressel.'

'I believe Mr Tressel is profoundly serious. I think he showed it by his pluck in resigning and standing another contest,' Sir Victor said, looking at her with puckered brows. He did not like being told that he had made a mistake, and especially such a mistake.

'Very possibly; I know little or nothing about him. You probably know the real man. But the world does not take him seriously; and Mr Bellarmin would not have any way of knowing that you had got at the man's true self. No; Bellarmin would not open his mind to him. You must try again, and through someone else.'

'You are the leader now, not I,' he said, with a smile that gave a peculiar sweetness to his melancholy face. 'Well, Josephine, tell me the man you would recommend.'
'I don't recommend any man. I don't think it's a man's office. I recommend a woman.'

The smile passed from his face, and was succeeded by a look of wonder.

'A woman?' he said, slowly.

'A woman, Victor; the one woman who could be trusted in anything that concerned you. I offer you my own wits, such as they are, for this purpose. Let me negotiate with Mr Bellarmin. See! there he is.'

She stopped suddenly, and made Champion also stop. She looked towards the doorway of stone through which one comes on to the Terrace from the interior of the House. Bellarmin was coming out, escorting Miss Beaton and Miss Beaton's retinue. A peculiar light flashed in Lady Saxon's eyes as she saw the group.

'You know who the lady is?' Sir Victor said, in a low tone.

'Oh, yes; I have heard. A woman whose friends tell her she is the legitimate Queen of England. What childish absurdity—in days like these, too!'

'If Bellarmin should become devoted to her,' Sir Victor said, 'she will not be likely to inspire him with much inclination for the abolition of the House of Lords and the cause of a Democratic commonwealth.'

Lady Saxon looked curiously at him, once again wondering whether he was not speaking in satire. But, no; Sir Victor was quite in earnest. He was considering within himself whether it might not be to the disadvantage of his position if Bellarmin were to be taken captive by the feminine representative of Divine right and the cause of legitimacy.

'We must intervene,' Lady Saxon said with alacrity and emphasis. 'He has had no time yet to be influenced by her. He never saw her until to-night.'

Perhaps, up to this moment, Sir Victor had not been very cordial in his reception of Lady Saxon's generous offer. Champion was never much of a believer in the use of the petticoat in politics. In spite of his asseveration to Lady Saxon, it was said that more than once in his life he had been strongly under the influence of some woman; but that influence had not shown itself in his policy. Now, however, as he looked at Miss Beaton and at Bellarmin together, and saw how beautiful she was, and how young she was, he did begin to admit to himself that the intervention of a brilliant and fascinating woman like Lady Saxon would have some advantage. He saw that her eyes were lighted already with the flame of battle. He admired her. He felt a pride and a new delight in her professed devotion to him. They continued their walk.

'You accept my service, Victor?' Lady Saxon asked.

'Most cordially. I put my trust fully in you. Speak to Bellarmin. Tell him as much as you like, or as little.'

'And we are friends and comrades once more?'

'Friends and comrades once more. Who shall separate us?'

Just then they turned again, and came towards Miss Beaton and Bellarmin.
CHAPTER IV.

MARY BEATON.

A BRIGHT gleam of interest lighted up Mary Beaton's eyes when Lord Stonehenge presented Bellarmin. She had been hearing a good deal lately of the bold, brilliant young political free-lance; but she had not remembered just at that moment that he was so young, and it was with a pleased surprise that she saw the handsome, well-shaped, well-dressed youth brought to her notice as Mr Rolfe Bellarmin. Her very first words, much more abrupt than ceremonious, were sweeter to Bellarmin's ear and heart than the most courtly turn of compliment.

'Mr Rolfe Bellarmin! I am delighted, but I never thought you were so young—and you have done so much!'

Their eyes met, and hers were all brightness and vivacious kindliness. He felt his cheeks flush with a strange feeling, half modesty, half mere delight. Her frank, sweet expression seemed to single him out at once with especial interest. She held out her hand to him, and he bent over it with the deference he would have shown to the princess of a reigning house. His instinct at once told him that thus he must meet the free and friendly graciousness of her reception. He spoke a few words of gratefulness, of gratification that she had heard of him, and he addressed her as 'madame.' He had heard Lord Stonehenge do so, and he assumed that this was done in recognition of her illustrious birth, her claims, and her peculiar position; and Bellarmin did not find that it qualified or compromised his allegiance to the sovereign of England to give to this beautiful, interesting, and most friendly creature any title which her friends wished to adopt for her, and which she was willing to receive. Mary Beaton really felt much interested in him. He was young, like herself, and there was a glance in his eye which spoke of a vivacity somewhat wanting in those who chiefly surrounded her.

'Yes, I have heard of you,' she said; 'and of your party of young Progressives. I like anything fresh and original, Mr Bellarmin, and I am afraid,' she said in a somewhat lower tone, 'that I have a leaning towards anything which is called young.'

She threw a somewhat mischievous glance backward at an elderly lady with a prim face and white hair, dressed à la Marquise, who stood behind her, and at the stately, soldier-like old man whom Bellarmin had described to Lady Saxon as her factotum. General Falcon was gazing at her intently, and surprised her glance. A sudden gleam shot from his eyes, and for a moment transformed his calm, severe face, giving it an expression of fierceness, almost of malignity. It was as though he interpreted and resented Miss Beaton's playful look. Both Mary and Bellarmin were struck by this unexpected fire. Mary laughed lightly.

'Now, you wouldn't think that General Falcon was touchy on the subject of his years?' she said, in a low tone; 'but I assure you he is as vain as my dear Lady Struthers, who will tell you, if you ask her, why her hair turned grey so naturerly.' She shook her
head in an amused manner at the general, who bent his ceremoniously, but did not speak. 'All the same, Mr Bellarmin, I did not expect to find you so young,' Mary went on. 'It's such a strange thing with all you English statesmen and politicians—you are all so old. I mean the others are all so old. I am told of someone who is said to be a rising politician, still quite young; and I see a man of forty, forty-five, or fifty perhaps. Look at Lord Saxon. I always heard of him as a young man—and look!'

She shrugged her shoulders with a pretty movement of wonder and protest.

'Yes, we think Lord Saxon quite a youthful and rising politician,' replied Bellarmin; 'and then,' he added, with a glance towards Lady Saxon and the Liberal chief, who were moving off to the Terrace, 'there's Sir Victor.'

'Oh, tell me about Sir Victor?' Mary cried, eagerly. 'It doesn't seem to matter with him whether he is young or old. I've heard and read all kinds of things about him. I want to know why he has got the nickname of "Lucifer"?'

'It came out of a joke of Tommy Tressel's,' answered Bellarmin. 'Champion was making a speech in one of his most highly-wrought moods, just a trifle too highly wrought perhaps; and he was glorifying his own political career, and showing how absolutely consistent it was. "My mission is to bring light," he exclaimed, and then Tommy Tressel was heard to murmur dreamily the one word "Lucifer!" So the House laughed, and it stuck to Champion.'

'But I thought Mr Tressel was a devoted follower of Sir Victor Champion's? Was not that why they cheered Sir Victor so much just now?'

'Oh, yes; but Tressel likes to have his fun with Champion's little weaknesses all the same. He does Champion real service; he will do anything for him almost, and he pays himself with a laugh every now and then. Another man would expect a baronetcy, or a privy-councillorship, or a place in the administration, or a peerage. Tressel cares for none of these things. He considers himself amply repaid by being allowed to make fun of his chief sometimes.'

'Quite a court-jester,' Mary said, scornfully.

'Well, one doesn't altogether despise Chicot the Jester,' replied Bellarmin; 'but Tressel is much more than a mere jester. He is one of the most disinterested public men I know.'

'A man ought to have ambition—a high ambition, I mean. I am attracted by Sir Victor Champion. He has a high ambition, everyone says. Yet it may be a little wearisome sometimes to those around.' Mary spoke in a different tone, as if her mind had been drawn along some new line of thought. 'General Falcon has great ambition for me, and it wearies me sometimes. I think, perhaps, I should like Mr Tressel now and then to come and say amusing things, and make me laugh.'

Her manner touched Bellarmin. There seemed to him something curiously pathetic in the position of this young girl. 'She must be lonely,' he thought. All her views of life must be strangely coloured by the conditions under which she had been brought up.
He had an odd desire to talk to her about herself—to get at what she really felt and thought and hoped for.

‘There is Lord Stonehenge,’ Mary said, suddenly. ‘Now, he is young; but yet he is so grave and serious that I never could dare to approach him with the frivolity of youth. I am afraid you were very much shocked just now, Lord Stonehenge,’ she added, turning towards him, ‘when I was so near blundering into the very midst of the House of Commons?’

‘Not so shocked as Mr Leven, who has an intense reverence for the forms and traditions of the House,’ said Lord Stonehenge, smiling in his grave, sweet manner. ‘Besides, you have an ancestral claim, madame, to a place on certain occasions in another House.’

Mary smiled.

‘We mustn’t bring Mr Bellarmin into our traitorous schemes. I see he is thinking already of Tower Hill and the block.’

‘I think nothing would be more delightful than to die on Tower Hill,’ Bellarmin answered; ‘that would be dying like a gentleman—like a brave loyal Englishman of a better time than ours.’

‘Is that the faith of the Progressive Tories?’ Mary asked. ‘Do you speak for your party, Mr Bellarmin, or only for yourself? You see, I have learned something of your political phraseology already.’

Meanwhile General Falcon and Lady Struthers, who was Miss Beaton’s gouvernante, chaperoné, Mistress of the Robes, or such like anomalous functionary, had been communing together.

‘Madame expressed herself anxious to see the Terrace, Lord Stonehenge,’ said Lady Struthers. ‘Is the present an appropriate time for madame’s wish to be gratified?’

‘Just a moment, my good Struthers,’ madame said, apparently in no impatient anxiety for the Terrace. ‘I want you to tell me, Mr Bellarmin, are there any of your celebrities in the lobby now?’

‘Lord Stonehenge has just been saying that there are not any,’ General Falcon observed; ‘and Lord Stonehenge knows everybody.’

‘On the contrary,’ Lord Stonehenge gravelly interposed, ‘I know very few. I seldom come here. Mr Bellarmin is ever so much a better guide.’

‘There is no one, I’m afraid,’ said Bellarmin.

Miss Beaton studied the lobby.

‘What a strange-looking, venerable old man! I never saw a face like his before. Who is he? He is a celebrity, surely.’

‘Yes; in a sense,’ replied Bellarmin. ‘He is an odd sort of person. That is old Clarence Greenleaf. He has sat for one and the same constituency for fifty-seven years. He has never spoken in the House; there is a tradition that he once presented a petition. He boasts that he has never missed a division. The House is his home. It is all the world to him. He has neither kith nor kin. He was never married. He knows everybody a little, and nobody well. He likes to make the acquaintance of anyone who is a celebrity, or is even talked about. He calls himself a Liberal, but in reality he has no politics. I see him looking at you with intense interest. I have no doubt he is planning in his mind how he may get presented to you.’

‘Poor old man!’ exclaimed Mary, to whom the picture seemed
a pathetic illustration of the life of the House of Commons. 'Will you present him?'
'May I?'
'Oh, yes; if he cares about it,'
'He will only be too delighted. You may be sure that he knows all about you already.'

Bellarmin crossed the lobby, and immediately returned with Mr Greenleaf, who came along making a succession of solemn bows, and had taken off his hat the moment he first put himself in motion.
'Madame has been kind enough to say that she wishes you to be presented to her.'
'Madame is all graciousness,' the old man said, in a thin, reedy voice, and again bowing lowly before Mary. 'I had the great honour of knowing madame's father. He sat for a while in this House before he succeeded madame's honoured grandfather in the title. I had the honour of seeing madame herself when madame was a child, in the palace of our illustrious friend the late Grand Duke of Schwalbenstadt. May I trust that madame will grace and favour us by making a long stay in England? which is indeed her country in some sense.'

'England, I hope, is my country in every sense, Mr Greenleaf,' Mary said; 'I was not born here; but it is my country. It was the country of my ancestors.'
'Madame cannot claim the country more eagerly than the country claims her,' and he bent again as he might to a queen on her throne. Then Mary bowed, and, so to speak, dismissed him. The old gentleman went away delighted with himself. He had contrived to let her know, he thought, that he understood her position and her claims; and without compromising himself had almost given it to be understood that on the whole he rather favoured them than otherwise in his secret heart. Mary, for her part, was amused.
'I think Mr Greenleaf managed his part very prettily,' she said; he almost made a profession of true allegiance to me. But I saved him from compromising himself with the Hanoverian people. I stopped him just in time.'
'You have made him very happy,' said Bellarmin. 'He will become quite a figure at every dinner-party for the next few weeks on the strength of this interview with you.'

The young man laughed softly as he spoke, but his laugh had something tender in it, and was rather the outcome of that curious compassion he was beginning to feel than of any sense of amusement at the unconscious assumption of the young Pretendress. 'At anyrate, she is perfectly sincere,' he thought. 'I am glad she has faith in herself.'
Miss Beaton's eyes roved round in eager curiosity. Now they looked up at the groined ceiling; now down at the tessellated pavement, and at the inscription in Old English letters which surrounded it. 'General Falcon,' she said, imperiously, 'why haven't I been here before? I want to go over the House.'
'It can be very easily arranged, madame,' returned Falcon. 'I am sure that Mr Leven or Mr Bellarmin—'
'Are entirely at your service, madame,' put in Bellarmin.
'Would you like to see the library and the reading-rooms now, before we go on to the Terrace?'

The little party moved along the corridor, Bellarmin and Mary in front, Falcon closely following them. Mary examined the oak presses as she passed, and looked in at open doors, and asked questions about everything, sometimes turning to Falcon as to her recognised protector, more often to Bellarmin.

'I like this place,' she said. 'It excites me. Watching people and things here is like seeing the heart of England beating. Isn't it so?'

'Yes,' replied Bellarmin, his eyes fixed upon her.

'Here is the heart of a great nation,' Mary went on, enthusiastically; 'here, in Westminster. Oh! I wish—' she stopped abruptly.

'What do you wish?' asked Bellarmin.

'Never mind. You people who are at the core of it all, and who sit here and make the laws, don't seem to notice or to care about the wrong and misery that are crying at the very doors of this Westminster.'

They were about to enter the library, and had just passed the door that leads into the newspaper-room and the members' tea-room beyond. At the side of this door, the side nearest to the library, stands a desk, beside which members often stop to read letters or to write a hasty note, or to confer with somebody.

'Let us not go in just yet,' Bellarmin said; 'I can't take you into the library under these new regulations. Let us stop here a moment. I am anxious to hear you on this subject.' He was really much interested in Miss Beaton's views, and was glad to have a chance of knowing how the condition of things in England impressed her.

The little party came to a stand accordingly.

'Oh, I haven't anything to say which can be new to you. I have only my own crude notions. I judge hastily, perhaps, by what I see. Well, for instance, it was only yesterday we walked about some of your streets—General Falcon and I—I like to go about among the people in that way; for how could I do any good if I did not know? We had a friend with us, a lady who is interested in that work; and we went into some alleys and houses. Oh, Mr Bellarmin!'—Mary stopped short, and clasped her hands excitedly.

'Well?' he said.

'It chills me to the marrow; it makes my blood freeze, to see these hideous contrasts—this terrible poverty, that lavish wealth. It's like death behind a carnival mask haunting one everywhere—when one is driving in the streets and the Park; when one is going in to smart parties. Oh! do you remember the face of that man last night?' She turned to General Falcon, and then again to Bellarmin. 'A man was trying to sleep as he cowered in the door-step of a fine house—and the woman, the girl, the child who was trying to get coppers by sweeping a crossing? Oh! what sights for a Christian country! Thank God that I am not really Queen of England! No, though—I wish I were. I wish I were Queen of England only for one day, as somebody was Caliph of Bagdad, or wherever it was. I would do something for the poor. I would do something, too, for the rich; for while things go on as they are
in England—look you,' she said, sinking her voice to a low, grave tone, 'these rich cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven.'

'What can they do? They can't help being rich,' Falcon said, abruptly.

'No, can't they? Can't help being rich! And people as good as they starving in thousands all around them, at their gates, on their doorsteps. And they can't help being rich!' she cried, in her childish way, the tears starting to her eyes. 'I feel sometimes, when I am sitting down to my good dinner—when I am putting on my jewels—as if I were the most cruel and heartless girl who had ever lived. And I can do so little. They will let me do so little. I think to myself how it will be with me when I stand up before the judgment-seat. Shall I be asked, How much have you? or, How much have you given away?'

'It is quite true,' said Lady Struthers, in an aside to Lord Stonehenge. 'The misery in London preys upon her frightfully. She gives away all that she can. She would have sold her jewels if it had not been represented to her that they were heirlooms.'

Bellarmin heard the aside. Mary had moved to another table. He followed her. 'But money given away in thoughtless charity does no good to anyone, the giver or the receiver,' he said.

'Thoughtless charity? No; but could true charity ever be thoughtless? And see what you have made of it, what they have made of it, whoever they are, who are always preaching against thoughtless charity—yes, and practising very faithfully against it, I haven't the slightest doubt. What have they made of things, and of life here in England—here in London? Could any thoughtless charity make a worse hand of it? Can you get me to believe that the condition of things is right and satisfactory in which one woman spends a thousand pounds in flowers for a single ball—the show and pleasure of one night—and another, just as good as she, gets three halfpennies—yes, they told me it is so, three halfpennies; a penny and a half—for making a shirt.'

CHAPTER V.

'IF YOU WERE QUEEN.'

'What would you do if you were queen?' Bellarmin asked.

He was deeply interested in her vivid faith—in her own power to settle much-perplexed economical problems.

'I can't tell you off hand,' Mary answered, with a certain self-sufficing imperiousness of manner. 'But I can tell you this, Mr Bellarmin, I would do something. I would devote my life, and my thoughts, and my care to it. I would set my heart on settling the question; and I should end in settling it. I would never rest happy while a single honest Englishman or Englishwoman was starving for want of employment, and hundreds of thousands of other Englishmen and Englishwomen, who never wrought one stroke of work in their lives, were sinking into the mere corruption of too much wealth. Yes, if I were queen—queens can do so much!'
The Rival Princess.

'Things are very bad in America—in the United States,' Lord Stonehenge struck in. 'The contrast between extreme of wealth and extreme of poverty is equally terrible there, I am told.'

'Yes,' Mary answered, shifting her ground with quick, sweet, woman-like disregard of logical consistency; 'but then America has not a queen. Everything is left there to drag on at the mercy of politicians and political economists, and all that; and there is no presiding influence, no presiding sympathy, to intervene and give a chance to something better. Well, I should try, if I had the chance. Now nobody cares. It is everyone for himself, and God for us all—only fancy God being for the set of wretches who were everyone for himself!'

She flung her handkerchief on the desk with the air of a sovereign who throws down his truncheon to signify that enough has been done in a duel, that the fight is over, and that the combatants must now be parted.

There was nothing new in what she had been saying. Bellarmin admitted that to himself. Her logic was crude, her facts were faulty. It was all just the same sort of thing that he had heard many a woman say before. Almost every sweet-natured, intelligent woman in countries like ours has said the same at one time or another. The fact is that woman never did, and never will, acknowledge the absolute authority of economic law. The intelligent women do not go the length of saying that there is no fixed economic law; only they have the impertinence to suggest that men have not yet got an absolutely certain knowledge of the exact interpretation of the law. Woman is by nature a mutinous creature, and on this question of political economy she will not allow herself to admit that her husband, or her brother, or her father is infallible. 'They are a poor lot, these women; they can never reason,' says Mr Huncks, M.P., after a futile attempt to persuade his wife that the eternal conditions of human society justify starvation and the three-halfpence for the making of a shirt. Bellarmin was not without some secret misgiving about the woman's view of the subject. He fancied sometimes that she had got hold of her half of the truth, and that the man had not quite got hold of his, and that some day or other an attempt must be made by statesmanship to bring the two halves together in the construction of a sound social system. But even if Bellarmin did not admit to the full all the feminine reasoning of Mary Stuart Beaton, he was none the less charmed with her fresh sweetness of nature, her generous impulsiveness, her bold self-confidence, her simplicity, her quick and flashing sympathy. A man, he thought, felt braver and better for talking to her; for hearing her talk.

'Can you do nothing in the House of Commons, Mr Bellarmin?' she suddenly asked.

'Nothing; nothing whatever. Nothing, at least, what you would call anything. I am speaking now of what we call independent members. They can't do anything. Even if we saw our way to any proposal, and we don't—what could we do? Put on some motion by the favour of the ballot for a Tuesday night; and if we succeeded in getting an early date, bring on our motion, and be counted out.'
‘If You were Queen.’

‘But why don’t you all stand together, you independent members, and not be counted out?’

‘Because,’ he answered, gravely, ‘we English are a practical people.’

Mary said no more, and they passed into another corridor, and after some further wandering, and an attempt to hear part of a speech from the back row of chairs in the Ladies’ Gallery, they went down to the Terrace. As they were going down, a telegram was thrust into Bellarmin’s hand. He glanced at it; this is what it contained:

‘Am coming up to town to-night. Shall be at Spinola’s. Be sure to go; want to talk to you. TRESSEL.’

Lady Struthers thought all that she heard about politics in England very shocking. It was her first visit to the House of Commons, and she asked many questions—wanted to know who the men in wigs were sitting at the table, and why members got up and walked this way and that like a flock of sheep when the bell rang; and if it were a division, why weren’t Sir Victor Champion and Mr Bellarmin in their places; and since it was all of no consequence, what was the good of wasting people’s time for nothing? General Falcon, who, in a quiet way, was amassing a good deal of information, had already made a mental note of Tressel as a man who ought to be propitiated on the subject of Mary Beaton’s claims to the forfeited Stuart property.

These two principal members of Miss Beaton’s household differed in one important respect. Falcon was reticent, and made his observations in secret. Lady Struthers blurted out her opinions with an undesirable lack of discretion. People who knew both looked upon Lady Struthers as a harmless, good-natured person, but there were many who regarded Falcon with vague dislike and distrust.

As has been seen, Lady Saxon and Sir Victor were passing by when Mary Beaton and her companions came out through the massive doorway on to the Terrace. Mary noticed that Lady Saxon paused in her walk; noticed also the look she turned on Bellarmin. An involuntary movement on Bellarmin’s part also struck the young girl. She was going to ask him a question about the regal-looking woman whom she had remarked in the lobby, and whom she concluded to be a person of consequence, when General Falcon pressed rather eagerly forward.

‘Mr Bellarmin, can you tell me—who is that lady?’

‘That is Lady Saxon,’ replied Bellarmin, ‘the wife of Lord Saxon, to whom we spoke in the lobby.’

‘The wife of Lord Saxon! Is it possible? She has not been long married?’

‘About two years,’ answered Bellarmin, carelessly. ‘Why do you ask?’

‘Oh, for no particular reason. I fancied that I recognised her as a lady whom I have seen in Schwalbenstadt.’

‘Lady Saxon’s first husband was a German,’ said Bellarmin. He turned to Miss Beaton. ‘Do you admire Lady Saxon? She is considered one of the most beautiful women in London.’
'Yes; I think her very beautiful,' answered Mary, a little con­strainedly. 'But I don't know that I like her. They say, Mr Bellarmin, that women are not fair judges of one another. I am quite sure that I should not like to have Lady Saxon for an enemy, or even for a friend.

'The words made Bellarmin colour a little and wince—almost start. They touched him, even hurt him, in a curious way. Miss Beaton saw that she had given him pain.'

'Oh, I ask your pardon!' she said, earnestly. 'I am so sorry—I forgot that Lady Saxon was a friend of yours. I really meant nothing, Mr Bellarmin; it was only my absurd, impulsive way of saying right out any nonsensical idea that comes into my mind.'

'I hope you will always speak to me in the same frank way,' Bellarmin said, he, too, yielding to sudden impulse; and he spoke the words with a certain emotion which a little surprised Miss Beaton.

General Falcon was standing near them, looking impatient. Just then a soft sheet of summer lightning enveloped the scene, and there came a long, low roll of thunder.

'Come, madame,' General Falcon said, imperatively; 'it is time to leave this place; a storm is coming.'

'My good Falcon, there is no need for haste; we are near enough to shelter if rain should come.'

'But you ought not to remain any longer,' Falcon remonstrated. 'Madame will perceive, too, that she is keeping Mr—this gentle­man—from his parliamentary duties, which, I have no doubt, are highly important.' General Falcon spoke in accents of hardly sup­pressed passion. Miss Beaton looked up, surprised. A cloud gathered on her face.

'You must forgive the zeal of my friend, General Falcon,' she said, turning to Bellarmin. 'He is always somewhat too anxious about me.'

'General Falcon's zeal for you doesn't need any excuse,' Bellarmin answered; 'it can only recommend him to all your friends.' Bellarmin really felt what he said; he was not in the least angry with Falcon.

'The acquaintance is too short for Mr Bellarmin to presume to call himself one of madame's friends,' Falcon interposed, rudely.

Bellarmin now, indeed, felt angry, and was on the point of ex­pressing his anger in words. Miss Beaton stopped him with a look.

'You are forgetting yourself, General Falcon,' she said, coldly and with decision. 'I have to ask Mr Bellarmin, as a favour to me, to forgive your rudeness, and to believe, as I do, that it is not meant to give offence.'

At this moment Lady Saxon, who had again passed, stopped and turned. Her keen eyes and quick perceptions took in the whole of the little group. She saw the embarrassed look of Beller­min; the enforced composure of Miss Beaton; the smouldering fury in Falcon's eyes. Another flash of summer lightning illumined and emphasised the living picture. Lady Saxon could not, of course, understand its meaning; but it told her of some existing elements of discord, and she was pleased. She marked out Falcon from that moment as a man to be studied. Then, with the manner of one who yields to a sudden impulse, she advanced towards the group,
Lord Stonehenge was with her now, as well as Sir Victor Champion. She came directly to where Miss Beaton stood.

' I have asked Lord Stonehenge to make me known to Miss Beaton,' she said. ' My husband, I believe, has already had the honour of being presented.'

Bellarmin felt surprised. It was not like Lady Saxon to seek acquaintance with one of her own sex in this informal fashion. Her manner was graceful and winning, and Mary frankly accepted the courtesy, though with a certain dignity which was observed by both Sir Victor and Bellarmin. There was some desultory conversation about the beauty of the night and the summer lightning, and the debate which was going on. General Falcon and Lady Struthers were presented; and then Lady Saxon and Bellarmin fell back a few steps. She asked him to take her to her carriage, and bade good-night to Miss Beaton, saying that she hoped to be permitted to call upon her shortly.

' I daresay we shall meet later on this evening,' she said to Rolfe. ' Where are you going ?'

' I am going to Madame Spinola's,' he answered.

'Madame Spinola's !' repeated Lady Saxon. ' I don't know Madame Spinola.'

' I didn't suppose that you ever found your way into Bohemia, Lady Saxon,' Bellarmin said. ' It's a country that befriended me when I was a homeless waif, and I owe it some gratitude. No, I'm afraid I sha'n't turn up at any of the places that you are going to this evening.'

'Good-night,' she said. There was something caressing in her voice. The footman was holding her carriage door. She stepped forward, then turned her head back, looking at him half over her shoulder. ' Remember, to-morrow,' she murmured, still in the same caressing manner. Presently she had stepped into the carriage. The door was closed, and she was whirled off.

Rolfe Bellarmin lingered a few minutes in the stone-paved square at the entrance to the Ladies' Gallery. He took out a cigarette and lighted it, and said a few words to the policeman on duty. It was getting late now—the deep notes of Big Ben sounded the quarter to eleven—late, that is, to outsiders. For busy, fashionable women with a ball or two on hand, as well as for members of the House of Commons, real night business was only just beginning.

Two or three broughams were drawn up in the courtyard. One of these, which had the appearance of a carriage let out by the season, Bellarmin conjectured to be that of Miss Beaton. He wondered if she, too, were going on to some ball, and decided that she was not. Mary Stuart, in her black velvet gown and coif-like bonnet, seemed an incongruous figure against the unpoetic background of London society. Why did she dress like her far-off ancestress? Was it part of the masquerade, part of the game, or only a girlish whim? Was she rich, or a mere high-born adventuress with whose shadowy claims General Falcon was trading? Rolfe recalled all that he had heard, or fancied now that he had heard, of Miss Beaton's parentage and connections. No; he felt sure that she was, if not rich, certainly not poor. He had a dim recollection of having read in some book of memoirs of an estate left
to the Stuarts in the latter days of Anne, by a devotee of their cause, and confiscated by the Hanoverians. There was some reality then in the claims she had come to urge, and about which, in talking to Lady Saxon, he had by some momentary freak seemed to know a great deal more than he actually did know.

The girl interested him. She was old-world, poetic. She appealed to the romantic vein in his nature. She stood out in his imagination like some moonlit statue that, once seen, is never forgotten. As he strolled irresolutely down the covered archway, he had a vague intention of going to seek her. A curious consciousness of disloyalty to Lady Saxon checked the impulse, and he crossed into Palace Yard, a sudden contrast to the cloistral enclosure he had left.

There seemed something at once fantastic and work-a-day in the aspect of the place—a blending of the past and the present, of the ideal and the actual. Bellarmin had in his nature a greater admixture of the dreamer than he would have been ready to admit. He was struck by this thought to-night. The great square, with its innumerable lamps, its bustle and movement, the men passing to and fro, the carriages and cabs, the newspaper messengers hurrying with latest intelligence to the shed where their horses stood saddled; and then the majestic walls of the building, the spectral Clock Tower rising aloft, the grey, solemn, time-stained abbey, which appeared so little in keeping with the roar and rush of the London night—all had been suddenly magnetised for him by some new spell of association, and had been perfumed by that essence of poetry, which, ever since Helicon's diviner days, is most often distilled by a woman.

But Bellarmin did not trace his vague sense of intoxication to its subtle source. He believed that what he felt was a keen thrill of triumph in the success which had made him part of this throbbing life around him, and which had set him here to help in weaving the threads of England's destinies. It seemed only the other day that he had come to Westminster, an obscure youth, with, apparently, no chance of ever distinguishing himself. And now—now!

'I've turned out the Liberals, and Champion is making overtures to me,' he said to himself. And then another thought set his pulses tingling. Lady Saxon's boudoir was a dangerous place; Lady Saxon was beautiful; it was her whim to play the game of political intrigue. He knew this; he had often told himself that 'forewarned is forearmed;' but already his fancy was revelling in anticipations of the morrow—of the hour in her companionship. He half hated himself for this eager longing. There were times when he almost hated Lady Saxon for her influence over him. Her cool fencing excited and irritated him. It was alternate allurement and recoil—pastime becoming conflict.

With an effort he wrenched his mind away from Lady Saxon. He had much of the typical schoolboy's enjoyment of contrast and variety. 'Now for Bohemia,' he said, half aloud.

He delighted to jump from serious debate to rollicking fun; from the atmosphere of pathos and poetry into that of club gossip and drawing-room frivolity. He got into a hansom, and gave the order to drive to Madame Spinola's.
CHAPTER VI.

MADAME SPINOLA AT HOME.

The Countess Spinola lived in a small old-fashioned house in the Buckingham Palace region.

The Countess Spinola was an Englishwoman married to an Italian, and it was well understood that he and she were poor; at least, that they had but slender means. According to all received traditions of satire and fiction, Count Spinola ought to be in such circumstances a mere sham nobleman, and his English wife ought to be a woman of real position sacrificed to him. But it was not so in this case; Count Spinola was unquestionably a man of high and genuine rank, and nobody quite knew what his English wife had been. Some people said she had been an actress; some whispered that she had been an artist's model, and that if you wanted to appreciate to the full her claims to be considered beautiful, you had only to go to the South Kensington Museum, and see the painting of Andromeda chained to the rock, which was done by the lately deceased chief of a romantic school of art. But all this was only talk, and no one had anything substantial to say against Madame Spinola, except that she was very pretty, that she was poor, and that, nevertheless, she and her husband managed to see a good deal of society. Their parties might indeed be said to represent a certain phase of London society, and a book professing to describe London life would certainly not be complete unless it took in Madame Spinola and her set. The Countess Spinola was very pretty, and, oddly enough, she, the Englishwoman, was dark-haired, and her husband, the Italian, was fair. Not many women came to Madame Spinola's parties. Perhaps she was too pretty to make women anxious to go near her. A lady of fashion once laid it down as a canon of good taste that no really well-bred hostess ought to be prettier than everyone of her guests. The reason why women kept away from the place could not be because Madame Spinola flirted a little now with this man and now with that, for she did not flirt nearly so much as many ladies did whose drawing-rooms nevertheless had in them more petticoats than pantaloons; and, indeed, Madame Spinola's flirtations were very general, and so evenly distributed as almost altogether to disarm ill-nature itself. Still, the women did not come much; only a few came who were well known to Madame Spinola, who were regular 'pals' of hers, and would have kept to her through thick and thin; and some, like a certain Mrs Rivers, who would go to any house at which there was a man to be seen or a supper to be eaten.

Madame Spinola, however, did not seem much to miss the fair sex. Her house was a rendezvous for agreeable, lively, distinguished, and sometimes fast men. She could hardly be said to give formal parties. She never issued invitations; but she was at home on certain nights in the season, and her friends were free to go and see her then, and one might come very late, for the meetings were well kept up. If she anywhere met a man she liked, she told
him he might come and see her on any or all of her evenings; and then he was on the free-list, so to speak. If he wished to bring some friend into the circle, he asked madame's permission, and it was generally given, and the permission put him, too, on the free-list. If a man only came once in the season, the countess was satisfied; but if he did not, she gave him to understand that he was not to come any other season. There were some faithful friends who came every night regularly, and stayed till the very end.

There was always a little supper very late in a rather small room below-stairs; Madame Spinola passed round among her guests the word who should go first, when so many had remained as to make it impossible that all should sit down together. Her principle was to send down first those she least cared for; they did not usually sit very long over their supper, having the disturbing consciousness that others, among whom was the hostess herself, were waiting for a turn. Then those who came last stayed over their supper and their drinks as long as they liked, and cigars and cigarettes were lit up, and people made themselves really happy. The supper was simple, but, in its way, it was dainty; delicious little sandwiches, galantines, and that appetising dish which one meets with so often in New York, but is so rare in its appearance in London—the real chicken-salad. There was good sound claret; there were some excellent wines in huge straw-sheathed flagons; there were brandies and soda; there was really fine whisky. Madame Spinola kept no man-servants; the waiting was done by two bright and quick-witted, as well as nimble-handed, Tuscan girls.

It was said that people sometimes played, and played highly and deeply, at Count Spinola's house; and this was talked of as a possible explanation of Madame Spinola's frequent entertainments. Madame Spinola wore diamonds, fine diamonds. 'Who gave them to her?' folks inquired, with meaning glances and shrugs. If there was any gaming indulged in at the Spinolas', it is certain that Bellarmin never saw it; although at one time he was a frequent guest. Perhaps the explanation of the entertainment is as simple as that of many a social mystery. Count Spinola, although he had but a small income, certainly had an income, and a regular one; and the pair had no children. Madame was still very young, very lively, very fond of company, and her husband was very fond of her. Is it not within the limits of bare possibility that she may have liked to spend some of her income on a succession of little parties, cheap in themselves, but which often brought her in the season a company that the riches of the richest city stockbroker might have failed to attract to his vast dining-table? Is it not credible that Count Spinola may have been glad to be able to afford his wife this one pleasure which she so loved, and may even have been willing to pinch himself in other ways that she might not be deprived of this enjoyment? May he not have admitted to himself that he owed her some recompense for having bound her youth and her charms up with his elderly companionship? But this is not the fashion of reasoning in Vanity Fair.

'Now, Mr Bellarmin, don't you attempt to go away without supper, and don't attempt to go down with the first lot. I won't
have it; you must stay, and you must wait for me. I haven't seen
you for ever so long; and Tommy Tressel is coming, and he's the
hero of the hour, is he not? I am in rare good fortune to-night.
Now, your word!

'I pledge myself,' Bellarmin said, 'to take you down to supper.
Hear me swear.'

Bellarmin was very popular in this circle, and indeed, in most
circles. His good spirits, his bright ways, his flow of talk, his
utter freedom from pretentiousness, made him a favourite. He
never patronised any man, and he did not carry the tone of the
House of Commons always in his voice. He never took account
in private life of what a man's politics might be, and therefore he
was welcome to out-and-out Radicals as well as to 'no surrender'
Tories, and even to pale-blooded, lymphatic Whigs, with whom—
Lady Saxon notwithstanding—he was naturally less congenial.
One of those who now rushed up most vociferously to greet him
was big Ross Bingley, a journalist, the noisiest, the cheeriest of men.
With his big frame, his big head, his big beard, his big voice, his
big laugh, Ross Bingley was a living type of bigness. He had been
a war correspondent, and a resident foreign correspondent, and now
he was settled down in London journalism. He hated numbers of
men whom he did not know, for Bingley, unlike most journalists,
was a fierce politician; but he liked everyone he knew. He could
spend hours in execrating Champion's most devoted followers, and
if he had been brought into personal relationship with Champion
he would doubtless soon have come to adore him too. He could
talk many languages, and play on many instruments, and he had
been in love a great many times in a great many countries. Now,
a London home and wife claimed him as their own; his pith
helmet, which he used to wear in his war correspondence days,
was, metaphorically speaking, a hive for bees, like that of the
noble old warrior in the poem, and Mrs Bingley ruled him.

'Now, Mr Bellarmin, you must talk to me. No, no. You
must not go away; at least, not just yet. I have not seen you for
ever so many ages.'

This was spoken by Mrs Rivers—who caught his arm to em-
phasise her appeal. Bellarmin protested that there was nothing
he so longed for in existence as a talk with Mrs Rivers; and
as he looked into the dimming beauty of her eyes, and heard
her voluble tongue going, he began to moralise mentally, and to
preach to himself a little wan and outworn sermon on the nothing-
ness of human hopes. Short, comparatively, as had been his
experience of London society, he could almost remember Mrs
Rivers a beauty. She was one of the first of the galaxy of pro-
fessional beauties who were publicly recognised as such, and
dubbed with that name of doubtful compliment. When Bellarmin
heard of her, she was the central star of almost every social con-
stellation. Men of rank, and fashion, and wealth, and genius
swarmed around her, scrambled to get near her, were proud to be
seen with her—even to be seen saluting her in the Park. Now,
obody cared twopence about her; she had to ask men to come
and sit by her; she had to insist on their talking to her; she had
to get up and cross the room to arrive at some particular man who would not arrive at her. In her bright days she had never troubled herself about women, and now women never troubled themselves about her. What had happened in the meantime? She had ‘gone off;’ she had gone down; she had gone out. But there were others who had started as professional beauties with her, who were keeping the field as professional beauties still. She had not quite lost her charms, although her lustre had faded, and her figure had got too firmly set, and her movements were stiffer—at all events, were less supple—than they used to be. She had had a quiet separation from her husband. They did not get on well together. There was no scandal; she had never been seriously talked about with any man, but after her separation from her husband she got into a way of drifting about the social world which was fatal to her. She had to make herself too cheap. The allowance from her husband was small, and she knew that if she gave cause for scandal, it would be stopped altogether. In the days when her beauty was fresher and more prized, she could of course have found admirers who would have lavished money upon her. But if she was not good enough to depend on goodness, neither was she bad enough to depend on badness. She must have society—the society of men; she must have admiration, or, at all events, the profession of admiration, and she made this too plain. Men began not to care about her—began to avoid her, to think her a bore, even to speak of her as a bore. Women sometimes talked of her as ‘poor old Mrs Rivers;’ and she was hardly outside forty yet! When she went to a party, which in the season she did every night in the week, Sundays included, her mind was always set on finding some good-natured man to take her home. It was not for the sake, or in the hope, of being flirted with, or made love to, or being complimented: it was wholly and entirely to escape the payment of her cab fare. If she had to pay all her cab fares, she could not go out to parties, she could not live.

Bellarmin was always very kind and good-natured to Mrs Rivers. He had taken her home many a time, although he had come to know long ago what was the reason of her anxiety for escort. She touched him with a curious feeling of pity. He was amused in a half-melancholy way to observe how she succeeded now and then in getting hold of some very young man, to whose vanity it was pleasing to suppose that he was ‘mashing’ a married woman, who had been, perhaps even still was, accounted a professional beauty. Soon the very young man dropped off. Perhaps he heard someone talk slightingly of ‘old Jennie Rivers;’ and his feeble, factitious love light went out at once. Another youth would, no doubt, succeed to him; but the succession must every season be more and more interrupted, and at last must come to an end altogether.

What, then, would remain for the poor creature who had staked all her earthly happiness on society and on men’s admiration? If she sank into being recognised as a mere bore among men, the women certainly would not invite her to their parties. How could she live without these parties? They formed part of her means
of living. She did not very often get asked out to dinner now, but still she had some dinner invitations; and when she was not lucky enough to have a dinner on hand, she ate no dinner, and made up for the want as soon as she decently could by going to the refreshment room of some evening party. There she consumed her sandwiches with only too keen an appetite; and she drank her wine with a heart as merry as well might be under all the conditions. Sometimes her first really solid meal in the day was made at a ball supper-table. When the season was over, she got invited a good deal to country places still. People in the country regarded her yet as one of the reigning queens of society, and were astonished when some irreverent young man or woman, fresh from the West End of London, described her as an old bore. There is not, after all, very much that is more truly tragic in the world than such a career, such an ambition, such a game of life, such a failure, such an end. Mrs Rivers is but the type of many a woman who hangs on to the skirts of London society.

Mrs Rivers talked with a curious little emphasis on wholly unimportant words. The truth was that she never quite knew what she was talking about, and so got into the way of trying to supply meaning by emphasis. Her mind was as nearly as possible empty of all but her own little schemes, and shifts, and dodges. In her professional beauty days, men delighted in the vapid chatter which rippled through such full red lips. The lips were full and red still, but somehow the value of a professional beauty depends very much on what society says of her. She may be a beauty still to the cool, impartial eye; but if society ceases to regard her in that light, then there is no use protesting; there is an end to her beauty. So men now began to value the chatter at its real worth, now that they had ceased to believe in the loveliness of the lips through which it flowed.

'I saw you the other day, Mr Bellarmin, but you did not see me; at least, I suppose so; I must hope so. It was in Palace Yard;' and she laid as much emphasis on the word 'yard' as if there were serious possibility of his supposing that she had seen him on Palace roof. 'You were driving by in a hansom.'

'I do drive into Palace Yard in a hansom pretty often, Mrs Rivers. I think that I pass a great part of my time in hansoms.'

'You are so much occupied, so much sought after, I wonder you have time to come here to-night, to honour a company like this with your presence. Do you know, I am told that you are invited out to more dinners than any other man in London.'

'Nothing of the kind, I can assure you. I am not by any means such a favourite in society. Besides, it wouldn't be any use. I have to dine so often in the House of Commons; I can't help it. If I am in a thing, I like to stick to it, Mrs Rivers.'

'Yes, I see. And how is your beautiful princess?'

'My princess!' repeated Bellarmin, with a startled and somewhat displeased glance back at Mrs Rivers, from whom his eyes had been roaming.

'Oh, I heard about you this evening. The lady who is said to be so like Mary Queen of Scots, and whom the society papers are
talking about, and who, they tell me, is going to set up some claim to the crown jewels, or the revenue, or the Duchy of Lancaster.'

'Or the crown itself?' suggested Bellarmin.

'Well, I don't know. Perhaps even the crown itself. But tell me all about her. Is she coming here to-night?'

'Here! Oh, no!' Bellarmin said, with a sudden wonder that he could not conceal.

'Oh, no? How odd of you, Mr Bellarmin! You seem to be quite shocked at my question. But what was there wrong in it? Why might she not be here? There is nothing surely in our dear hostess which should make it so very extraordinary that even a young lady of great family should condescend to cross her threshold.'

'My dear Mrs Rivers, I never meant anything of the kind. I was presented to Miss Beaton for the first time an hour or two ago, and I am a great friend and admirer of our hostess, as I am a great friend and admirer of yours; but you know the political ways of people differ so much that I was a little astonished at the thought of an uncompromising representative of Jacobitism and "Divine Right" being found in this cosmopolitan assembly, where the red Republican lion lies down with the Peace Society lamb.'

Mrs Rivers did not in the least understand what he was talking about; but she looked up and saw some woman passing who had occasionally slighted her, and she was delighted to be seen in apparently deep and confidential conversation with the fashionable and brilliant Bellarmin, the enigma of so many conjectures and speculations. At the same moment she thought she detected in Bellarmin's manner a desire to escape, and she could not allow him to go while her critic or enemy was still in sight.

'But now, Mr Bellarmin, there is something I wanted so much to ask you about—something very particular indeed—and you can tell me;' and Mrs Rivers began exploring all the corners of her mind to discover something on which she wanted to get Mr Bellarmin's opinion.

'Delighted, Mrs Rivers—tell you anything you want to know,' Bellarmin said, vaguely.

But Mrs Rivers had fastened on to her hostess, who was passing. 'Kitty, dearest,' she whispered, in a tone quite audible to Bellarmin, 'may I stay for the second lot too? I do so love to hear Mr Bellarmin, and I want to congratulate Mr Tressel.'

'But, Jennie, love, I am afraid we sha'n't have room.'

'Oh, but I must now—I must!' Mrs Rivers implored, and her once lovely features underwent an odd little contortion like what children call 'making a face.' She was really on the brink of the fountain of tears. She had been so little used in her bright days to be contradicted and crossed in anything; the best places had always been for her.

'You dear old silly!' the good-natured hostess exclaimed, 'of course you must have your way. I'll pack off somebody else. Never mind; I'll manage it somehow. Oh, here is Tommy Tressel! Tommy, Tommy, we all congratulate you!'

'How d'ye do, Kitty?' Mr Tressel drawled out in languorous accents as he entered the little drawing-room, and with a single
glance of his half-closed eyes seemed to take in the individuality of every creature in it. 'How do, Bellarmin? I'm going to have a row with you.'

'Oh, I am so delighted,' Countess Spinola exclaimed; 'I'm so glad when you have a row. It is such fun.'

'But I am afraid of Tressel,' Bellarmin said; 'I always find that I am bound over to keep the peace when I meet him, as Captain Bobadil found when he was suddenly confronted with Downright.'

'Now who is Captain What's-his-name, and who is Downright?' Madame Spinola asked. 'Are these nicknames of men in the House? It is true that they call one man "Pussy," and somebody else "the Goat?" What do they call you, Tressel?'

'They call me "Drawl,"' replied Tressel, promptly, 'and they call Bellarmin "Rattle."'

This was pure invention, struck off on the spur of the moment.

'You haven't looked at me, Mr Tressel,' Mrs Rivers complained, with appealing eyes.

'Haven't I really, Jennie? Then I will. Come and let me look at you.'

This was exactly what Mrs Rivers would have delighted in; she just wanted Tressel to sit beside her and look at her. But Tressel turned away immediately, and began to talk to someone else. In Countess Spinola's little drawing-room the manners were free. Men went there—at least, men of Mr Tressel's order—because they were wanted to go, and because they liked it. They did not feel under any strict obligation to be attentive to the women they met there. The women were called by their Christian names—as often as not with the addition of the word 'dear.' Mr Bingley usually went a step further, and called each woman 'darling.' Tressel did not get as far as the use of 'dear' or 'darling.' His manner rather said, 'Oh, yes, I see you are there; I suppose I ought to call you "Jennie," and say something nice. There now, I have called you "Jennie," and said something nice; run away and play with somebody else.' Yet Mr Tressel was no woman hater, or report belied him.

Tressel—the Honourable Spencer Thomas Tressel—was a tall, thin man, with a swaying body. He always looked through life with half-closed eyes; but he saw a good deal. His profile was aquiline, and in its outline thus suggested something of the force of character and the strong individuality which the half-closed eyes and the languorous accent might have hidden or denied.

Spencer Tressel was the younger son of a nobleman. He had offended his father very early in life by avowing Radical opinions. Good-natured people said he had only assumed these opinions to spite his noble parent, and that if his father had become a Radical, the son would have declared himself converted back to the Tory faith. However that might be, Spencer Tressel stuck to his opinions. He further offended his father by marrying a very poor and very pretty girl. His father made him only a miserable allowance; his brothers dropped his acquaintance. He discovered suddenly that he had great capacity for political writing, and he got an engagement to write leading articles for a bright and audacious evening paper. He lived manfully with his wife on his earnings as a jour-
The Rival Princess.

The happiness was almost as short-lived as a spring-time. The young wife took sickness and died. Tressel disappeared from the sight of all friends and acquaintances for a long while. No one knew where he was; he held communication with nobody. People were beginning to forget him, when he suddenly turned up in London again. He never made the slightest allusion to the death of his wife, and he never said a word about his long absence. Some time after he told a friend that he meant to marry for money, and he did marry a good-natured, uninteresting widow with an immense fortune. Not long after this second marriage a distant relative of his, who had never taken the slightest notice of him, got into some sort of quarrel with Tressel's father, and, to annoy him, made a will leaving his whole fortune to Tressel, and died soon after the will was made. Probably if this event had happened a little earlier Tressel would not have married the rich widow. But he was very kind and attentive to her, though he did not in any way give up his life to her. He made politics his business, as he said—his amusement, as others preferred to put it. He was always assailing and denouncing the peerage, and especially members of that highly-privileged body who had had the good fortune to serve their country as foreign ambassadors. Tressel's father had been at the head of several embassies. Tressel now had a great house in one of the most fashionable squares, and was understood to be a good deal of a wire-puller in the interests of the extreme Radical Party. Perhaps the principal stimulant to his taste for wire-pulling in this direction was the good of his country, according to his understanding of it; perhaps it was to be found in the fact that whenever a Tory ministry was displaced, Tressel's father and elder brother straightway had to bundle out of office.

'Are you going my way, Bellarmin, when you leave this?' Tressel said, as there set in a general movement and scattering, some guests having come from the supper-room, others preparing to go down.

'Going any way—I don't much mind.'

'Well, walk my way, then. Don't let's drive. I hate driving.'

'All right,' Bellarmin answered. 'I will discourse with my philosopher.'

CHAPTER VII.

TOMMY TRESSEL.

The selected guests, the initiated ones, the guests of this night's second circle, were settling down to the table. Madame Spinola sat at the head. Her husband, who scarcely ever spoke to anyone, took the other end. There were only three women—Madame Spinola, Mrs Rivers, and a clever, eccentric woman of fashion, Lady Cora Mallory, who went in for amusing herself in life, went wherever she pleased, and did not care what people said of her. She was a widow; she was only thirty years old. She had just enough money to live pleasantly, and she found the ordinary society of the season
dull. Bellarmin came down to supper, and Tressel and Bingley
and Colonel Towers, and some others. Colonel Towers was a man
who lived happily and proudly on the reputation of being managing
diplomatist and secret wire-puller to the inner circle of the Con­
servative Party—at present the party in office. He had been for
some time in the House of Commons, and he had never spoken
there. Some people believed in Towers and his confidential rela­
tions with the Tory chiefs; others, and they formed the majority,
did not. Tressel always affected a profound belief in him.

‘You ask Tressel what he was going to make a row with me
for, Madame Spinola,’ Bellarmin said, as they were sitting down.

‘Oh, yes, yes; Mr Tressel—Tommy Tressel—what were you
going to blow up Mr Bellarmin for?’

‘It’s this: do you know that they counted me—at least they
counted one of my supporters—on his great motion on Tuesday
night; and you promised me long ago the support of your whole
Progressive Priggism Party—ain’t that what you call it? You
promised me that the whole five of the Progressive Prigs, yourself
included, would be in their places to support my man, as I couldn’t
be there myself.’

It was a favourite joke of Tressel’s to assume that the Progres­
sive Democrats only numbered five; a favourite retaliation of
Bellarmin’s to talk as if they numbered hundreds.

‘You outrageous humbug!’ Bellarmin promptly replied. ‘Do
you pretend to forget that the bargain was conditional? I promised
you all the influence I could bring to bear on the Progressive Tory
Party to get some small proportion of them—fifty or sixty, let us
say—to keep a house for your man, on condition that he let us go
to a division the moment he had fired off his own speech. We
couldn’t stand having the thing argued by solemn blockheads on
both sides of the House. I can stand you, Tressel, on the expedi­
cency of extinguishing all our embassies and legations abroad, and
it amuses me to hear the anecdotes and the bits of scandal about
the pompous old ambassadors and the wives of the secretaries of
legation. That sort of thing, my good fellow, is amusing enough;
but I can’t stand hearing it argued out. Why didn’t you get your
fellows to hold their tongues?’

‘I don’t believe you ever showed up at all—better employed up
in the Ladies’ Gallery; that was about it, wasn’t it? or out on the
Terrace! If you had been in the House you’d have seen there were
lots of fellows on both sides dying to show that they had travelled,
and each of them wanted to drag in his imaginary experiences of
some particular court or capital. It wasn’t that they wanted to
argue the thing. They didn’t care a bit more about the right or
wrong of it than you do, Bellarmin.’

‘Or than you do, Tressel.’

‘I have thrown my soul into it.’

‘ Safest thing you could do with your soul, if you can only manage
to keep it there,’ said Bingley, with a great, jolly laugh at his own joke.

‘Is that you, Bingley? Didn’t see you before. I know you have
been trying a joke, because you laughed and no one else did.’

It was always a great thing when people could get Bellarmin
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The Rival Princess.

and Tressel together at the supper-table in Count Spinola's house.
T h e two chaffed each other unendingly, and the animated rapidity of
the one m a n set curiously off the languorous slowness of the other.
' Oddest thing in the world,' Tressel observed; ' the House of
C o m m o n s will never take either Bellarmin or m e at our word. /
say that I a m a serious politician, and they won't believe that I am.
He says that he is not a serious politician, and they arefirmlyconvinced that he is.'
'What do you think about M r Bellarmin's seriousness?' the
hostess asked. ' D o tell us, pray; Bellarmin won't mind. Will
you, Bellarmin ?'
There were occasions when the Countess Spinola's manner to
men, and her way of speaking generally, did suggest that after all
there might be some truth in the story that the pretty creature was
the daughter of a washerwoman^, and had begun active life as an
artist's model.
' I sha'n't mind,' said Bellarmin. ' I'll tell him if he guesses right.
N o w then, Tressel. Oblige the company.'
' I think Bellarmin is one of the most serious politicians in the
House of C o m m o n s — t h e most serious, I should say, after myself,'
said Tressel, calmly taking a rosebud from a vase near him, and
fastening it into his button-hole. ' H e has been devoting himself for
several years back with the most indomitable perseverance and
energy to the task offindingout what his political opinions are.'
T h e two w o m e n laughed in a somewhat puzzled manner.
'And he has. just-this evening discovered that his political
opinions are incompatible with allegiance to the reigning house,'
continued Tressel, solemnly.
' Good gracious, T o m m y Tressel, what do you m e a n ?' asked
M a d a m e Spinola.
' T h e age does well enough for commonplace people like you and
me, M a d a m e Spinola, but it's too crude and practical for a poetic
creature like Bellarmin,' said Tressel, gravely. 'Bellarmin has found
that England is getting vulgarised by American Republicanism and
the almighty dollar and the liberty of the press, and all that sort of
thing, don't you know. Bellarmin thinks that sentiment and chivalry
are dying out, and he can't get along without sentiment and chivalry.'
Bingley gave a coarse guffaw.
' Quite right, Bingley; you can't, either. Well, Bellarmin intends to revive them by a revolution, a new dynasty—a queen w h o m
he thinks one might die for with some feeling of satisfaction.
. Tower Hill; the block; a declamation on the scaffold ! That's
Bellarmin's form now-a-days.'
' A new dynasty ! not really ? T h e block ! the scaffold !' cried
Mrs Rivers, in horrified accents. ' Oh, Mr Bellarmin !'
Bellarmin's sense of humour was not easily tickled this evening.
H e saw nothing amusing in Tressel's joking. H e seemed absorbed
in the peeling of a peach, which he placed daintily on M a d a m e
Spinola's plate.
Bellarmin
it is serious
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doesn't
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said she
even
to Tressel;
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'Every bit of it,' said Tressel. 'Don't you know, Madame Spinola, that there's a regular Jacobite faction in London? Lord Stonehenge is at the head of it—on my honour, I assure you—White Cockades, and all the rest of it. Only "Charlie over the Water" is a fascinating young woman got up after the Mary Stuart pattern. She was in the House this evening, I'm told. Old Greenleaf tumbled up to me on Piccadilly half-an-hour ago in a state of intense excitement to tell me that he had been presented to her; and he said that Bellarmin was dangling at her skirts along the corridors instead of leading his five Progressive Prigs in the House.'

'By Jove!' exclaimed Bingley, who had caught the name of Mary Stuart, and turned from a whispered conversation with Colonel Towers. 'It's the cheekiest thing I have heard of for a long time. Takes one's breath away, don't it? In a country like this, where, by Jove! we are all devoted to the reigning house, and to every member of it, I say.'

'We all know that you are, Bingley,' said Tressel, languidly. 'You are quite a tame cat among the royalties, ain't you now?' Tressel himself had that reputation, his Radical opinions notwithstanding; and Bingley, who had never been presented to a single member of the august family, felt that the speech was barbed. 'But suppose now,' Tressel went on, 'that the Prince of Wales was banished from the British dominions, and had to take up his residence in—say, Camden, Oneida County, I wonder if you'd follow him there into exile.'

Everyone laughed except Bingley, who said, emphatically,—

'I was talking to Colonel Towers about it, and he quite agrees with me that something ought to be done.'

'I'm quite with Towers there,' Tressel gravely observed.

'Oh, you, too, think that something ought to be done, Tressel?'

'I think that something ought to be done always; and, indeed, I am of opinion that something is always done. But in this particular instance, Bingley, what is the emergency?'

'Well, haven't you seen that thing in the Park Lane Pictorial?'

'What thing?'

'The portrait of that audacious foreign woman you are talking about, who presumes to call herself lawful Queen of England.'

'No, I haven't seen that,' said Tressel, now pretending unconsciousness.

'What does it matter?'

'Oh, this must be your princess, Mr Bellarmin,' Mrs Rivers whispered.

'Well, it seems she is a Miss Beaton,' Bingley began, in an explanatory tone.

'But you said she was a foreigner.'

'So she is—at least, her mother was a foreigner, and she herself was brought up abroad.'

'She is not a foreigner,' Bellarmin interposed. 'She is an English lady, the daughter of an English nobleman.'

'Mr Bellarmin knows all about her,' Mrs Rivers said, with a little malice in her tone.

'I have had the honour of being presented to Miss Beaton; I have
the honour of her acquaintance. Look here, Bingley, my good fellow, I would not advise you to get into the way of talking disrespectfully of that young lady. She has a good many friends in England."

"But why does she call herself Queen of England?" Madame Spinola asked.

"I never heard of her calling herself Queen of England," Bellarmin answered. "Her friends say that she is the legitimate Queen of England; and so in that sense she is. Only for the Act of Settlement, she would have as much right to be Queen of England as Lord Saxon will have to be Duke of Athelstane when his father dies."

"Oh, Mr Bellarmin, you are talking treason," Lady Cora exclaimed, with a laugh. "This is quite delightful; Jacobitism in the nineteenth century—the White Cockade! Oh, I like this!" Seated at table as she was, she broke into a rattling version of the famous Jacobite song, nor would anything stay her until she had finished her verse. "Now then," she said, "tell us all about our rightful queen."

"I am only mentioning dry, hard, historical facts," Bellarmin said; but his cheek was a little flushed for all that. "This lady claims to be the heiress of the Stuarts, and she is the heiress of the Stuarts. Nothing on earth can alter that."

Count Spinola spoke for the first time. "She stems, I suppose, from Henrietta Maria, Duchess of Orleans?"

"She does."

"Oh, yes; then it will be this way," and he gave a full detailed account of Mary's pedigree. Count Spinola was a living, moving 'Almanach de Gotha.'

"Exactly," Bellarmin said; "there is the case. If anyone in his senses can deny that this lady is the heiress of the Stuarts, then all I can say is that he would deny anything."

Bingley was chafing with impatience. "We don't care about that," he exclaimed. "What we say is that the Constitution of England has put the reigning family on the throne, and anyone who sets up a claim against them is a traitor and a rebel, by Jove! and ought to be clapped into the Tower or Newgate, and sent from there to the scaffold."

"Very good, Bingley, very good indeed! Your sentiments do equal honour to your head and heart," said Tressel. "But then I knew what they would be, of course, knowing my friend Bingley as I do. I don't yet know what the Park Lane Pictorial has been saying about this young and lovely creature. She is lovely, ain't she? I haven't much curiosity on the subject of the Stuart pedigree, but I do feel some curiosity about that. May I be allowed to know what she is like?"

"Look at this," said Bingley, handing him the paper.

The Park Lane Pictorial was a journal of which Bellarmin had never, to his recollection, heard before. It was now passed from hand to hand, and eagerly studied by each possessor in turn, so that it was some time before it reached Bellarmin. When it got to him he found that it was a pretentious-looking 'society paper,' which published weekly portraits of distinguished and fashionable and beautiful women; and the portrait in this number was that of Miss Beaton, evidently taken from a photograph. Beneath the
portrait was an inscription in Latin, setting forth Mary's parentage and pedigree, and declaring her—'the law for constituting the succession alone standing in the way'—Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, Defender of the Faith. A short memoir accompanied the portrait. Bellarmin saw the whole thing with unspeakable dissatisfaction. It was most unlucky, he felt convinced; its appearance was most untimely. It would set people against her; it would be assumed, by those who did not know anything about her, to be published with her authority and connivance.

There was something about it which seemed to him utterly out of harmony with what he supposed were Mary Beaton's own feelings and temper. It was not of any political or personal responsibility on Mary's part that Bellarmin was thinking; but there was a vulgarity about such an appeal to publicity which he felt sure would be bitterly hurtful to her nature. As to her claims, Bellarmin did not suppose that anything could do much good or harm to them; but he shuddered to think what might be said in public and private about this ill-omened publication. Then he pulled himself up with almost a laugh at his own concern about a woman to whom he had spoken for the first time a little while before.

'Well, what do you think of that?' Bingley asked, impatiently, of Tressel.

'Simply a statement of fact, it seems to me,'

'Of course it's a mere statement of fact,' said Bellarmin.

'You see,' Tressel continued, 'all that this says is that, except for the Act of Settlement, this young lady would have a rightful claim to the throne of England. But that's so, ain't it? And where is the crime in saying it?'

'But at such a time, and in such a way, to put out a portrait of this woman in their windows, and a Latin proclamation under it, declaring her Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, and Defender of the Faith! Why, the publisher ought to be taken out and shot—shot before his own door.'

'I must say,' interposed Colonel Towers, 'I do think that you two men make far too little of this. Do you think they would stand this sort of thing in any other country?'

'Such a thing might do some harm in a foreign country; don't see how it could do any harm here,' Tressel said, drily.

'I don't know. I am not by any means of your opinion. I think I must talk to some of the chiefs about this. These are strange times. There is a great deal of restlessness everywhere.'

'Suppose you put a question in the House about it, Towers,' Tressel suggested, with a keen glance at Bellarmin. Nothing would have delighted Tressel more than to see Towers make a fool of himself.

'I should hardly like to do that,' replied Towers, with a look of great solemnity; 'at least, not without taking advice—in a manner, getting authority. It would hardly do in my case, Tressel. Of course, I am not in office—'

'And a great shame, too,' Tressel interjected. 'So we all say, I can assure you.'

'I don't know, Tressel; I don't know, really. These things
are difficult to manage; and there are so many men who want office, you know, and have to be conciliated. I always make it a point when a ministry of our men is being formed—I always make it a point to say to our chief, Lord Bosworth, "Never mind me—never mind about me; you know I would rather be out of office than in, so far as personal feeling goes. Provide for the men who want office; I'll work with you all the same—you'll give me your confidence all the same."

'And he does, of course, just the same,' Tressel said; 'I haven't the slightest doubt of that.'

'Yes, yes, just the same.'

'But about this princess. Do make a row in the House about her, Towers—do, now,' the hostess appealed to him. 'It would be such fun—such capital fun. And won't you get me a seat in the Ladies' Gallery? I should love to be there.'

'I think it is rather a matter for Tressel,' Colonel Towers suggested. 'You see, Tressel goes in for being independent; he doesn't acknowledge any authority; he has no responsibility. Besides, you go in for out-and-out Radicalism, Tressel—sort of disguised Republicanism, isn't it?—so it would come better from you, perhaps. You can't be supposed to have any sympathy with the sentiment of Divine Right.'

'There I can't quite agree with you, Towers. I go in for sentiment; I am altogether a man of sentiment.'

Most of the company screamed with laughter at this announcement. Tressel went blandly on,—

'I am a man of sentiment altogether. I am touched with the melancholy beauty of that hopeless claim, that lost cause; and then I am a slave to the charm of female loveliness. No, Towers; I can't do it: for you, on the contrary, I should think your duty was clear.'

'Does she go to the House?' Mrs Rivers asked, confidentially, of Bellarmin.

'I believe she went there for the first time this evening.'

'Will you take me down to see her? Oh, please do!'

'My dear Mrs Rivers, she is not on show; and even if she were, I am not her showman.'

'Now I have made you angry—oh, yes, I have; I can see it; but, indeed, Mr Bellarmin, I meant nothing.'

'I am quite sure of that,' Bellarmin said.

'Anyhow, you will look into this thing, Towers,' Bingley shouted; 'you won't let it drop out of sight. Mind, I reckon on you. If you don't, I'll get someone else; it sha'n't be allowed to pass unchallenged, I can tell you.'

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CHAPTER VIII.

'ABOUT CHAMPION.'

BELLARMIN and Tressel were walking through the Green Park.

'Vey are badly advising that girl,' Tressel said, abruptly.
'Who are they?'

'I don't quite know; the people, whoever they are, who have her in hand. Why did they get that thing put into the Park Lane Pictorial? Why such a thing anywhere? and, in any case, why the Park Lane Pictorial?'

'Oh, they know nothing about it.'

'Don't they? You bet they do; someone does. If I know anything about anything, I know that the Park Lane Pictorial never published that portrait and that memoir, and the whole lot of it, without being well paid.'

'Oh, but that is impossible. She would never listen to such an idea.'

Bellarmin spoke with angry surprise.

'She wouldn't, eh? Well, you ought to know, I suppose,—better than I, at any rate.'

Tressel cast a keen glance at Bellarmin's face as he spoke.

'Anybody who knew anything of her would know that. As a matter of fact, I judge from inference only. I met her for the first time in the House of Commons to-night.'

'Yes, very good. Then somebody about her is doing things without her knowledge; and she ought to be put on her guard.'

'Lord Stonehenge certainly would not tolerate anything of the kind,' Bellarmin said.

'No, no; of course he wouldn't. In point of fact, no one who knows London would do it. But the people who have this girl in hand, don't all of them know London. Anyhow, there it is. You had better give someone the straight tip, or tell her yourself.'

'You speak as if you had some knowledge of her affairs,' said Bellarmin, with an interest which he could not disguise.

'I have some knowledge of the affairs of most people,' replied Tressel, 'and I am always, in a quiet way, on the lookout for information; there's no knowing when it may come in handy. A habit acquired in journalism; and not a bad training for a politician. Try it. I do happen to know something about Miss Beaton's claims and Miss Beaton's adherents—Stonehenge among them.'

'Does he want to marry her?' Bellarmin asked, abruptly.

'Don't think so; no, Stonehenge is a dreamer, a man of chimeras; like many of these Catholic people, a man who half believes in the King's evil and the virtue of royal touch—by a Legitimist sovereign, of course. A man who cherishes, as a sacred heirloom, the historic wig of his majesty Charles the Second! No, Stonehenge doesn't want to marry her. They are only hoping to put the thin end of the wedge in—by the way, did anyone ever try to put the thick end of the wedge in?'

'If it were not too ridiculous, one might imagine some deep-laid scheme.'

'Oh, there won't be a civil war just yet, unless you start it—you might turn the Irish-American energies in that direction. Not a bad notion! A second Stuart bid for the Irish support! Stonehenge isn't such a fool, though he is a Legitimist. There may be a plot against the throne in the brain of that white-moustached old ass who got the sabre-cut at Solferino. Why always a sabre-cut?' added
Tressel, meditatively. 'Have you observed that fanatics, foreign Fenians, and Legitimist agitators, which all comes to much the same thing, have generally—in novels and out of them—got a sabre-cut somewhere? Why not a bullet-hole? However, a bad whist-player will try to force his enemy's hand with the ten of trumps. I dare-say that's the general's notion.'

'But Miss Beaton's claims? Has she any at all—any that are real? I have heard something of an ancestral estate.'

'Oh, yes; she has a bona fide claim on an estate in the palatinate of Lancaster, left by a Stuart adherent in the latter days of Anne, when the old woman herself seemed inclined for a Stuart restoration. It was left to the eldest princess in the Stuart family, and in default, to the eldest succeeding princesses of the line. There's the whole pretension in an historical nutshell.'

'Well?' said Bellarmin.

'Well! The Hanoverian ministers simply seized the property for the crown. It's conceivable, however, that a prime minister of England—say, an enthusiast like Champion, possessed with fantasies of reform—might be wrought upon to recognise the claim on the part of the undoubted representative of the Stuarts—merely as a family possession. However, enough about that. Now, what about Champion?'

'About Champion?'

'Quite so. About Champion. Are you coming to terms with him? You may speak out with me. I know all about it; and I saw Champion to-day, and he particularly wished me to see you in an easy, informal sort of way, and get to know what your ideas are on the whole subject. First, the thing itself; next, the time when.'

Bellarmin was silent for a while. He was surprised to hear that Sir Victor had made Tressel his confidant on such a subject. Bellarmin himself was inclined to believe in Tressel on the whole as a sincere and serious politician; but he never supposed that a man with the intensity of conviction and the lack of humour which alike characterised Champion could be got to put himself and his schemes into the power of a teller of scandalous anecdotes and a maker of cynical jokes.

'I see that you are a little astonished, my youthful politician, to think that Champion should make me his emissary. It does seem odd, doesn't it? But I managed to work it out of him and to work myself into him. I have my peculiar advantages, don't you see? and I got him to see them. I talk to everybody, and so nothing is inferred from my talking to anybody. Then I am not a serious politician; everybody says that, and what everybody says must be true. Therefore, of course, nobody would believe that so tremendously serious a politician as "Lucifer" would think of taking me into any confidence. Then if I were to let out the secrets, nobody would give them a moment's attention—seeing it's me, don't you know? Then again, if the worst came to the worst, I could be disavowed so easily. Oh, it's only Tressel's absurd talk—nobody minds him, and the thing is at an end, don't you see?'

'Yes; there is a good deal in what you say. But this is a serious business. Has Champion told any of his colleagues in office?'
‘Not one. Most of them are mere puppets, whom he can set in motion when he likes, and move in any direction he pleases. Saxon he is a little afraid of; but he thinks it safest to keep Saxon in the dark for the present. Saxon is the sort of man who accepts accomplished facts. If Champion can say to him, “Look here, this is a definite policy, to which I am pledged in my own mind: will you go with me or desert me?” he thinks there would be his best chance for nailing Saxon.’

‘Well, what does Champion want of me?’

‘Champion thinks you are a clever young fellow, with some fresh ideas and plenty of go, who has made enormous strides in the political race, and has the faculty of keeping the House amused by showing it game. The House always likes that. He thinks you must be about as tired of the stupid old ways as he is himself. That’s why I stick to Champion; because he wants to do something new and plucky. Champion thinks that you would have wit enough to see that some reform of this absurd old anomaly must be made soon, and that a clean sweep would be as easily done as a little trimming and clipping. He fancies that you are a sort of man who would rather be identified with a great reform, which is inevitable, than care about the barren honour of opposing it. He thinks Progressive Toryism might very properly include in its progress a march over the ruins of the House of Lords. He wants to form a new party; and he is eclectic; and he wants you to belong to it. Will you see him?’

‘No, I think not. I don’t see the use; I don’t fancy I could do him any good—just now, at all events. The House of Lords, as it is now constituted, has got to go. Even without a prophetic eye one must see that. I should like my Progressive Tories to have a hand in the construction of the new chamber, whatever it is to be—of course Champion would go for some sort of second chamber?’

‘Oh, yes? I wouldn’t, if I could; but he is strong on it, and I don’t much mind either way.’

‘But I doubt about the time; and I am inclined to think that Champion’s notion of springing this scheme upon his old colleagues will lead to a smash. I don’t see my way to it, Tressel; that’s all I can say. If I were to advise him, I should tell him he ought to take Lord Saxon into his confidence at once.’

‘He won’t do that. Look here, Bellarmin, it’s not Lord Saxon I’m afraid of, so far as this business is concerned.’

‘No? Who else?’

‘Lady Saxon. I’ve some reason to suspect that she and Champion are old pals, and he would be easily managed by a clever woman like that.’

‘I don’t believe there is an atom of foundation for your suspicion about her and Champion—about their having been friends before her marriage,’ said Bellarmin, hastily, yet with an uneasy recollection of the conference on the Terrace.

‘All right,’ said Tressel. ‘Good-night.’
MARY BEATON lived in a wonderful little house, very near the walls of old Kensington Palace. It was only chance which had given her a domicile; but it seemed sometimes to her, when she was in a mood of exaltation, that the hand of Providence itself had settled her down in the immediate neighbourhood of the Palace where Queen Anne died, beneath the very shadow of its walls.

The house General Falcon and Lady Struthers had succeeded in getting possession of was a long, ancient, low-roofed building. It had only one storey above the ground-floor, and that upper storey held only bedrooms. The whole day life and evening life of the house was therefore on the ground-floor; and the reception rooms ran out of one another in a quaint and curious way. In each room there were long, low windows, some of them shadowed by the trees of the Kensington Gardens; some of them looking on the walls of Kensington Palace.

When it was decided that Mary Beaton should come over to England and set up her claims there, General Falcon went on in advance to find a suitable dwelling for her; and, after a while, Lady Struthers came to help him in his quest. General Falcon decided from the beginning that the heiress of the Stuarts could not condescend to occupy any house in one of the new and fashionable quarters. Belgrave Square he put aside, after some consideration, rather as being under the social and historical conditions undesirable than because the rental was beyond Mary's means, though that was certainly the case. It had, of course, the traditional attraction, to a Legitimist, that it was the scene of the famous pilgrimage to do homage to Charles the Tenth. But times had changed since that time, and General Falcon could not find any fragrance of Divine Right and exalted self-sufficing legitimacy lingering now along the stuccoed lines and ridges of Belgrave Square. Eaton Square he held to be as utterly out of the question as Cromwell Road itself. Park Lane would not do; it was occupied far too much by hangers-on to the Hanoverians, as he put it, and by the aristocracy of birth and of money who habitually went to court. There was too strong a savour of Marlborough House about it for his purpose, he thought. So when, after the coming of Lady Struthers, and when things seemed well-nigh desperate, a strange chance threw the long, low, old-fashioned house at Kensington in his way, Falcon thought he saw the finger of Providence distinctly intervening for his guidance. He took Lord Stonehenge into council, and they arranged for a long tenancy of the house.

Everything was prepared for Mary's reception by the Dowager Lady Stonehenge, Lady Struthers, and General Falcon, in permanent council; and when all was done, Lady Struthers and Falcon went back to bring their young mistress to her London home.

Nothing could exceed the delight of Mary Beaton when she first ranged through the rooms of that delightful old house. She thought
she could never have enough of it. She studied all its peculiarities, and all its views and glimpses. She kissed Lady Struthers a dozen times in her rapture; she felt almost inclined to kiss dear old Falcon too, so she told Lady Struthers in private confidence. With all her little dignities and airs, Mary was a thorough girl.

Mary was very fond of Lady Struthers, after a fashion; but it was not surprising that she sometimes found this scion of the aristocracy a little tiresome. Lady Struthers prided herself on the length of her pedigree. Her mother had belonged to a noble Highland Catholic family, and she herself had married, she considered, beneath her rank. Sir Peter Struthers had begun his career as an apothecary's assistant, and had ended it as a court physician. He had doctored various foreign royalties. He had died after making an unaccountable and, to his wife, eminently unsatisfactory will, by which the bulk of his fortune had gone to his children by a former marriage, while Lady Struthers was left but a moderate annuity, and the consoling reflection that she was suffering for having demeaned herself by such a union.

It had seemed natural enough that Lady Struthers should accept the position of governess to Miss Beaton; and at the Court of Schwalbenstadt, where the young lady was brought up, Lady Struthers had revelled in titles and high life, and had become so accustomed to addressing her acquaintances as princess, countess, or baroness, as the case might be, that she found some difficulty in adapting herself to humbler society in England. It was a disappointment to Lady Struthers that Miss Beaton's claims were not at once recognised, and that she did not immediately receive invitations to all the greatest houses. The Catholic coterie was all very well, and Lord Stonehenge had proved himself a valuable ally; but Lady Struthers wanted and expected something more than that.

General Falcon and Lady Struthers had this in common, and perhaps almost this only, that they were both devoted to their young mistress. They had watched her growth up from childhood with pride and delight. They had bent before her pretty, wilful ways, admiring her the more for them. Would she be a Stuart if she were not wilful? They had yielded her an exaggerated deference, exulting in the thought that her nature was too sweet for adulation to spoil it; and even when scolding her for her shortcomings, and tutoring her in what they conceived to be the duties of her position, they had never succeeded in inspiring her with any wholesome awe of themselves. Gradually Lady Struthers' supremacy had waned; now she was a mere picturesque dummy—for she was certainly very picturesque with her snowy hair and her stately presence—an amiable chaperone whose ideas of propriety never interfered with her charge's inclinations.

General Falcon, however, seemed with years to become more exacting and more tenacious of such authority as he held over Miss Beaton. In truth, Mary sometimes felt a little puzzled by his manner, and impatient of his system of surveillance. His humour was by turns querulous, suspicious, and curiously emotional—tender, even impassioned. She would have been more annoyed by the ill-temper, were it not that the tenderness appealed to her warm heart, and to
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all that was romantic and queenlike in her nature. His affection, she thought, was something more than mere personal devotion. It was devotion to the memory of her dead parents; to a cause. It was the living example of that mysterious poetic fascination which the Stuarts had always exercised over their followers.

The day after the visit to the House of Commons, Mary was in her own room, her peculiar place of retreat, some time before the regular breakfast hour. It was her custom, after the fashion of the Continent, to have her coffee alone in her room early, and then to meet her household circle at a set dejeuner à la fourchette about noon. She seldom saw General Falcon till the time of the midday meal, and after that they usually began and got through the business they had to do—a business which generally consisted in considering and dismissing absurd and impossible suggestions from unthinking and unsolicited advisers. On this particular morning, however, General Falcon sent a formal message to say that it would gratify him if madame would kindly allow him to wait on her. In all superficial intercourse he treated her with an almost exaggerated ceremony. Madame at once accorded the interview, and madame shrugged her shoulders, and pursed her lips and pouted, well knowing that she was to be scolded. She did her best to escape censure; she met Falcon with a look of sweet disarming welcome, but Falcon was not to be disarmed.

As he entered—grey, erect, with the scar on his forehead conspicuously white—Mary thought she had never seen his face sterner or more ill-tempered. She was puzzled by a certain air of excitement and forced self-repression which she noticed in him.

'What now, I wonder?' she murmured, half aloud, and with a mocking accent; 'London air is too stimulating for the general's nerves. Come, something is wrong,' she went on, in a louder tone. 'Well, let us have it out. What have I been doing?'

Falcon was silent for a few moments.

'I am afraid that you shocked Lord Stonehenge and Mr Leven last night,' he said. 'You were near going actually into the House of Commons; and you only laughed and made fun of it.'

'Well, there was nothing to weep over, was there? Why should Lord Stonehenge care? He is one of us. As for Mr Leven—'

'And then you kept rambling about the Terrace with Mr Bel­larmin, as if you were a schoolgirl. A man like Lord Stonehenge could not approve of that.'

Mary gave up all thought of conciliation. 'I wish you would not speak to me as if I were a schoolgirl,' she said, petulantly.

'I wish you would not act as if you were a schoolgirl,' he answered, as petulantly. 'I wish you would try to remember that you are not of the schoolgirl's age, or of the ordinary schoolgirl's position—'

'I wish you would try and remember my position a little more than you do. You scold me in a very disrespectful and disagreeable fashion. What have I done that was so bad? Come, tell me of all my faults; and Heaven send me patience to listen. Give me a bead-roll of them. But stay a moment. I presume the task will be pretty long. Let us make ourselves comfortable.'

She pushed a soft and heavy arm-chair towards him with an air
of mock humility, and settled herself on a great heap of cushions converted to the duty of an ottoman. She settled herself down very comfortably, unfurled her fan, and waved it gently before her face. She did not look at Falcon—her eyes were upturned. Had she looked, indeed, she might have been surprised by the gaze bent upon her: a fierce, melancholy longing, almost tragic in its intensity. It was as though Falcon had dropped his mask for a moment, and allowed play to the emotion he had been trying to conceal by his petty fault-finding. His eyes literally devoured her, and his face, lighted by the gleam of ardour, seemed for an instant youthful once more. But Mary saw nothing of this: she appeared to be languidly studying the painted ceiling. There was a minute of silence, and then she said,—

' I am waiting, General Falcon.'

'Waiting!' he said, dreamily, pulling himself together with a start, and turning his eyes away. 'For what, madame?'

'Waiting to be lectured; to be scolded; to be told of all my various sins of omission and commission. Won't you tell me? I only want to be put right. I'll promise not to be aggravating,' she said, coaxingly.

'Oh, it isn't any use!' he exclaimed, with sudden sharpness. 'I haven't any influence over you—now; any longer. I had better give up.'

'General Falcon,' said Mary, solemnly, 'what would you have? Did not I play my part properly last night? You said that you wanted me to know influential people in the political world—people who would take up my claims, and see the justice of giving me back the estate which these Hanoverians confiscated. Well, isn't Sir Victor Champion an influential personage? You are extremely unreasonable. "Thou shalt praise me to-day, O Caesar!" This was the least that I expected.'

'Madame, it is not for the descendant of the Stuarts to boast of an introduction to an adventuress like Lady Saxon.'

'I'm not boasting, general. Quite the contrary. I behaved prettily to Lady Saxon last night from a sense of duty—and, indeed I thought I had put quite the right infusion of "dignified reserve"—that's your phrase—into my manner. Is she an adventuress? Then my instinct did not deceive me. It's always so comforting to know that one may put trust in one's instinct. Of course I should have supposed her to be a very great and high-born lady, if it hadn't been for my little inward monitor which labelled her with a big "D," Doubtful. What do you know about Lady Saxon, General Falcon?'

'Enough to make use of her.'

'You are dreadfully melodramatic. Tell me the mystery. I adore a mystery.'

'There is none,' said Falcon. 'Let me advise you, madame, to treat this lady with a certain amount of reserve, not to become too intimate with her—not, for example, to discuss your private affairs with her, your likes and dislikes, your theories, your feelings. Yes, it is the want of that dignified reserve in your manner which I complain of. In your conversation with Mr Bellarmin—'

'Ah, I understand,' Mary interrupted, with scornful amusement.
'You are jealous of Mr Bellarmin. That's it. You are jealous because he is young and good-looking, and famous and agreeable, and because he interests me. Good gracious! What have I said now?'

A sudden wave of red rushed to Falcon's face, and overspread his forehead, except where the scar seamed it, leaving his cheeks pallid. His eyes flashed angrily. He bit his moustache, and rose abruptly.

'Madame, I was right when I accused you of levity.'

'And I, when I told you that you were melodramatic,' she retorted.

'What did you object to in my conversation with Mr Bellarmin?'

He made an impatient gesture, and moved a few steps from her without answering.

'Oh, I know! You want me to be stiff and formal, and superficial to everyone but yourself. You did not like my talking to him so openly about what I thought of the poor people and the state of England—and everything. Why, I wonder? General Falcon, for Heaven's sake, let me be myself sometimes—a young woman with heart and sympathies and—yes—some wish to amuse herself. I want to have a taste now and then of a girl's natural life. I am tired of this sham sovereignty. I am weary of it all.' She spoke with impetuous warmth. General Falcon had stepped nearer her again. He did not look at her. His face, still working with some untold emotion, was turned towards the window.

'God knows that I am weary of it, too!' he cried, with a burst of passion.

There was silence for a moment or two. 'You speak strongly, general,' said Mary, with a puzzled, wistful glance at him. 'Are you tired of me?'

He turned to her with a gesture of apology.

'Forgive me, madame. I forgot myself.'

'Why are you unhappy? Are you tired of me?' Mary repeated.

'Well—yes—in a manner.' The general spoke now in a forced, mechanical voice, dropping out the words slowly, as if he were deliberating while he uttered them. 'I am not tired of you; but I am tired of trying to make you do the right thing, and see things in the right way. And I see that you rebel against the restraint—I see that I bore you; I see that my influence over you is weakening day by day—and—yes, I get tired, and sore, and sorry; and I don't see what is to come of it.'

He threw himself into his chair with a heavy sigh.

'My father would be grieved if he could know of this,' Mary said, softly, more as if she were talking to herself than remonstrating with Falcon. 'He would be so sorry. If he could only have known that the friend he loved best and trusted most would come to weary so soon of the task of taking care of his daughter!'

'How dare you talk in that way?' Falcon exclaimed, starting forward, tremulous and excited. 'You—you are a wicked girl—a wicked, heartless girl, to play upon me like this—to bring up your father's name—to say that I have wearied of taking care of you, when you know that I only live for you. Oh, say what you please, torture me as you choose; but don't cry; don't, don't begin to cry!'

For there were tears in the girl's brown eyes, and she put up her handkerchief to hide them. General Falcon sat like one terrified, not
knowing what to say or do. After a moment or two, Mary looked at him with a serious face, and eyes that were still moist and wistful.

'General Falcon,' she said, 'tell me, what is it that you want? You cannot make me Queen of England, you know.'

'I can't make you Queen of England,' he repeated; and his eyes were fixed upon her with a rapt gaze that seemed more befitting a lover than an elderly guardian. 'Would I if I could? I have dreamed so many wild dreams, Mary—dreams in which you were the central figure—dreams of glory, and of poetry, and of love.' His voice dropped in a sort of caressing cadence, and the girl started and blushed. 'I have dreamed so much,' he went on, 'that sometimes I can hardly tell the real from the unreal—the possible from the impossible. I often think that dreams are my only real life.'

'General Falcon,' said Mary, in a soft voice of compassion, 'you idealise me, I know. You mustn't do that. I'm only a girl; and a very frivolous girl sometimes, as you tell me yourself.'

'Mary Stuart was only a girl when she came to Holyrood; but she had in her face and her voice that magic which made men forget that she was the queen, and made them dream wild dreams of ambitious love and daring deed—ay, and do the deeds! There are women still who have such magic, my princess—women with the dangerous gift of fascination by which a man may be turned into a madman or a hero. You are one of these, Mary. You have that gift; but there clings round you something more than the magic of the woman. There is the magic of an historic cause.'

'I know it,' replied Mary, soothingly. 'I like to feel that some of the romance of the dead-and-gone Stuarts is revived in me; and there are moments—oh, many, many—in which I am proud and glad to be a Stuart. You must not think that I undervalue your devotion, or that I don't know what it means.'

'Do you know what my devotion means, madame? My princess, my queen, if you do know, you are wiser than poor old Falcon, who makes himself wretched in trying to understand it.'

He laughed a quavering, uncertain laugh.

'Devotion like yours is the birthright of the Stuarts,' said Mary, affectionately, touching his hand lightly as she spoke. 'I accept it as such, dear old friend, and I will try to tease you no more. Dream no more dreams, Falcon, about magic charms and heroic deeds, and impossible thrones. Make me glorious and rich if you please, in a matter-of-fact nineteenth-century fashion. Curry favour if you like with her majesty's ministers, present and to come, and settle me in my historic inheritance with my historic thousands. In good truth, Falcon,' she added, with a laugh, 'I think we shall need them; for though this house isn't a palace, and I am not a pauper, I am quite certain that we spend more than we ought.'

'You must spend money,' Falcon answered, impatiently. 'You must keep up an establishment.'

'It seems to me, my good general, that I myself am something of an adventuress. I fancy that my Stuart dignity might be supported without a hall-porter, and with a fewer number of men in livery; and that I might have a better chance of Heaven, and should be a worthier daughter of the Mother Church, if I spent more in charity,
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and less upon this vain state and show. But we have talked of this often enough; and now I hope that our quarrel is over for to-day.'

'Yes, thank Heaven!' murmured Falcon, in a relieved tone.

He seemed to have descended to the nineteenth-century level. His emotion was past now; and he leaned back composedly in his chair. Mary came and sat herself on one of the broad arms of the chair, and laid her left hand caressingly on his shoulder. At first he winced at the touch; then, as if with an effort, he put up his right hand and placed it on hers.

'Yes, dear old friend,' Mary said; 'you shall give me the list of all my sins, offences, and negligences—but no more now. Some other time. I am going to coax you. I have a great, great favour to ask of you. You will take me to the East End, and let me see the sort of life that goes on there? Come, promise now. I'll be as sweet as honey to you for a whole week if you will say that I may go.'

She bent down and looked into his face with a childlike coquetry that was irresistible, at least to General Falcon. He gazed at her fondly, admiringly. Then he moved his hand from hers, and timidly touched her soft cheek. The contact might have been magnetic, he withdrew his hand again so quickly; and he gave a sort of shuddering sigh.

'Promise,' insisted the girl.

'Yes, you shall go,' he answered. 'You shall go with me—alone with me.' There was a wildness in his manner of pronouncing the last words of which he himself seemed to become conscious, for he added in a different tone, and after a moment's pause, 'Perhaps it is as well that you should see for yourself what life is.'

'Exactly my own notion, and what I have been trying to impress upon you ever since we came to London. I want ever so much to see an East End music-hall; and I don't want to be seen and known. Listen. May I go in boy's clothes? I should like that, because I should be so much more free; and nobody could suspect who I was—don't you see?'

'I am afraid that you would never be fit for a queen,' he said, in a half-melancholy remonstrance.

'Ay, every inch a queen!' she said; and she sprang to a standing position, and stood before him straight as a spear, tall, with one hand raised to her forehead as if she were placing a crown there, and the other held on her bosom as though it grasped the symbolic orb.

General Falcon had in his time seen many queens and empresses, and princesses of all sorts, nationalities, and even colours; but he thought in his heart that he had never looked on so queenly a form as that which now stood before him and challenged impeachment of its right to sovereign state.

Mary threw herself down upon her cushions again.

'I want to go to court!' she said, defiantly.

'To court! But, madame, surely you don't think of what you say?'

'Indeed, Falcon, I am afraid I very seldom think of what I am saying, or at least of what I am going to say. I do now and then begin to think of what I have said after I have said it, and the reflection is not always encouraging. But I mean what I am saying this time; I want to go to court.'

'If you wish to be presented at court merely as the Honourable
Mary Stuart Beaton, daughter of an English baron, I presume that could be arranged,’ Falcon said, doggedly. ‘But I should hardly have thought you would condescend to such a performance.’

‘I want to see the sight, but I suppose it wouldn’t be the proper thing. It would be like a recognition of the Hanoverian family. No; we must not do that. But I want to see the Queen in private; do you think you could manage that?’

‘See the Queen in private?’

‘Yes; I want to talk to her about the condition of England—the poverty, the misery! I am sure she could do something if only her eyes were opened to the real truth. I am sure she is not allowed to know anything about the wretched condition of so many of her subjects—I mean of the people who are her subjects for the time. You may be certain that her ministers, and her courtiers, and the ladies who are about her, take good care to keep her in perfect ignorance of the truth. Well, I want to see her, and tell her all. It is my duty. I must not stick at points of etiquette where such interests are concerned.’

Falcon smiled compassionately.

‘Madame, you may take it from me that the Queen knows as well what is going on all over the country as any man or woman in the land. She has the newspapers read to her regularly; she keeps herself thoroughly informed.’

‘Yes, read to her—there it is, you see; you admit it yourself. Read to her! Of course they only read the pleasant parts; they leave out all that could distress her or make her think that she had duties to perform which they don’t want her to be troubled about. I understand these things, general. Why, I remember so well when I was at the Residenz in Schwalbenstadt, the newspapers were all carefully examined before they came under the eyes of the grand duke, or the grand duchess. The ministers and court people would not let either of them know a word that would give them any trouble. I let the grand duchess know all the truth of some stories, I can tell you; and how the court people hated me for it! Ah, yes; I know.’

Mary Beaton sighed with the air of one on whom long and varied experience has forced the knowledge of hard realities. General Falcon became more compassionate than ever.

‘My dear child,’ he said, with father-like tenderness, ‘this court here is not in the least like any of the little courts you have seen. The Queen knows everything; and if there was anything in her power to do, she would do it.’

Mary dropped the discussion, but did not feel satisfied. After a moment of silence, she began again,—

‘I should like to know the Princess of Wales, general.’

General Falcon was becoming impatient.

‘Madame, you must know very well that sort of thing can’t be for the present. Why do you let such ideas get into your head at such a time?’

‘Well, we are all so dull here. You are a brave soldier, and a good, dear friend, Falcon; but you are not lively. Come now, are you? You know you are not.’

‘No; I am not lively,’ Falcon admitted, grimly.
'And Lady Struthers, dear thing—she is very obliging, and knows languages, and has an exalted and very proper notion of "the high life," as they say in French novels,' Mary laughed, softly; 'but you wouldn't call her a very amusing companion, would you? And I'm tired of the people we have to meet, and the solemnity of it all. Everything so ordered and so stately and so cold, and such a sham. If one were a queen actually—a queen reigning—I suppose one would pull one's courage about one grandly, and put up with it. But to me, and as we are here, it has no reality. It is all stiff, chilly, stupid! I want to be amused; and, yes, I want someone to admire.'

Falcon looked suddenly at her; she caught the expression of his face, and broke again into a little peal of musical laughter. Falcon's features were convulsed as they had been a little while ago; and he kept his eyes down, as if afraid they would betray him.

'Positively,' said Mary, 'your look means, "Why don't you admire me?" You vain old hero! Well, I do admire you very much; but then I am so accustomed to you that I don't think of you. What I mean is that I want to see someone from the world outside whom I could admire as a hero.'

'Madame!' burst fiercely from Falcon's lips. Then he checked himself, and laughed discordantly. 'Exactly' he said; 'you are so accustomed to me that you don't think about me. What if some day I were to do something which would force you to take me into account in your life—something wild, daring—if I were to act one of those dreams I spoke of just now? You would be obliged to think about me then, madame.'

'What sort of dream? I don't understand you to-day, General Falcon,' Mary spoke uneasily. 'Of course, I take you into account in my life. Don't you know that I'm very fond of you? You don't need telling, surely. And now that I haven't a single relation left you are closer to me than anyone else in the world. But I don't think of you in a—in a girl's way, general.'

'No; you don't think of me in a girl's way,' he repeated with a sardonic emphasis. 'Well, let us look around. There's Lord Stonehenge. Everybody who knows Lord Stonehenge must admire him.'

'Oh, Lord Stonehenge! yes, indeed. I do admire him very much. He is a man of gold. He knows everything one could want to know. He is ever so kind—'

'He is very handsome,' Falcon interjected, as if he were saying, 'Don't pretend to forget that.'

'He is very handsome; yes, that one sees,' she admitted. 'He is not very young.'

'Quite young for such a man,' Falcon declared, authoritatively. 'He is only just over forty!' Mary made a little grimace. 'Oh, yes, I admire him; I think he is a little shy of me; and do you know, my good Falcon, an idea has once or twice come into my mind that some of you are making up a little scheme to marry me to Lord Stonehenge?' She spoke with the utmost composure, and looked quietly into Falcon's eyes, waiting for a reply. Falcon appeared embarrassed.

'Madame,' he said, gravely, 'if any hint of that kind were to reach Lord Stonehenge's ears, he would be shocked and horrified.'
Mary glanced at herself in the glass, and smiled.

‘You understand quite well,’ he replied, almost gruffly. ‘Lord Stonehenge would regard it as presumption on his part to lift his eyes to the daughter of the Stuart kings. It would be impossible for him to devote himself as he does to you and your cause if any such talk were to get about. I beseech you, madame, to guard your impulsive utterances.’

‘I observe, my dear general, that you have not disclaimed the intention all the same,’ Mary said, quietly. ‘I never supposed that Lord Stonehenge was a party to it, or to anything half so amusing. Suppose that I were to take a liking to him, or to anything half so amusing. Suppose that I were to take a liking to him, she added—‘to fall in love with him—what would have to be done then? Should I have to propose to him? And suppose his modesty and his devoted allegiance were to compel him to refuse, where should I be then?’

‘I don’t think you ought to talk in that way, madame.’

‘Well, let us talk in some other way. I wish you would tell Lady Struthers to write and ask Mr Bellarmin to dinner.’

‘Mr Bellarmin!’

‘Yes; I think he is very clever, and he amuses me; and I’m sure he has a career before him, and he isn’t like everybody else. I want him to dine here, general, or somewhere else where I am to be. I want him asked to Lord Stonehenge’s when we go down there. See about that, General Falcon.’

‘I have no doubt, madame, that whatever you insist upon can be done. But I would have you remember that some people call Mr Bellarmin a political adventurer.’

‘What is an adventurer, general, in politics? You say Lady Saxon is an adventuress. I have a notion that I am a political adventuress. Now, how do you define a political adventurer? Is it one who goes in quest of adventures, and to whom life is only a game? I wish I were a man, and an adventurer in that sense. It must be delightful.’ Mary allowed a half-sigh to escape her.

‘Madame is mistress in her own household.’

‘Is she, Falcon? Really, now, is she?’ Mary smiled at him mischievously; she had apparently forgotten her promise not to tease him. ‘I am so glad to hear it; for there are times, do you know, when I should not quite have thought it.’

Mary Beaton was, it must be owned, in a somewhat provoking mood to-day. Falcon stood under severe self-restraint.
'I hope,' he said, 'that neither Lady Struthers nor I have been unduly interfering.'

'Oh, no, no, my dear creatures, you have been absolute perfection. I fancy you are a good deal too near perfection for me. But you will remember Mr Bellarmin, Falcon? I am sure that he is not by any means perfection, and he will suit me all the better for that.'

'I will speak to Lord Stonehenge,' said Falcon, stiffly.

'Thanks. And now about the East End.'

'That shall be arranged, madame, since you are set upon it—a little, perhaps, after the Stonehenge visit.'

'And mind—I shall wear boy's clothes. Now you know you have promised; and in return I have promised—to admire you—to consult you—to adore you—seriously, to be so sweet to you, general, and so good! I shall never believe in your affection again if you are going to be as inflexible and as unyielding about the proprieties as you try to be on most occasions.'

'Unyielding about the proprieties! And I have consented to allow the heiress of the Stuarts to go to an East End music-hall in boy's clothes! Unyielding! Oh, Mary, my princess, you see too well how blind and foolish are my affections.' He rose and strode up and down the room. Mary looked at him with amusement, in which there was a faint trace of perplexity.

'Now, general, if you must be theatrical, imagine that I am the Queen of Scots as an archer of the Guard. You know she was up to a good many pranks. It's in the Stuart blood; that reflection will comfort you. I know you like to please me,' she went on, in a different tone; 'and I suppose I do like to try your patience sometimes. There's not the least doubt that when I get married I shall try my husband's patience and temper terribly. You don't like me to talk of marrying, general; but I suppose that I may take a husband some day? I'm not in the Act of Settlement, you know; and there's nothing to prevent me from marrying a shoeblack.'

'Indeed, madame,' he exclaimed, bitterly, 'I have almost brought myself to believe that your marriage would be the best thing for you and for me. I shall at once set about introducing suitors to your notice.'

'That's right. Understand, I shall want to govern this husband absolutely. I shall take positive delight in conquering him and taming him, and making him obedient and submissive—'

'Yes; and you will despise him if he is obedient and submissive,' said Falcon, with a melancholy laugh.

'I wonder would that be so, do you think? I don't know at all. I haven't followed out my track of thought so far. I have only got to the subjugation point; I have enjoyed in advance many a triumph over his complete subjugation and his final acknowledgment that he was subjugated; that he was my captive and my slave, and so forth. But I haven't studied the question beyond that point. That has been my sky-line, my horizon. I haven't asked myself how I should feel to my slave when he had meekly put on his collar and accepted his yoke. You don't like all this nonsense, do you, Falcon? I can see by the look on your face that you disapprove of it highly!'

'Excuse me, madame. I was not venturing to express disap-
proval or approval; but I would remind you that I came at this early hour to talk over some matters of business before luncheon—and that luncheon time is now near at hand.'

'You are right, General Falcon; your words recall me to myself, as the people say in the plays. Well, let us get to business. I dismiss my fantasies and my, as yet, untamed husband. Go on, I am all attention.'

So General Falcon went into a great number of questions of policy and expenditure, and so on; and one might have fancied, from the way in which Mary lolled carelessly upon the cushions, and toyed with the fan in her hand, that she was not listening to a word he said; but she every now and then drew her eyebrows together and interrupted him with a shrewd question, or made a quiet, keen suggestion, which showed that she was not altogether the frivolous girl that she seemed.

CHAPTER X.

ROLFE BELLARMIN.

BELLARMIN lived in St James' Place, a small street opening out of stately St James' Street. His was not an august habitation. He was not rich; his father allowed him enough money to live like a gentleman in London, to pay for gloves and cabs, and all the rest of it, and was willing to make such an allowance to him for ever. But, as our readers will see, Bellarmin had not yet opened out any career for himself, in a paying sense. He had been drawn into political life, and had made a mark there, and he meant to stick to it. Up to the present, however, he had not got any money out of it; and, therefore, he took care not to live extravagantly. His lodgings consisted of a sitting-room, a bedroom, and a bathroom. The sitting-room was rather small, and it was encumbered, as is the sitting-room of every bachelor member of Parliament, with piles of blue-books and parliamentary papers of all kinds. Newspapers, of course, were scattered all around. The chairs, the sofas, the tables, the floor, were encumbered with books and papers. The books that Bellarmin kept in his sitting-room were not, however, the books that he read. They were the books that he intended to read, or that he told himself he intended to read. They were first the blue-books, and then the works of various kinds which Bellarmin meant to study in order to supplement the knowledge to be derived from the blue-books. For example, there came to him the latest blue-book on the affairs of South Africa. Now, to understand and to test the statements in the blue-book, it seemed necessary to get a number of non-official books about South Africa; and Bellarmin got them with full intent to read them. But then came in the blue-book on bi-metallism; the blue-book on our dealings with Russia in relation to the Afghan Boundary; the blue-book on the employment of pit-brow girls; and on all these and various other subjects Bellarmin wanted to get additional information, and so got in additional books from the
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London Library. When he set out on his political career he wanted to study everything—to know everything. But then came in the social attractions—the dinners, the luncheons, the garden-parties, the visits to country houses, the race weeks here and there; and Bellarmin wanted to accomplish all that too. Arthur Pendennis said of himself and his position in London society, 'I am in the swim, and, by Jove! I like it.' Bellarmin was in the swim, too, and, by Jove! he liked it. One result was, that the blue-books got less and less studied, and that they accumulated more and more. Bellarmin was loath to acknowledge, even to himself, that he had abandoned any particular subject, and so he would not get rid of the blue-books which he had once fondly believed that he could master. Nor had his acquaintance with Lady Saxon, nor had his appreciation of the charms of Mary Beaton's society tended in any way to expand his opportunities for the study of the South African question and bi-metallism and the work of the pit-brow girls.

The books which he said he must not allow himself time to read, but which he did read pretty often, nevertheless, were all in his bedroom—a room comparatively large for a set of London apartments. There were the books that he loved; a few of the classics of ancient and the classics, too, of modern days. There also were various novels and memoirs and biographies got from Mudie's Library, and never intended to be classic at all, but which Bellarmin sent for because people were talking about them, and in such matters, too, his ambition was to know everything.

On the walls of his sitting-room were displayed the ordinary West End lodging-house frames and engravings. But in his bedroom he had some really fine etchings, given to him by artists, or bought by him here and there, and some curious swords and pistols, and fans and bronzes; and he had a long japanned box which contained his court suit, cocked hat and all.

The mantelpiece in his sitting-room was littered with letters and cards of invitation. There was no mirror there; this was an alteration Bellarmin had insisted on. He could not stand the lodging-house looking-glass over the lodging-house chimney-piece. So he had the glass taken away, and substituted for it a screen, which he well-nigh covered with photographs of celebrated persons, and of men and women who were personally interesting to him. But there was no photograph of Lady Saxon there. Doubtless she must at some time or other have given him one; but, if so, he did not display it; probably he kept it treasured apart and away somewhere.

Was there in life anywhere a happier man than Rolfe Bellarmin? He was young, he was handsome; he had a graceful figure, slender but vigorous, and there was an almost antique air of good-breeding about him, although he was nothing of an aristocrat by birth, but, indeed, only the second son of a very successful business man in one of the great provincial cities. The Bellarmins, to be sure, were understood to have good blood in their veins, even though of later years some of them had succeeded and some of them had failed in the effort to make money in the ways of commerce and industry. Rolfe's father had a great ambition, not for himself, but for his sons; and as the elder loved business and the younger detested it, he
resolved to make a liberal allowance to Rolfe and start him in life as a gentleman. Rolfe took to the calling very kindly. He passed through the training of a public school and a university in the regular fashion; but he had some extra studies in Paris and Bonn as well; and then he went boldly into politics. He had the gift or the genius of success. He threw himself upon a constituency, and was elected. No one expected him to make much of a figure in Parliament. He seemed cut out for mere social success; but he contrived to play a conspicuous political part from the very beginning. There was something winning about his youth, his bright ways, his refined, mediaeval-looking face, and his well-modulated voice; and, let it be added, his audacity, which was in such odd contrast to his appearance. He had an absolute faith in himself. After he had made his first speech—which was what someone called 'a rattling success'—a friend of long experience in Parliament cautioned him that he must take more pains to catch the tone of the House. 'Catch the tone of the House!' was the reply of that brazen youngster—'that abominable sing-song? Not if I know it. Let the House catch my tone—if it likes, or if it can.' The sage adviser shuddered; but young Bellarmin went his own way, kept to his own tone; and before two sessions he had a little knot of imitators. He was always taking divisions, moving adjournments, coming boldly up to the rescue of some forlorn 'independent member,' to whose Tuesday evening crotchet no one but Bellarmin would think of giving countenance. He despised no one; he made friends everywhere. He soon attracted the notice of the Conservative leader—for Rolfe had gone in as what we call a 'Progressive Tory;' and the leader was pleased with his buoyancy, his brilliant animal spirits, his evident delight in all the life and all the ways of the House of Commons. Bellarmin had a good stock of more or less superficial information on almost all subjects likely to come up in Parliament. He knew enough of most things to be able to make some use of any fresh facts; at all events, he knew enough to be able to talk without talking obvious nonsense.

One evening he came in rather late, flush from a dinner-party, with gorgeous flower in faultless dress-coat. A debate was obviously breaking down; the Conservatives, then in opposition, were trying to make something out of a foreign question on which a motion had been put down for papers 'on going into committee of supply.' The government had laid some papers on the table to meet the demand; had, in legal phrase, paid so much into court, and the Opposition did not seem able to carry on the discussion in face of that fact. The leader, for reasons of his own, particularly wished it to be carried on for the whole evening. Some of his weighty men, his big guns, were not yet on the field, and he kept looking anxiously at the doors.

In came Bellarmin. 'Ask Bellarmin to speak,' the leader said, in a voice low as an evening breeze, but distinctly audible to Bellarmin as well as to the party whip, for whom it was intended.

Bellarmin felt his cheek glow with pride and delight. To be thus specially invited to take part in a failing fight by his leader
was a compliment such as one might have had from a Cæsar or a Napoleon on the field of some desperate battle.

The whip came to Bellarmin. 'Chief wants you to speak,' he whispered.

'What is it all about?' ask Bellarmin, breathlessly. 'What am I to say?'

'Oh, it's all right—information in papers wholly insufficient; pitch into ministry—you know,' was the comprehensive and luminous reply; and the whip scuttled away after having thrust a blue-book into Bellarmin's hand.

Bellarmin began to read, the letters all dancing before him. Just at that moment the minister who was speaking came to an end of his discourse with the declaration that he was convinced the universal judgment of the House would admit that the government had produced ample and sufficient information for the guidance of all honourable members, and that the House might now be permitted without further delay to get into the business of supply.

The hint was enough for Bellarmin. The moment the minister sat down—indeed, before he had got to his seat—Bellarmin leaped on to his feet after the manner of one who has been choking all the evening with the hitherto vain desire to unburden his soul of something it is his duty and mission to say.

'Mr Speaker,' he began, 'the right honourable gentleman who has just sat down has been talking of the ample and sufficient information contained in the pages of the blue-book which I hold in my hand. Ample and sufficient information! I wonder if the right honourable gentleman really believed that he could either cajole or bully the House into an acceptance of the contents of this worthless book as ample and sufficient information?'

The minister in question was a man of violent temper, and Bellarmin knew this, and expected some interruption, which might give him a chance of even a momentary glimpse into the contents of the blue-book. The minister sprang to his feet.

'I rise to order, Mr Speaker,' he said, in a tone of half-suppressed fury; 'I wish to ask you, sir, if it is in order for an honourable member to charge a minister of the crown with a desire to cajole or bully the House of Commons?'

Bellarmin did not care three straws how the point of order was decided. He was only trying meanwhile to get some rapid notion of the general subject of the blue-book. Up to this moment he did not know whether it was a question of home or foreign politics. Now, to his immense relief, he saw it had something to do with Russia.

His chief, appreciating the situation, came to his assistance in good time.

'On that point of order, Mr Speaker,' he blandly said, 'may I direct your attention to the fact that my honourable friend—oh, how Bellarmin's young heart beat with pride to hear the great Conservative leader speak of him as 'my honourable friend!'-'did not accuse the honourable gentleman of any desire to cajole or bully the House.'

Cries of 'Oh, oh!' from the ministerial benches interrupted the
Rolfe Bellarmin.

orator, and now the House began to fill, in the eager hope of a scene of some kind.

'I do not understand the meaning of these interruptions,' the Conservative chief went calmly on; 'I fancy the honourable gentlemen who indulge in them do not understand their meaning any more than I do.' I said that my honourable friend did not charge the right honourable gentleman with any desire to cajole or bully the House. My honourable friend put a mere hypothesis.' There were new cries of 'Oh, oh!' 'Yes, I repeat it; a mere hypothesis. He merely asked whether the right honourable gentleman really believed that he could either cajole or bully the House into a certain belief—into the belief that these papers contain ample and sufficient information.'

This ingenious interpretation was greeted with delighted cheering from the benches of the Opposition, and much laughter and divers manifestations of various emotion from other quarters.

The Speaker rose with becoming gravity, and said that, although it might have been better, perhaps, if some other form of expression had been used, he could not take it on himself to declare that the honourable gentleman had been actually transgressing the rules of order.

Bellarmin had got all he wanted; he had seen that the blue-book was something about Russia, and was quite content.

Once fairly started on the designs of Russia, and the danger to England from a ministry blind or indifferent to such designs, there was no reason why Bellarmin should not go on talking for hours. Every now and then he read at random from the blue-book some paragraph or passage, and then demanded of the House, in language of indignant eloquence, whether such pitiful crumbs of information, doled out to Parliament on such a subject, could be held to satisfy the just demands of the House of Commons, or to fulfil the duty of a government. Not half-a-dozen members in the House had read one line of the blue-book, or had the least idea whether the information contained in this or that paragraph was ample or inadequate. The under-secretary for foreign affairs could be seen rapidly fluttering the pages of his blue-book to get at some of the passages which Bellarmin was criticising; but before he had quite time to possess himself of the meaning of one paragraph Bellarmin was off to another.

At last Bellarmin's chief, who was listening with a bland and smiling face, saw that his heavy men had come up. 'Tell Bellarmin he may stop whenever he likes,' he whispered; and Bellarmin, winding up with some sentences of glowing patriotic passion, sat down, much relieved, wondering within himself what he had been saying all the time. 'That was very well done,' his chief whispered, turning round in his place to nod to Bellarmin; and Bellarmin felt, like Othello, that 'if it were now to die, 'twere now to be most happy.'

Bellarmin had now got far beyond that stage of his career when a tour de force of this kind could be expected of him. He was the recognised leader of a party; a small party, it is true, but a party that had considerable influence in putting the Liberals out of office, and had at present much influence in enabling the Conservatives to
stay in office. Bellarmin's little group was composed almost altogether of young men. They had faith in what they believed to be the principles of Progressive Toryism. Progressive Toryism, they held, could do everything for England by taking necessary reform in time. Progressive Toryism must move with the age; must invigorate itself with the spirit of the time. Progressive Toryism was great in catchwords. Why not? Youth always has faith in catchwords.

When Progressive Toryism proudly proclaimed that 'we march with the movement of the times,' Progressive Toryism was as well satisfied as though it were really marching; in fact, was quite assured that it was marching. Bellarmin represented the *juvenis mundi* of Toryism; the youthful ardour which, believing it could not live without a principle, was satisfied to live with a catchword. It was the old story of Ixion and the cloud. Ixion believed he was embracing Juno while he was only throwing his futile arms around a cloud. Bellarmin and his friends believed they had got firm hold of their principle, and were all the time in possession only of their catchword. The elders, for the most part, had found out long ago that they could get on very comfortably without either catchword or principle.

Bellarmin's social success was not the least wonderful part of his career. He had come up to London almost unknown; he never saw the interior of the House of Commons until the day when he came to take his seat there as a member of Parliament. He suddenly found that he had the gift of knowing people; the gift of being taken up by society. He had not been aware that he had this gift; he had not thought anything about it. He wanted to be in the political world; he was ambitious of a seat in Parliament; and he had vague notions that when he got into the House of Commons he should be able to do something in some line or other; but he had not bestowed one thought on mere success in society. He got suddenly taken up, however, by this and that great house. He soon became a man whom it was the right sort of thing, the necessary thing, to have at people's houses. 'We must have Mr Bellarmin, of course,' smart people said, all the more because it was not by any means easy to have Mr Bellarmin.

Bellarmin enjoyed all this mightily. He had not quite got over, even yet, the delight of seeing his name in the newspapers. The one thing he wanted was someone to write to and tell all about his success; his speeches in the House of Commons, his dinners, his luncheons, his visits to great country houses. His brother would not care a straw for hearing anything of the kind; and although he knew his father would feel gratified by the fullest accounts of his son's success, yet somehow Bellarmin felt ashamed to say much to him on the subject when he wrote home. Many times he found himself wishing that he had a sister to whom he could send long confidential letters, telling her about his good-fortune and his enjoyment of life; telling her what the newspapers said about him, and what various great ladies said to him, and how kind they all were, and how easy, after all, it was to get on in good London society. One can write these things to one's sister. To a sweetheart one can't exactly; she would be sure to think her lover was forgetting
her in the society of people much smarter than she; she would be
jealous of the great ladies, and would assume that they were, as a
matter of course, young ladies and handsome, and that they were
making love to the lover—and that the lover was falling in love
with them—and the sweetheart would let all this be seen only too
plainly in her letters; and then the lover would write about such
things no more, and would keep all his little triumphs to himself.
But the sister would not mind, even though the kindly great ladies
were all young and lovely; the sister would never feel jealous, or
think herself forgotten; and she would read with delighted eyes
every word of praise that was spoken of her brother, and would
never for a moment think him egotistic, or grow tired of his writing
always about himself. So Bellarmin just wanted a sweet sister to
write letters to; and in the fulness of his still young and fresh heart
he once let out as much to Lady Saxon. She looked at him out of
her deep eyes, and said: 'Let me be your sister, Mr Bellarmin. I
am sure I should like to have such a brother; and I have no brother.'

'Come to me to-day, best of brothers, at three o'clock; I want
to talk to you about something very important and interesting;
don't fail me on any account.'

This was the whole of a first little letter signed, 'J. S.' which
Bellarmin received after the compact was made. It was the prelude
to a volume. Lady Saxon had taken on herself the part of a sister
ever since the day when she invited him to put a brother's confidence
in her. She was too young as yet even to affect that mother's place
in a young man's interest which coquettish matrons sometimes find
very attractive with youth. But the sister's part was suitable to any
age, and allowed of a charming and easy familiarity between her
and her adopted brother. It was the part of an elder sister, decidedly,
and permitted Lady Saxon to take the initiative in giving advice, or
even administering reproof when occasion suggested. She saw that
Bellarmin very much enjoyed the position thus given to him, and
was quite delighted to be petted as a brother, or even scolded as a
brother. The scolding, indeed, was only petting in another and
sometimes a more captivating form. What could be more delight­
ful to a young man than to be sent for to the boudoir of a beautiful and
clever woman in order to receive a scolding for not having done
something which, according to her judgment, would have been for
his political and personal advancement?

Lady Saxon seemed to move in an atmosphere of sensuous emo­
tion. She carried that atmosphere with her, around her, wherever
she went. Her looks, her movements, her figure, her voice, all
gave out with them that bewitching sense of womanhood, of woman's
sex, which is so magnetic to the temper of a young man. The
quietest, most ordinary words she spoke seemed to ask the man
whom she was addressing, ' Why don't you make love to me? I
know you are longing to do it. I look into your eyes with mine, and
I read all your feelings there. Come, make love to me; I shall not
be angry; you may get nothing else by it, but at least you shall not
catch a scolding nor a lecture on morality.' This was one of Lady
The Rival Princess.

Saxon's fascinations. She seemed to put herself frankly on man's level, to accept him and his passions without affectation of thinking him any better than he was. She was not, in truth, a passionate woman. Had she been so, she could not have exercised over so many men the supremacy which she enjoyed so much. The lion-tamer does not feel the fierce rage of the lion. Had she been a passionate woman, she could not possibly have escaped the scandal which, so far at least, had not seriously affected her fame.

Short as had been Lady Saxon's career in London, she was already notorious for daring flirtation. There were men who envied Rolfe Bellarmin his position, and there were men who, it was whispered, shared the position with him. Lady Saxon had more than one elder brother in the political world. Society wondered and speculated upon the meaning of Lord Saxon's complaisance. Was he still infatuated, blind, or only indifferent? Lord Saxon was a man whose feelings it was difficult to guess. Habitually silent, heavy, and awkward, he looked utterly unemotional. He was supposed to be entirely engrossed in politics. He had never been a London man in the conventional sense. He was scarcely known in fashionable drawing-rooms. His early manhood had been stormy, and it was said that he had occasioned considerable uneasiness to the duke his father. He had gone in for racing, had patronised ballet-girls, had committed follies. He had built a theatre at the command of a beautiful burlesque actress, who had a great reputation for ruining men. She did not quite ruin Lord Saxon. She deceived him, and he found her out, and from that time a change took place in his manner of living. He gave up racing and ballet-girls and theatres, and took to politics instead. He had become, in a certain sense, a power in politics. He was looked upon as a sort of skid to the Liberal wheel, and likely to retard any violent innovations. He was slow to make up his mind as to the course he would pursue, and equally slow to swerve from it. He was always opposed to wars and daring schemes of reform. He could make a weighty speech, the result of deliberate preparation and careful verification of facts and statistics. But his delivery was awkward and hesitating, his voice monotonous, and he had none of that magnetic sympathy, that spontaneity and adaptiveness to the hour, which distinguished his enthusiastic and impulsive colleague, Sir Victor Champion. He worked hard, and took as much pains in acquiring statistical information as if he had been qualifying for an examination in political economy. He had serious ideas as to the duties of landed proprietors, and the abuse of aristocratic privileges. He had little time for social, or, it might even be said, for domestic enjoyment. In the early days of his reformation ambitious mothers had made a dead set at him, but to no avail; and he had so long been given up as a match that the sudden announcement of his marriage was a shock rather than a disappointment. No one knew anything about the affair till it was an accomplished fact. The Baroness Langenweiss had never been heard of till she appeared as Lady Saxon, and burst in her wonderful beauty on English society, an ample justification of any act of folly.

Lord and Lady Saxon did not go about a great deal together,
and Lady Saxon had admirers, but that was all. Lady Saxon was a very clever woman—far too clever a woman to allow her influence to become weakened by disuse. She knew the man she had to deal with—knew his weakness and his strength, knew that she had captivated him in the first instance by her daring independence, her impulsive frankness, and a certain imperious air of mastery combined with that peculiar sensuous witchery that has been spoken of. She knew that she was not the more likely to retain her hold upon him by adopting the attitude of a patient Griselda. The Cleopatra part was much more effective, and she could play it well. Perhaps she had spoken truly when she described her husband as her slave and her convenience. She had only to exert her power of fascination, and she could bend the great, heavy, sullen-looking creature in whichever direction she pleased. But she did not always please to exert herself, or even to disguise the fact that he bored her supremely. She bade him do this or do that; attend her, or absent himself, and he obeyed, rewarded by a contemptuous smile or caress. It was her mood just now to be deeply interested in politics, and to keep him closely in that groove. She had an ambition to open a salon, and to make her drawing-room a rallying point of the Liberal camp. She wished to attract Champion to her house. She urged her husband to invite him, to insist upon his coming, but Champion did not come. His personal relations with Lord Saxon were not of an intimate kind. He evaded the invitations, pleaded disinclination for society. And then Lady Saxon had a wild, vindictive longing to make her power felt somehow; to undermine his influence; to split his party. She had a vague intention of working against him—of using Bellarmin as a weapon. But first, she must discover if any opportunity of discovery presented itself, whether Champion was in very truth indifferent as he seemed. She would make the opportunity, and for this reason she frequented the House of Commons. Her humour was of this kind, when, suddenly, by favouring chance, she and Champion were drawn together for the first time since they had been lovers. And now her mood in relation to Bellarmin had changed.

CHAPTER XI.

LITERA SCRIPTA.

LORD AND LADY SAXON lived in Seamore Place. There was a stately, forbidding-looking mansion in St James' Square ready for their occupancy when the old duke should be called to a better world; but this was an event which, for other than filial reasons, Lord Saxon would gladly see postponed as long as possible. He was not anxious to change his seat in the House of Commons for one in the House of Lords.

Lord Saxon before his marriage had a set of rooms in Athelstane House, in which mansion the duke and duchess and their unmarried
daughters only lived for a few weeks in the season; but though there was space and to spare for two establishments, it did not suit Lady Saxon to be domiciled even for a few weeks under the same roof as the duchess.

Lady Saxon had an Oriental taste, which she had exercised in the decoration of her house in Seamore Place. She was fond of bizarre effects and brilliant colouring, and when she appeared in public liked to be seen with a retinue. Her private apartments, which looked out upon the Park, were furnished after her own fancy. It was her custom to receive her intimate friends here when she returned from her drive at six o'clock; and to have the entrée at this hour was quite a different thing from being invited to Lady Saxon's formal parties.

Bellarmin had often passed through the Moorish ante-room, with its wonderful arabesque ceiling, its fretwork carving, its hanging lamps in filigree silver, its huge vases and magnificent draperies; and he knew the pretty little Japanese waiting-maid, Lady Saxon's latest caprice, who stood outside her mistress's boudoir and looked as though she had just stepped out of 'The Mikado.' She ushered him into a most strange and luxurious apartment, the walls of which were hung with red-and-gold peacocks embroidered upon a blue satin ground, where each low chair and divan was a marvel of exquisite embroidery; and each cabinet, bronze, and bit of lacquer work might have taken its place in the South Kensington Museum.

But Lady Saxon's sanctum was not in the least like a showroom in a museum. It was very gorgeous, but the eye rested nowhere on an inharmonious spot of colouring, a piece of defective grouping, or an incongruous effect. Lady Saxon's old Tokio and Satsuma ware was the joy and envy of connoisseurs, but it did not obtrude its costliness, and merely blended agreeably with the background. No one would have suspected that the quaintly-shaped pottery bowls, which were filled with hothouse flowers, or enclosed palms and tropical plants, were almost unique as specimens of their period.

On first entering this room, Bellarmin had felt a sense of bewilderment, so many uncanny monsters peered at him from walls and tables. Lady Saxon had a fine taste in monstrosities. Sea serpents, with grotesque human heads, twined the legs of the tea-table; dragons guarded the fireplace; demons with tails and fins climbed over the chairs, or did duty as footstools; strings of hideous ivory masks festooned the drapery of the mantelpiece. But after a time the confusion of colouring, the demons and the monsters, wrought themselves into the curious fascination of the place and of its occupant.

Lady Saxon called this room her confessional, and certainly it seemed a spot which might well invite confidences of a tender kind, and she herself appeared a fitting priestess of such a shrine. She sat in a low, wide lounge, propped up by gold-embroidered cushions, and she wore a sort of robe of some rich velvety material of a deep yellow colour, which toned with her yellow hair. She looked, Bellarmin thought, like some wonderful orange-coloured lily or orchid, such as he had seen in tropical houses. There was in her whole
appearance—in her glowing eyes, her slow smile, the soft undulations of her form, something rare, exotic, and enervating to the senses. She did not rise as he came in, but held out her hand to him with a welcoming look. At the sight of her a glow suffused his being. It was a kind of intoxication. He longed to press her hand to his lips; but upon this he could not venture. Lady Saxon, in spite of her audacity, had an imperious way of dealing with her admirers, and of keeping them at a respectful distance. She was always on guard, even when she seemed most open to attack.

In her hand she held a copy of the Park Lane Pictorial, and it was open at the portrait and biography of Mary Beaton.

'You see,' she said, 'I am studying the genealogy and the claims of our heroine of last night. It's all very ridiculous.'

Bellarmin took a chair near her. 'Yes,' he said, with a faint hesitation, 'it is ridiculous.'

'But it is picturesque,' Lady Saxon went on. 'Your Mary Stuart is delightfully picturesque. The old gentleman with the scar is picturesque too, and so is the white-haired housekeeper, who talked so much of the Grand Duchess of Schwalbenstadt. I think that if I were to ask the princess and her suite to one of my parties, people would find them attractive. This would be an odd house, wouldn't it, for your Pretendress to make her début in? I shall ask Miss Beaton to dinner; and I shall invite some highly respectable members of the House of Commons, and a detachment from the Lords, to come and inspect the claimant to the throne of Great Britain.'

Lady Saxon's laugh jarred upon Bellarmin. He did not want to talk of Mary Beaton. Her name seemed as much out of place here as at Madame Spinola's.

'The people who put that thing into the Park Lane Pictorial have done her an injury and an injustice,' he said, with some warmth. 'Such a flourish of trumpets is absurd. She can't help being a Stuart; and there's the beginning and end of it all.'

'Is it? Then why is she here? She might just as well have stayed in Schwalbenstadt.'

'One finds it conceivable that Miss Beaton might wish to see her own country,' said Rolfe. 'Her father was an English baron. But I believe there is a claim,' he added, 'to a property in the north which was confiscated.'

'Ah!' said Lady Saxon. 'And it is intended that some chivalrous young member with influence in the House should bring forward a motion for inquiry and restitution! Is that to be your part, Mr Bellarmin? In the meantime, Liberal and Tory politicians are to be attracted and conciliated. I should say that Miss Beaton might have a very good chance of getting her claims recognised if—' She paused as though she were deliberating. 'No, no, Rolfe; there are graver issues than that coming up. There is something more important for you to do than play the part of political paladin to a pretty, ambitious girl.'

'I have neither wish nor intention to play the part of paladin, Lady Saxon. Tell me of these graver issues, if we are to talk politics.'
Lady Saxon leaned back against her cushions and looked at him thoughtfully for a minute or two. Bellarmin sometimes wondered if her eyes actually had some magnetic quality, and if she were conscious of it, and made use of it. Certainly they affected him peculiarly.

‘Yes, we are to talk politics,’ she said; ‘and first I am going to give you some tea.’

There was a tray near her, with a silver service, and a tiny crystal liqueur flask. ‘Koto,’ Lady Saxon called, and the Japanese girl appeared with some fresh tea. Lady Saxon poured out a cup and gave it to Bellarmin. He did not refuse the little glass of liqueur Koto handed him.

‘I will see no one,’ said Lady Saxon.

Koto made an obeisance and disappeared, and Lady Saxon and Bellarmin were alone again.

Lady Saxon had put down the Park Lane Pictorial, and now leaned forward, her hands clasped on her knee, still looking intently at him. ‘Have you anything to confess to-day?’ she asked, abruptly. ‘There’s something on your mind. Come, out with it.’

His voice trembled a little, and his eyes seemed unable to move themselves from hers. ‘I have something on my mind, and in my heart, at this very moment. Are you really not afraid to know what it is?’

‘Afraid! I was never afraid of anything in my life, or of anybody, except myself. Go on. I sha’n’t flinch, however dreadful it may be.’

‘I shouldn’t mind that. I shouldn’t mind if you showed some sort of feeling, so long as you were not scornful and angry, and didn’t forbid me to come near you. I’m a mortal coward if there’s a risk of losing your friendship.’

‘Oh, that would stand a shock,’ she answered, softly. ‘I think I can promise you that, short of murder or high treason, you won’t lose my friendship—if you care to keep it. I like you, Rolfe Bellarmin. I am proud of you—I wish you success and happiness. I have your career as close to my heart, I am as fond of you as if— if you were my brother.’

‘Oh,’ he exclaimed, ‘that’s it! I don’t want to be your brother! That relation is impossible with you. Why are you so kind to me, Lady Saxon? Why do you encourage me to say daring things?’

‘Because I want to inspire you to do them; because I am daring and ambitious for myself and for those whom I admire. Now I’ve one virtue, Mr Bellarmin, and that is frankness; and I am going to be frank with you. I can read your thoughts, and I’ll read them to you, if you’ll let me.’ She gently furled and unfurled a fan of yellow feathers which had lain beside her, and went on very deliberately,—

‘You are in a state of irritation against me, against circumstances, against everything. You are angry because we are only what we are; you are distrustful of yourself, and you are distrustful of me. In spite of what you said a moment since, you have an impulse to end everything, to keep away from me, and to break off in a highly virtuous and melodramatic fashion our harmless and pleasant friendship. You want to have done with this brotherly and sisterly sham
—that's what you call it yourself. You fancy yourself the good young hero from the country, who falls a prey to the London Peg Woffington. That's how it is, Rolfe.' She touched his cheek with the feathers of her fan, and looked into his eyes with more of tender reproach than mirth. 'But, my dear boy, you are no more the virtuous hero from the country than I am Peg Woffington. It went out of date, all that kind of sentiment, before you came into Parliament. Progressive Toryism must keep pace with the times, you know.'

'Oh, Lady Saxon, don't be cruel to me!' The young man reddened, and put out his hand imploringly.

'I am a good thought-reader, then? Well, I never pretended to be younger than I am, and to be stupid and to know nothing of men and their moods. To do myself justice, Rolfe, I may say that I never in my life pretended more than was absolutely necessary.'

'You shouldn't laugh at me,' he said, rather sullenly.

'I didn't mean to laugh at you, my poor boy, and I think I understand young men. Experience is my magic. It's the only sort of magic labelled "that is the genuine article," mind that. This brother-and-sister business, Rolfe, is difficult to keep up. You are quite right. It is a sham. But, my brother, when one cannot have realities, one must make the best of shams.'

There was a note of plaintive regret in her voice, which dropped in sighing cadence. Bellarmin fancied that her eyes were tearful. He imprisoned the hand and the slowly swaying fan. She let her hand remain in his for a few moments, then gently withdrew it, and shook her head sadly. New purposes and plans were in her mind since she last received Bellarmin in her confessional. She had made her compact with Victor Champion.

'I can't be your brother!' he exclaimed, passionately. 'My feeling towards you isn't in the least brotherly, I'm quite certain of that; though what I do feel about you in the very depths of my heart puzzles me a great deal more than Lord Bosworth's foreign policy. Look here, Lady Saxon, you won't mind bluntness, I know. I'm not fool enough to imagine that what I feel or don't feel makes any difference to you. If I thought you really cared an iota, I shouldn't think for an instant about what was good or bad for myself. But I can't do the Platonic. I want to take your hand—I want a thousand mad things—Heaven knows what I want; I don't!' Rolfe spoke in a quick, boyish, agitated manner, looking at her straight all the time, but she kept her eyes on her fan. 'A man who wouldn't lose himself, risk everything, give up everything for a woman's sake is a cad,' the young fellow cried; 'but when there's no question of that, and the woman doesn't care, and he is only certain at best of hurting himself severely, and perhaps of being laughed at—' he broke off.

'Well?' she asked, calmly,

'He had better not make any pretences to her or to himself. I think you are dangerous to me, Lady Saxon, and that's the truth—complimentary or uncomplimentary, as you may take it.'

'I will take it as complimentary,' she answered, 'since I want to
believe that you are not making pretences, but have a real feeling for me.'

'I have a real feeling for you. It's horribly real, and that's the worst of it. But I should not feel like that about you if you were my sister; I should be very sorry if anyone felt for my sister—supposing I had one—in that way. Being with you is like taking opium—one wants more and more of it. Yes, the thought has come into my mind more than once lately that it wouldn't be a bad thing if I were to give up altogether, and run away and keep away until I am cured.'

'And then, after a month or so, come back and marry some charming girl with a fortune, or a rich widow—she need not be too young—that would be a certain way of advancing your career. You might indulge in the luxury of political principles then. You have an example before you.

'In Sir Victor Champion,' he answered, in her own vein. 'Providence might not be equally kind to me.'

Lady Saxon gave a little laugh. 'So, on your way here you were meditating how to make your escape? You needn't let it trouble you any longer. From this moment, Mr Bellarmin, you are free. I release you from all vows and promises. This has been your prison, and I have been your gaoler. Well, give a last look round, and take your liberty.'

She glanced about the pretty, fantastic room, and up at the embroidered peacocks. He followed her eyes, then rose and stood by the mantelpiece, where he seemed lost in the examination of one of the grotesque ivory faces.

'You are free,' she repeated, pointing with her yellow fan as she spoke. 'Why don't you go?'

'I don't mean to take my liberty,' he answered, stolidly, looking at her straight; 'not now—not in this way. I am ashamed of what I said to you.'

'Why—if it was true? I daresay that my influence is pernicious. Are you sure that you don't mean politically and not morally?'

'Perhaps.'

'Do you take me for a Delilah? Are you afraid of being drawn by my wiles from the straight paths of Progressive Toryism into crooked Liberal ways? Oh, my poor boy! I am a more disinterested counsellor than any of the rest of them. I don't make my living by politics.'

He echoed her laugh, but in a remorseful, discomfited fashion.

'How cruel you are! I don't deserve your taunts. You know well that your sympathy and counsel are inexpressibly valuable to me.'

'Then why give them up? Why make difficulties by saying things you don't mean?' Her voice had become plaintive again. 'I am ambitious for you, Rolfe—not for the party.'

'Oh, don't you see? Don't you know?' he cried, starting to his feet. 'You must know how it is!'

Lady Saxon's manner changed suddenly. In her rippling laugh there was a sound of mockery.
‘Do I see? Do I know? Oh, how poor our English language is! One realises that in private theatricals and the great moments of our life. All this peroration, and the climax not arrived at yet! In French it would have gushed out with all the spontaneity and naturalness in the world. “Je t'aime?” and she clasped her hands dramatically on her bosom. ‘Or “Io o t’amo;” or—do you know Spanish, Mr Bellarmin?’

She stopped, seeing his white face. Rising, she stood before him and laid her hand upon his arm, looking at him with a sort of caressing command. She was almost as tall as he.

‘Well, then,’ he said, fiercely, ‘in plain English, and without peroration, I think I love you—I am afraid I do—yes, and it’s not a sentiment that I’m proud of.’

Lady Saxon did not in the least resent his roughness.

‘My poor Rolfe,’ said she, moving back slowly to her seat, ‘I’m not going to be melodramatic, or to let you be melodramatic either. Do you think those three words haven’t been said to me in most of the European languages, and do you think I am any the worse wife to Lord Saxon on that account? Of course I knew that the Platonic mood would not last. It never does last. People make up their minds to separate—or—they don’t. Either way, there is an end to the Platonics. But what then? Would it be such a serious thing even if you did love me? I also—love you!’

‘Josephine!’

‘Yes, in a manner—in a sort of fashion. But I love some other things far better. I love my ambition for you best of all.’

This last shot of hers told upon him. Where is the ambitious man who does not delight to hear from the lips of a beautiful woman that his fame is dearer to her even than himself? But with all his delight, and the sudden revulsion from his fervid mood, there came to the young man—he was still very young—a pang of distrust in his own capacity, a dread, amid all the confused pain and rapture, that the woman’s enthusiasm was rating him far too high.

‘Dear Lady Saxon,’ he said, tenderly, and he touched her hand as he spoke, ‘you are very good to me. I’ll try to talk sensibly, and not to worry you about my feelings.’

The touch and the tone had something remorseful in them. The passion had gone from his voice. Somehow she had calmed his heated mood. She had wished to turn him in another direction from that to which he was tending, and he answered obediently to the rein.

‘You mustn’t expect too much from me,’ he went on. ‘You mustn’t think too much of what I can do in politics. You must not, indeed.’

‘What man of your years,’ she asked, impatiently, ‘has made such a place for himself in the House of Commons? Why, you are only a boy!’

‘Yes, perhaps there it is—a sort of political infant phenomenon; and we know what the infant phenomenon grows up to. I was very young when I first got into the House—and quite unknown; and I had plenty of schoolboy cheek, and little reverence for my
seniors—except one—De Carmel—who was my hero and my ideal—and I rattled away at anything; and I could do the thing easily, and talk nonsense fluently, and I suppose I talked better than people expected, and so I was set down as a rising young man. But one can’t always be a rising young man, can one? and I sometimes doubt whether I have anything better to show after these years than I had in my first session.’

He lowered his voice and spoke those last words pathetically. He had really often felt the doubt rising within him lately.

‘Come,’ she said, ‘I think all the better of you for these little gleams of distrust now and again—these bursts of stage-fright. They show that you have the true artistic temperament. But the real actor never gives way to his stage-fright; he fights against it, and conquers it. What you want, my friend, is a field, and I am going to show you the field.’

She paused complacently. She enjoyed all this. He looked at her, and he too waited. Did any sudden sense of distrust spring up in his mind? She, the wife of Lord Saxon, how did she propose to find a field for an enterprising young Tory Democrat? Was she speaking as Lord Saxon’s wife? She quickly settled that question.

‘I want you, Rolfe, to join with Victor Champion. That is what I mean that you should do.’

‘With Victor Champion! But—don’t you understand? My dear Lady Saxon, it is out of the question. But you don’t know,’ he added, blankly.

‘You absurd boy! Why, of course I know. Somebody made overtures to you in Victor Champion’s name, and you have been artfully trying to keep it from me. Oh, yes, I saw all that yesterday; and it was all cloudy, and you couldn’t see your way. That was all right. That was Then; but now it is Now. That makes all the difference.’

Bellarmin involuntarily drew back. ‘I don’t see that much has changed since then,’ he said.

‘Don’t you? I do. Then Sir Victor Champion was only feeling his way. Now he sees it. Then he was only thinking of going on. Now he has made up his mind to go on. The old Whigs are done with, Rolfe; their day is past; they sleep in ancient history like the monumental figures of the knights and their dames lying with folded arms on the tombs in the ancient churches. They are gone. You see that, at least, Rolfe?’

‘Oh, yes, of course!’ he answered, impatiently. ‘Every fool sees that.’

‘Rude young man! because I see it?’

‘No, no; it is only a saying. Please go on.’

‘Well, the fossil Conservatives can’t do much, can they? Your whole career goes to show that you don’t believe they can do anything.’

‘They can’t do anything of themselves, certainly. But if they could be “educated up” to the acceptance of some modern ideas, they might be made a useful party under a leader who could lead.’

‘Yes; and where is he?’
'Ah, De Carmel is dead!'
'Yes—and Lord Bosworth is alive! My dear Rolfe, no one knows better than you that the day has quite gone by when a man in the House of Lords could be the real leader of a great English party. Could you but ask De Carmel what he thought?'
'Yes, I suppose that is so; I suppose he began to feel that lately himself in the Lords,' Bellarmin assented somewhat reluctantly.
'I used to believe in the House of Lords once because of its picturesque side, I fancy. Radicalism is so confoundedly unpicturesque.'

The young man got up again and stood somewhat in the attitude of a declaimer, with one hand clinched upon the palm of the other. Curiously enough, this was a gesture common with Champion in debate, and Lady Saxon knew this and noted his unconscious imitation.
'I wish I could believe in the possibility of a great leader in the House of Lords,' Lady Saxon said, with a sigh and a distinct shrug of the shoulders.
'You, Lady Saxon! Why do you particularly wish that?'
'Don't you see? Because I am an ambitious woman—wildly ambitious—not for myself: I have got about all that a woman can well get in that way—but for any man in whom I take a real interest. Don't be too self-conceited, Mr Bellarmin. I daresay that I should be a model wife and famous helpmate if only there were no House of Lords.'
'I don't quite understand.' He sat down once more close to her.
'No? Well, I suppose not. I'll tell you. If Lord Saxon's father were not an old man, if Lord Saxon were not doomed by fate to succeed him in that hopeless House of Lords—well, I really believe that I should turn all my energies to the task of driving on my poor, heavy, reluctant husband to the career of a great leader in politics. You know he has some capacity, Rolfe.'
'We all know that he has capacity. Some say that he has great capacity.'
'But what is the use? He must go into the House of Lords, and when once there he becomes a mere figure-head—if he be even so much—and he will be quite content and happy. No; I can't make anything of Saxon. I want to make something of you, and it is to be done through Sir Victor Champion.'
'What is Champion going to do?' Bellarmin asked.
'Great things, Rolfe. To create a new party—call up a new spirit in English politics. In any case, your place is with him. The future is with him, and will be with you, if only you make up your mind, pull yourself together, and take my advice.' She paused, and gazed at him from under her level eyebrows. He looked at her in return, but did not answer. 'I know Victor Champion,' she said, steadily; her voice seemed clear as a bell. 'I discovered what was in him—well, never mind how long ago. I am not going to tell you that; I don't make up; you can see that for yourself. Yes; I appreciated him, and he appreciated me. If only we had had the good luck to get married then, it would have been better
for me now, and better for him—ay, and better for you too, perhaps, in one sense, for you would never have been in this dangerous confessional of mine. I should have been a devoted wife to him.'

'Why do you tell me this just now?' Bellarmin asked, with something like annoyance in his voice. He remembered Tressel's hints, and he wondered what Tressel knew. He had not come to Lady Saxon's confessional, surely, to hear her confession of tender feelings towards Sir Victor Champion.

'So you are jealous already, my impetuous youth,' she replied, with a kindly glance at him. 'You are jealous of those old days long before your time. Where were you then, I wonder? Eton, Harrow, where? You forget, my dear friend, that I saw the sun before you did, and had time to get through and get over a good many likings and loves—if you will put it that way—before you had grown out of the hands of your nursery governess. Yes, Rolfe, my heart ought to be an extinct volcano by this time; but somehow it isn't.'

He wanted to press her a little on this subject of Sir Victor Champion; quite without premeditation he put his hand on her wrist to check her, and call her attention. Her pulse was beating as steadily and calmly as that of a Roman soldier on guard. A shadow of surprise and disappointment—dissatisfaction of some sort—passed over his face. Lady Saxon caught sight of it as it passed, and read its meaning.

'You think I tell you all this too coolly, too composedly—with a candour which our French friends would call brutal?' she said.

'I don't call it anything—only I don't quite know why you tell it to me,' he answered, bitterly.

'No—to be sure! You men are to have all the flirtations and all the loves you please, and to go from one woman to another woman; and if a woman only confesses to a man that somewhere about the time of his birth she did rather like another young man, lo, and behold! our heroic youth is angry and offended.'

'I am not quite so young as all that,' Bellarmin said, almost roughly. 'Sir Victor Champion is not quite old enough to be my father, and you could not, by any possibility, pass yourself off for my mother.'

'Are we not wandering from our subject?' she asked, with a smile.

'Very much, I think,' he answered, almost with a frown.

'Yes—well, let us go back to it. You were asking me why I told you of my old devotion to Sir Victor Champion?'

'Why you told me—and now?'

'Quite so, dear impetuous youth. For this reason—that you should plainly understand why I am working for Sir Victor Champion now. Because he is the only man whom I loved—in my youth; the man I would have married if I could, then. Such a memory is sacred to me—such a past!' She put all the emphasis of her sweet and thrilling voice on that word 'past,' giving it a significance in Bellarmin's ears which set his pulses tingling once more.
Such a past has to me the sanctity of a dying bequest. Victor Champion understands me as perfectly as I understand him: I want to help him—if I can—to success, because of the past. I want to help you to success because of the present; because I am fond of you, Rolfe; and I want you to go in and win—don’t you see? In these closing words, which spoke of him, she dropped all her melodramatic style, and her manner was, seemingly, simple and natural. She put her hand in kindly, tender fashion on his. The young man’s mind was passion-tossed; the touch charmed away all his distrust for the moment. He caught her fair, plump hand and kissed its fingers. It was not a small hand—why should it be small?—Lady Saxon was a woman of what sculptors call heroic size—but it was very white and soft. It had, perhaps, too many rings on for a lover’s kisses; Bellarmin kissed more ring than finger. Lady Saxon smiled at him in a soft, bewildering way.

‘No, no, we mustn’t have any raptures, please. We are talking politics now; we have done with—even Platonics for the present. I want you to think over all that I have said; I want you to allow yourself to come in Victor Champion’s way, and get to know what he really intends to do. You will soon find that he is the man who really sees his way, and that the next great—truly great—English party is to be called into existence by him. I will not, if I can, have you left out in the cold. I want you to understand him—to appreciate him—to work with him—to be his right-hand man—in time to succeed him. There, you have my whole meaning, and my whole secret is out now.’

She rose to her feet—hastily, in an impulse, as that of a woman who has betrayed herself—has allowed herself to say what she did not intend to say.

‘No more to-day!’ she cried out, with passion in her voice; and then she stopped for a moment and seemed to control herself, and smiled, and spoke in a quiet tone. ‘No more to-day, Rolfe. We have said enough—at least I have said enough.’

‘One word.’ He put out his hand, and she sank again on her divan as if she would listen. ‘Sir Victor Champion knows nothing of this?’

‘Of what?’ Of my talking to you in this way—about this?’

‘Yes, Lady Saxon.’

‘Rolfe! How could you ask such a question? Do you think he would accept a woman’s intervention in such a thing? or that I would put you in such a position? Ah!’

‘I ought not to have asked the question,’ Bellarmin said, abashed.

‘You ought not—no; but I forgive you. You don’t quite, quite understand me yet. No, I talked to you on my own account; for I have set my heart on your success. I want you to promise that you will think well over what I have said. That isn’t much for me to ask, after—after what you told me. And if you come in Champion’s way—well, do not keep coldly out of his way. Now, that’s all. Good-bye, Rolfe, my brother—shall I still call you my brother?’

She took the young man’s hand in her own and looked into his
eyes with her own swimming eyes, and almost seemed as if she
would draw him towards her. Her voice seemed the voice of sin­
cerity itself. Bellarmin's heart was deeply touched. Dusk was
setting in, and the dimness and the perfumes, and the strange gor­
geous colouring of the room, heightened the sense of half-poetical
intoxication under which he felt himself languishing. He spoke
passionately:

'Oh!' he cried. 'You do me harm?—I must have been mad
to think it; I am mad sometimes—when I have been kept away
from you, and when you seem cold and sweet and mocking—when I
remember that you are Lady Saxon, and I poor Rolfe Bellarmin.
Josephine—to say that I am yours—ready—glad to be counselled
by you, and I know that you would never counsel me against my
honest convictions, is to promise everything. What should I wish
for more than to be led on to success by you?'

He flung himself down on a stool before her in an adoring atti­
tude, his eyes beaming with all a young man's ardour, upraised to
hers. She stooped over him from her greater height; but even as
she did so, seemed to interpose her soft hand as a barrier between
him and her.

'You must go,' she said,' go at once. Yes, I accept your devo­
tion—for your own sake—for the sake of your career—because you
are dear to me, if you will. But I will not urge you against your
convictions. I only ask you to keep your mind open—to give your­
self this chance to become the man of the future. But go now.
Write to me to-night, Rolfe—a letter straight from your heart—no
conventionality! From your very, very heart.'

She said the words very low, almost in his ear, her head near to
his. Now, as she ended she bent her face lower still, so that it
seemed to him her lips actually touched his forehead—actually
sealed the compact with the lightest, faintest suggestion of a kiss.
Faint and light as it was, the touch brought the blood to Bellarmin's
cheeks, and a wave of passion to his heart. He rose from his seat;
but she said to him, vehemently,—

'Go! you must go now,' and almost pushed him from her.

So Rolfe left her; he passed the little Japanese girl in the ante­
room and went downstairs dreamlike, and found himself in the
glaring street. That night he wrote to Lady Saxon from the House
of Commons a letter in which for the first time he committed to
paper and to written words a wild and passionate declaration of
his gratitude to her, in which he spoke of the bond he had made,
and protested his lasting devotion—his love.

He went home in the early morning hours, after a droning
debate. He slept uneasily, and his first waking thought was of the
letter. It brought him a pang of shame, of dread, almost of remorse.
It seemed to him that under the influence of an intoxication which,
in his saner moments, he could recognise as intoxication, he had
signed away his liberty. Whether Lady Saxon attached any
importance to the deed—and this he was hardly vain enough to
think, or, as he put it to himself, to hope—the fact remained the
same.

Lady Saxon read the letter with delight; she read it with full
satisfaction. She wanted to captivate Champion, but yet not to lose Bellarmin. She was never content with any flirtation which did not give her the triumph of a written declaration of love. Such letters were to her just the same trophies of conquest as the rings which the clever wife of the genie in the Arabian Nights—what marvellous stupid folks these genies were!—used to wear and delight in. In Bellarmin’s case there was a little more than the ordinary joy of victory. Josephine had a pervading idea that the letter might turn out to be useful somehow, and at some time; she did not exactly know when. It might, in all the varying changes of the coming days, happen to be of some importance to her that she could produce a letter from such a man as Bellarmin, telling her that he loved her. So she put it carefully apart from other letters; and she felt pleased, and her conscience was quite at rest.

CHAPTER XII.

MARY’S RECEIPTION.

But in spite of Bellarmin’s impassioned declaration—in spite of his still more impassioned letter, Lady Saxon did not feel certain of her prey. Love had not blinded her cool judgment, and she saw through his reactionary moods and impulses, and his struggle with the worst part of himself; Lady Saxon had watched such a conflict many a time before. It always amused her, and her interest in the doubtful issue never lost its keenness. There was a good deal of the instinct of the savage in Lady Saxon; she liked to inflict pain—to know that she had the power of inflicting it.

She had an unconquerable egotism, a thirst for power, for excitement, for mental stimulant of some kind. In her life she had felt one passionate, consuming attachment; and that had been for Victor Champion. When she had laid her snares for Lord Saxon the thought of Champion had been as prominent in her mind as that of the splendid position she might achieve. She had won the position; and though it delighted her less than she had fancied it would, she exulted in it nevertheless. There was still something she wished to win—something which she meant to hold as well as the position she had gained, if possible; but for which she would throw up the position if needs be. This had been the end and aim of her interest in politics. The fact that Champion was her husband’s colleague gave dramatic point to the situation, and intensified its zest. Lady Saxon was in some sense an anachronism; she would have better suited an earlier civilisation. She was unscrupulous enough for a Medicean court; she would have revelled in the luxury and the intrigues of the Lower Empire.

For the present, with her one supreme object still in view, Lady Saxon was resolved to feed her craving for power and excitement as best she could. Bellarmin’s admiration still gratified her. Be-
sides, he had now become an instrument which might be turned to useful account. By winning Bellarmin to Champion's side she might come nearer to her great aim. And, in any case, Bellarmin amused her; and he should not marry the nice girl with money, which was the fate his friends predicted for him. He should be her slave, her toy; and if he were in any danger of being attracted by Mary Stuart Beaton—well, Lady Saxon would advance daringly into the enemy's country. All the movements should be made under her own eyes, and if she were to be worsted, which was improbable, she would at least have the excitement of the fight.

So some days later, when Bellarmin was lunching in Seamore Place, Lady Saxon announced her intention of calling on 'the princess' that afternoon; and she told Bellarmin that it was her wish he should also pay his respects to the representative of the Stuarts.

He was surprised, and showed it; he stammered, and for a young statesman exhibited a most ingenuous confusion.

'Yes,' said Lady Saxon. 'The princess holds her court to-day. I have found out all about it. I want to see what sort of ceremony goes on at this English St Germains. Shall I be permitted a fauteuil, do you suppose?'

Bellarmin said that he ought to be at the House.

'Nonsense!' she rejoined; 'it is only solid, serious politicians like Lord Saxon who are interested in statistics, and who put in an appearance at question time. Come, I insist upon your going. Stay,' she added, in an imperious undertone. 'These people will have gone presently.'

Lady Saxon had been giving one of those informal little luncheon parties for which she was famous, where anybody and everybody might be found—except Lord Saxon. He exercised some slight jurisdiction in the matter of dinners; but his wife asked whom she pleased to luncheon. She usually had a politician or two of the less serious type—she was not particular whether Tory or Liberal; a favourite actor or actress; a bishop, perhaps; possibly a foreign anarchist as mild as a sucking lamb, at her table, and some smart young guardsman and frisky woman of fashion. After luncheon, cigarettes were smoked in a fantastically decorated den behind Lord Saxon's study, and coffee and kümmel were handed round, and a certain laxity of conversation—just a piquant flavouring—was permitted.

There followed a good deal of light talk and explanation about 'the princess' and her claims, which somehow grated disagreeably on Bellarmin. The young man was in a feverish and contradictory mood. He had a vague longing to escape from the scene, to breathe another atmosphere, and yet he was like the prisoner in an opium den, held by a fascination which he could not and would not resist. And all the time he felt disgust at himself and contempt for his own weakness. The other guests went away; and at last he was alone with Lady Saxon in the dully gorgeous room, in which the fumes of the scented cigarettes and odours of the aromatic coffee and the kümmel blended with Eastern perfumes for which she had a fancy. Lady Saxon seemed in keeping with the room; she was
quaintly dressed in some soft yellow-brown Liberty stuff—the colour she was so fond of, with her yellow hair piled above her forehead, and a barbaric-looking jewel fastening the lace at her throat. She came close to the young man and smiled at him in her peculiar way.

'Well,' she said, 'you are thinking of something.'

'You were at the German embassy last night?' he said.

'Yes.'

'And Champion was there?'

'Yes.'

'And you sat and talked to him the whole evening in a little side-room.'

'Yes,' she said again. 'Are you going to do me the honour to establish an espionage over my movements? Would you like to know of what we talked?'

'You and he never seemed to have anything to say to each other till quite lately. People have remarked it. Tell me, Josephine?'

'Poor boy,' she said, in her sweet, mocking tone, 'you are so impetuous; you let your feelings run away with you. That is not wise—in a politician. You know that I have your good at heart. I don't want you to take the fever too severely. It is such a wasting fever, Rolfe; it saps youth and energy and hope; no good comes of it, and it isn't a thing you can get over and be done with. It breaks out sometimes years afterwards; and then—oh! one can hardly be still for that restless longing to be'—her voice sank almost to a whisper—'to be with the one.'

She moved abruptly away from him. He looked after her with a sort of sullen wrath in his eyes. It had flashed over him that it was not of him she was thinking.

Presently she came back, and spoke in her light, caressing manner.

'Did I not tell you that you were to come here less often; that you were to go and devote yourself to your country's service, and make up your mind how far her institutions needed reforming? It isn't good for you to hang about me. You mustn't call me Josephine. I never said that I allowed that. You mustn't write me letters which'—she laughed at him rebukingly—'which are so pretty and so sweet, but which might occasion some uneasiness to Lord Saxon if—which isn't possible—they fell into his hands, and if he didn't understand his wife so thoroughly. So now go and put yourself into a hansom, and meet me in half an hour's time at the Court of St Germains.'

There was something in the aspect of Mary Beaton's drawing-room when Lady Saxon entered it which made her think of the old-time court to which she had so jestingly alluded. The house was early Georgian, and the lofty rooms were panelled, and had the corner fireplaces and the high, narrow windows and stiff ornamentation of that period. The portraits on the walls added to the illusion; the high-bred, melancholy Stuart countenance seemed to haunt the place. Even the Beatons appeared to have been of the Cavalier type, and two or three vivid paintings of Italian noblemen bore no relation to
modern London. The furniture, old-fashioned and Georgian too, had been collected by Falcon and Lord Stonehenge; both determined that the surroundings should harmonise with the prominent figure. Mary Beaton was seated in a high-backed chair against a background of tapestry, which filled in a sort of recess, and represented in faded colours some of the adventures of Ulysses. General Falcon, in a sort of undress uniform, stood very erect near her chair, and Lady Struthers, standing behind it, had the air of a lady-in-waiting. Mary Beaton's costume of rich brocade, quaint and straight-falling, with a full ruffle of Mechlin lace framing her throat, and at her side a quaint châtelaine with a veritable pomander, said to have been the property of the Queen of Scots, was in keeping with the scene.

There were a good many people in the room, but scarcely any who belonged to Lady Saxon's world; some standing about, others sitting on the slim-legged stools and settees; others looking at the collection of miniatures on the cabinets, which were of historic interest; a few passing in and out to the garden—a walled-in enclosure with some old beech trees in full leaf, and a grassy lawn and brilliant borders. The birds were singing there, and the scent of roses, which in this sunny, sheltered corner had come early into bloom, floated pleasantly in. Above the subdued hum of conversation there rose every now and then a word in French or Italian or German. Miss Beaton was talking in French to a venerable Catholic dignitary with cassock and cross, who was listening attentively to her words. Lord Stonehenge stood near the priest, and in the group, respectfully standing also, Lady Saxon, to her great surprise, saw Sir Victor Champion.

The little circle broke up as Lady Saxon entered. Her appearance seemed to produce in all some slight start of wonder. General Falcon made an abrupt movement. Lady Struthers went through a sort of preening process, and put on her blandest smile. She was much gratified by this recognition of her mistress' social claims and her own on the part of the fashionable world. Mary got up and bade her visitor welcome, her greeting a pretty mixture of girlish cordiality and native dignity. Sir Victor bowed gravely, and moved apart with the priest, whom, with his characteristic many-sidedness, he had drawn into a discussion on ecclesiastical literature. It was this alertness and receptivity, this quick desire of culture in every field, and openness to every claim and conviction, which made Sir Victor Champion the object of such admiration among his friends and sarcastic commentary among his enemies.

This thought flashed through Lady Saxon's mind while she was uttering sweet conventionalities to her hostess. It was like him to be attracted by the romantic and historic associations that clung round the descendant of Mary Stuart. It was like him to wish to inspect more closely this fantastic flower of bygone chivalry, blooming in prosaic modern London. Lady Saxon was not much disturbed by the thought so far. She had no kind of affinity with such ideas and associations. What sort of feudal instincts could she possess, any more than Emma Harte, that Lady Hamilton to
whom she had once likened herself? She only said in her mind that Sir Victor liked to be in touch with everything, and that he was curious about the charming claimant. He liked a sensation—that taste he had in common with herself; and she recognised and made allowance for the temperament. But she knew very well that the sensations he liked were of a more poetic kind than those which delighted her most. Lady Saxon had an odd candour towards her own soul. She knew the pretence and scorned it, even when she made it. She knew that she had never appealed to that poetic strain in Champion. She knew, only she did not care much now, that she could never appeal to the poetic strain in Bellarmin. That subtle, moonlight sentiment of life was for such women as Mary. For her, passionate sun-glow, ripe fruit, red wine. Still, she hated the girl who had inherited the crown of romance; the girl who could inspire poetry. Why should Mary Beaton be the daughter of the Stuarts? Why should Josephine Saxon be an Emma Harte?

Lady Saxon said a great many pretty things to Miss Beaton, and she was gracious to Lady Struthers also and to General Falcon, the latter of whom replied with sardonic courtesy. A steady look interchanged between the London lady and the soldier Legitimist—the paladin adventurer whose changing lot had thrown him among strange scenes and strange people—told a great deal to both. Lady Saxon had no definite personal association with Falcon, but she knew that he had crossed her path in the past, and that he remembered her. She guessed more than this. It seemed to her that there was some sinister design in the manner in which he turned his gaze direct from her to Sir Victor Champion, standing apart, conversing with the priest, and back again, with a kind of malign exultation, to her face. She was a fearless woman, and indifferent to consequences, but for the moment she had a spasm of the heart. Then her natural courage reasserted itself.

‘If I have a secret, he has a secret too,’ she thought, ‘and I will find his out and turn it into a weapon. If he can do me harm, I can surely be of use to him; it might be worth while for each to buy off the other; and failing the rest, if there’s war, I never knew the man who was too strong for me.’

All the time that she was thus taking inward counsel she smiled on Mary and her companions; she complimented the girl on her pretty house, and Lord Stonehenge and Falcon on the taste which had arranged it so appropriately. She told Mary that Lord Saxon was most anxious to meet her; that her father-in-law took deep interest in the question of Miss Beaton’s pedigree. She declared that the portrait in the Park Lane Pictorial had not done Miss Beaton justice, and asked if she had not felt angry with the artist to whom its execution had been entrusted. The girl flushed a little.

‘I did not know about it,’ she said, ‘and I did not like it; I was very angry with General Falcon for giving the people my photograph. I am not an actress—or—’

She paused; and just then a smile of bright, girlish greeting
broke over her face as she glanced suddenly towards somebody who had that moment come in.

Lady Saxon, without looking round, felt jealously certain that it was Bellarmin, and she was right.

He, too, looked glad; he was thinking, 'I knew she had nothing to do with that Park Lane Pictorial affair.' He had overheard her words. The deferential manner in which he returned Mary's greeting irritated Lady Saxon. He did not perceive her for the moment, and there was a buoyancy about him as if he had determinedly shaken off some stupefying influence. What had made him late? Ah, it was explained; Tommy Tressel—cool, indifferent, with his half-shut eyes and smile of gentle cynicism—followed Bellarmin, and was forthwith presented to the representative of all the superstitions he was supposed to hold in abhorrence. Tressel in a drawing-room and Tressel on the floor of the House of Commons were two different beings.

'Ah!' said Mary to Bellarmin, with frank cordiality, 'I wondered whether you would get the card that I told Lady Struthers to send you. You seem to have so many addresses, Mr Bellarmin. Do all English politicians belong to all those clubs?'

'I have to thank you, madame, for having done me the honour to remember me,' said Bellarmin.

'I was very sorry not to see you when you called the other day,' Mary went on. 'I want to talk to you, Mr Bellarmin—more problems in political economy that I want explained. Oh, if I were a statesman, what would I not do! I did not dare to tell Sir Victor Champion just at first what I am thinking about. Why don't you do something for your own people instead of—ah! Mr Bellarmin, I know a great deal more about the poor people round your Houses of Parliament, I think, than you do. But never mind, we have a plan—Lord Stonehenge has a plan; he will talk to you about it by and by. Lady Saxon, you are not going yet; I want to show you my garden. I am so proud of my garden.'

'I have a plan, too,' said Lady Saxon, 'in which Mr Bellarmin may be included if he pleases; I want you to dine at my house, Miss Beaton, and meet my husband and the Duke of Athelstane and some of our political friends.'

She had come forward, and as she looked at Bellarmin the young man flushed, and Mary saw the flush—saw that his bright, boyish ease suddenly left him. She saw, too, that he and Lady Saxon exchanged no formal greeting.

'Mr Bellarmin has been lunching with me,' said Lady Saxon, 'and he was so disingenuous, or so polite, as to let me think I had given him the information that it was your reception-day; I sent him on to announce my coming.'

Her manner clearly conveyed to Mary Beaton's sensitive ear that Lady Saxon, and Lady Saxon alone, had been the object of Bellarmin's visit: that he would not have come had she not bidden him. The girl felt a little shock of recoil from both the woman and the man. She regretted her warmth. Her manner became ever so little constrained, though she smiled brightly.

'Your plan is a very delightful one, Lady Saxon,' she answered,
'and I gladly agree to it. My dear tyrant must be consulted, however, I presume,' and she glanced up at Falcon. 'My guardian, Lady Saxon, seems to look upon the acceptance of an invitation as seriously as if it were the signing of a state treaty.'

General Falcon and Lady Struthers, will, of course, come too,' said Lady Saxon, turning to Falcon, who bowed with his characteristic solemnity.

'They would not consider it becoming that my youth and inexperience should go anywhere without their protection,' laughed Mary. 'Is it not so, general? Do you understand that Lord and Lady Saxon wish us to dine with them, and to make acquaintance with some of their political friends? Could anything please you better, since you are so anxious that I should learn exactly how England is governed—from the people who govern her?'

'It appears,' said Lady Saxon, her eyes turning from Tressel and Bellarmin to Sir Victor, 'that Miss Beaton is in a fair way to establish a political salon.'

'Ah! Sir Victor! I felt much flattered when he came here of his own accord to-day. I am fascinated by Sir Victor, Lady Saxon, and his greatest charm is that he is not in the least political—or—what do you say?—Philistine. He might be a Catholic, or a Jacobite. And he is an English Radical! You puzzle me, you English statesmen,' she went on, 'you seem so out of keeping with your professed characters. There is Mr Bellarmin, who calls himself a Tory, and you, Mr Tressel—I heard you speak in the House of Commons, but I could not see you; I heard you denounce royalty and aristocracy, and all the rest—and yet—'

'And yet—I am here,' put in Tressel, with languid courtliness which amused Mary.

People were coming and going. Every now and then Miss Beaton would move forward to greet some fresh arrival, to take leave of a departing guest, or say a gracious word or two to someone who looked neglected. Her manner, notwithstanding its girlishness, had a queenly assurance which might have provoked a smile had it not been so entirely unconscious. Lady Saxon could not help observing, not with unmixed satisfaction, that the young Pretendress showed considerable aplomb in her reception of certain guests, and in the way she warded off attention from mere lion-hunters. Madame Spinola was one of these. She had made her way into the house in Kensington by grace of an introduction which she had been at a good deal of trouble to procure from one of Mary's foreign friends. She had already made an attempt to entrap Miss Beaton into a promise to come to one of the Bohemian parties which have been described. But Lady Struthers rose to the occasion, and, sustained by the combined dignity of all the dead Stuarts, and of their living representative, replied with her stateliest air that it was not considered politic for madame to mix much in London society just at present. To dine at the Marquis of Saxon's in order to make acquaintance with the Duke of Athelstane, and to attend a reception at the house of Madame Spinola, whom the experienced old lady at once gauged as third-rate, were things not to be classed together in Lady Struthers' mind. Nor was Miss
Beaton favourably disposed to the lady who was addressed by the Scotch member, Mr Leven, with such easy familiarity, and whom she heard talking in terms of assured intimacy about 'Rolfe Bellarmin' and 'Tommy Tressel.' Mary noticed later that when Madame Spinola effusively welcomed Bellarmin the young man's tone and manner became unconsciously and almost indefinably free and flippant. She overheard also some slight criticisms from Tressel upon 'poor Jennie's' grief and rage at not being able to pay her respects to 'Bellarmin's princess,' which were not intended for Miss Beaton's ear. And Mary's colour heightened for a moment, and she wondered what manner of women these were whom Mr Bellarmin appeared to know so well; and she was half indignant, half gratified to observe from his chivalric air when he spoke to her how differently he rated her from such as these. The question rose involuntarily—was his deference a tribute to her as a woman or as a Stuart? There was a faint bitterness in the girl's heart as she passed on, leaving it unanswered.

The knots of talkers changed and broke up. Lady Struthers was devoting herself to a mediatised royalty, and, in rapid French, was making such of the bystanders as were familiar with that language aware of the fact that she was on terms of intimacy with various serene and imperial highnesses. She was also expatiating volubly on the merits of iced strawberry squash; and explaining to her illustrious guest that it was a mistake to suppose roast beef and plum-pudding the national English dishes, that distinction being claimed by strawberry squash; and at intervals the deep rolling voice, with its suspicion of Highland accent, might be heard above all the feminine buzz and general clatter urging, in tones of deferential entreaty 'Encore du "Squash," chère Princesse,—'Chère Princesse, encore du "Squash!"'

General Falcon, drifting about after Mary Beaton in the manner of a lord-in-waiting, found himself detained in a little group of which Lord Stonehenge and Tressel made part. He found that they were arranging for a visit to Stonehenge Park, the 'plan,' to which Miss Beaton had alluded, and about the exact date of which she had evidently been first consulted. This was an irritation to Falcon's jealous heart; the greater when he found that Bellarmin had been asked without his knowledge or interference, and that it was intended Sir Victor Champion should be invited; and yet he could not even in his own mind find any reasonable objection to the move, which, with the eye of a tactician, he saw was a wise one.

'You enter into our idea, of course,' said Lord Stonehenge; 'Mr Tressel would like to bring about a rapprochement between these two; and it is important to us that there should be a feeling of harmony on all sides on the question of the Stuart claims.'

Tressel blew away the smoke of an imaginary cigarette, and gave a comical side-glance out of his half-closed eyes. 'I'm not going to say anything about the Stuart claims,' he said, 'they are beyond me. I shall confine myself to Hanoverian grants and hereditary pensions for the present.'

'We count upon you General Falcon,' Lord Stonehenge said.
‘You do me honour, Lord Stonehenge; but I fear that I shall be of little use to you in your political conversations.’

‘Come, now,’ Tressel languidly observed, ‘you don’t imagine that hard-worked politicians go down to a beautiful place in the country in the Whitsuntide recess merely to talk politics.’

‘Yes, I do,’ Falcon answered, bluntly.

‘Quite wrong, my dear fellow, I assure you. Buttercups and daisies, and a beautiful old castle full of historic associations, and a library full of rare books—and a pretty girl—nothing in the world more calculated to warm the cockles of “Lucifer’s” heart—or, as Stonehenge puts it, to promote a feeling of harmony. I ain’t quite so sure of the harmony on Bellarmin’s part, though.’

Tressel’s remarks grated upon Stonehenge almost as unpleasantly as they did upon Falcon.

‘You will come?’ he said, turning to the general.

‘Undoubtedly, Lord Stonehenge. I could not refuse an invitation which does me so much honour, and the grim old soldier bowed himself out of the conversation.

‘Wonder it doesn’t get upon Miss Beaton’s nerves sometimes to have such a companion always hanging about her,’ said Tressel.

‘He is devoted to her, and she knows it,’ Lord Stonehenge answered, gravely.

‘Something about his eyes rather suggests the idea of the private madhouse,’ Tressel observed.

‘Oh, come! he was a splendid soldier, and he is a man of considerable capacity,’ Stonehenge remonstrated.

‘Just you wait and see. I don’t exactly claim to be an inspired prophet,’ Tressel replied; ‘but I do observe that what I predict does somehow always come to pass.’

‘You haven’t predicted anything in this case,’ said Stonehenge, good-humouredly.

‘No; then you’ll find that what I haven’t predicted—what I keep to myself—in this case will come to pass.’

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BOTHWELL PART.

MEANWHILE Lady Saxon, too, had been moving about, having come across several people whom she knew. She had exchanged a few words with Bellarmin, upon whom the double fascination was working, and who was like a moth between two flames. She left him presently and got into conversation with an attaché of a foreign embassy, who expressed some surprise at seeing her in Mary Stuart Beaton’s circle. Lady Saxon, in her turn, said to Champion, when chance threw them together,—

‘I was not prepared to find you in the Pretendress’s court.’
'Why not?' he rejoined. 'She is a very fresh and interesting young woman—quite a picturesque figure. I don't know if anything can be done for her,' he added, in a reflective sort of manner. The manner vexed Lady Saxon, partly because his reflections were about Miss Beaton, partly because he was reflecting about anything while supposed to be engaged in conversation with Josephine Saxon.

'Have you any ambition to be a nineteenth-century General Monk?' she said, saucily.

'General Monk!' He did not understand her at first. 'Oh, yes; I see. No, I was not thinking of a Stuart restoration; only of a possible restoration of Stuart property.'

A little wave of people who were near broke upon them, and Lady Saxon found herself talking to someone else with the annoying idea that Sir Victor had purposely escaped from her. She had a wonderful knack of seeing all that was going on around her without even seeming to turn her eyes away from anyone with whom she was talking. She saw now that Bellarmin was standing at Mary Beaton's side, and that General Falcon was close by with a set frown on his face. General Falcon evidently did not like Bellarmin's attentions to Mary Beaton; and the mere fact made Lady Saxon like them less, for it showed that Falcon thought there was something serious in them.

'Yes, I am delighted with my glimpse into your parliamentary life,' Mary was saying. 'I mean your House of Commons' life. I think the other House is lifeless and dull. But your House of Commons! I don't know how any Englishman could live without trying to take part in that sort of battle.'

As Mary spoke, a little bunch of roses of a peculiar reddish colour, which she wore at her girdle, and with which she had been carelessly toying, fell to the ground. Bellarmin moved to save the bouquet from being trodden on by the bystanders, but Falcon was beforehand with him. Stooping his erect form and grey head, he picked up the flowers and gave them back to his mistress, who did not seem to have noticed her loss. She gave him a little nod, more impatient than grateful.

'General,' she said, laughingly, 'you watch me as closely as a heron watches his prey, or a master his pupil. I am sure that you are afraid of my becoming corrupted by dangerous doctrine, or of saying something that would be unbecoming in a Stuart. Mr Bellarmin isn't a Socialist or a dynamiter, or even a Whig, dear tyrant. And do you know this is the third time in the last hour that you have interrupted the flow of my conversation by restoring some lost property which I could very well have done without for a time?'

Falcon drew himself up stiffly. He averted his face for a moment that Mary might not see how deeply he was wounded. Lady Saxon's eyes met his full. She smiled, and he turned away again quickly. 'I am very sorry, madame,' he said, in a deep, resentful voice, 'that my small services annoy you so much.'

'On the contrary, dear general, I am quite aware that they are my salvation. There's no saying what would become of me if it
were not for you. But you know school children like to tease their
master sometimes."

'Are those flowers from your own garden, madame?' asked
Bellarmin. 'They are very curious; I never before saw roses that
colour.'

'They grow in Schwalbenstadt, and nowhere else,' replied Mary.
'The dear old grand duchess invented them. I like them because
they remind me of my childhood. And do you know that General
Falcon, who, in spite of his tyrannical ways, can be quite courtier­
like when he pleases, gets them over for me; and every day makes
me a pretty little posy.'

Mary scarcely glanced at Falcon as she thus alluded lightly to
his devotion; but Lady Saxon, with her keen woman's perception,
divined how that arrow would strike home. The wave of emotion
which for an instant swept over the stern man's face, and which no
one else, perhaps, would have observed for whom it could have had
any particular significance, revealed to her experienced gaze what
the thoughtless girl was so far from expecting.

Bellarmin still examined the flowers. He admired their peculiar
colour, and praised their perfume, and he quoted, in courtier fashion,
the well-known line,—

'The fairest rose in Scotland grows on the topmost bough,'

and made a playful allusion to Mary Stuart's device of the crowned
red rose.

'Would you like to have them?' said Mary, simply; and with
a little gesture of graceful condescension, which was quite sponta­
aneous, and had a sort of regal absence of affectation, she gave
Bellarmin Falcon's posy. The young man accepted it as he might
have accepted the gift of a sovereign. Falcon made an abrupt,
passionate movement, as if he would snatch away the bouquet.
The scar on his forehead showed dangerously upon the red flush
which rose; but he restrained himself. His arm dropped heavily
to his side, and he was turning away.

Just then Mary said, her eyes still wandering, 'General, I don't
think you are doing your duty as a gallant soldier ought. I am
sure Lady Saxon must want some iced coffee, or something. Take
her to the tea-room;' and with a little imperious wave of her hand
she dismissed him.

Lady Saxon saw it all. Her heart thrilled with mingled exulta­
tion and anger. She was inclined to think that Mary meant
offence to her in thrusting Falcon on her.

'So you have to be polite to me, General Falcon? Your young
mistress commands it,' she said, as he gravely offered her his arm,
murmuring, 'You will permit me, madame.'

'I try to be polite,' Falcon returned, grimly.

'But you don't much care for this sort of thing?'

'I don't much care for mixed assemblies.'

Something in the tone in which he said this, and the look which
accompanied his words, made Lady Saxon's cheek flame. She
was at once alarmed and offended. She said nothing, however,
but, putting on her most gracious air, let him take her to the tea-
room, where she drank a cup of iced coffee, and played with some grapes. Presently she said to him,—

‘I should like to take a turn with you in the garden.’

Lady Saxon had a keen memory for faces, and a sensitive faculty which forestalled memory itself by association. She had had to live on the defensive very much during certain years of her life, and even in these her later days, when smooth success strewn beneath her feet made her path so comparatively easy and pleasant, she found caution necessary. It occasionally happened that a disagreeable association surrounded some face which she supposed she was seeing for the first time; and then the association resolved itself into memory, and justified itself. A chill, uncomfortable sensation had passed through her when, in the central lobby of the House of Commons, she had first seen Falcon’s marked face, with the heavy, drooping moustache, that reminded her, she could not tell why, of a hawk’s wing; and the steely grey and restless eyes—eyes in the depths of which something tyrannous and cruel might be read, she thought. But on that evening Lady Saxon’s mind and heart had been so fully occupied that she had not troubled herself about General Falcon and her vague qualms concerning him. They had come back to her later, however, and she had remembered the man in a dim, indefinite way. Yes, she knew that they had met before. He had seen her in England in her Bohemian days before the Dulcamara enterprise of her first husband had been covered by a patent of nobility; he had seen her, perhaps, with Champion before Victor had become famous.

Lady Saxon was not a woman to wait for danger and let it choose its own time for finding her out. She always preferred to go forth to meet it.

‘We have met before, General Falcon,’ she said, turning to him with a fearless smile; ‘your face is quite familiar to me.’

He bowed. ‘We have met before, madame.’

‘I never forget a face like yours,’ she went on; ‘perhaps,’ she added, with a benign, encouraging glance, ‘a face like mine is not easily forgotten.’

‘I remembered your face perfectly,’ he replied; and he looked at her straight as he spoke.

He could not help, soldier that he was, feeling a little thrill of admiration for her courage.

‘Yes. I am glad. Not with any disagreeable association, I hope?’

‘There was nothing particularly disagreeable in it—to me, madame. I have met you on several occasions in the company of your late husband—who was not then Baron Langenwelt; and I have seen you on two or three occasions, about the same time, in the company of another person.’

Lady Saxon was silent for a moment. She recollected now that Falcon had gone to her husband for treatment of his wound. She recollected what Langenwelt had told her of its probable effect upon Falcon’s life and temperament.

‘I understand,’ she said, with a composure that, under the
conditions, did her credit. 'General Falcon—a soldier—means to remind me that he knew me when I was poor and humble, and under a cloud.'

'Oh, madame!'

The steely eyes flashed; the heavy moustache moved in deprecation.

'What else?' she blandly asked. 'What else could I understand? Well, I daresay you know all about me and my worst days, my poverty and my struggles, and how a quack adventurer made use of my youth and my—well, I suppose I may say beauty—to advertise his drugs. What then? Perhaps General Falcon thinks my husband, Lord Saxon, does not know? General Falcon is mistaken. My husband does know—all.'

Her audacity deceived Falcon for a moment. When, later on, he thought over it, he felt almost certain that she had lied. Now it occurred to him that she was brave enough to have trusted to Lord Saxon's infatuation, and to have secured herself by telling him the truth.

'I was not thinking of that, madame,' he replied. 'I was not thinking of Lord Saxon. I have not to think of him. I was thinking of others—whom it might have been my duty to caution, against—'

Mary Beaton's silvery laugh rang out in the soft summer air as she, too, came with a little group of people from the tea-room. Lady Saxon looked meaningly towards her, and then unflinchingly at Falcon, who, at the sound of Mary's voice, had started and glanced in her direction.

Lady Saxon laughed too, and lightly touched his arm with the gold handle of her parasol, forcing him to meet her gaze. 'Do not be so impatient to go to her; she does not want you. It is only natural that she should prefer Mr Bellarmin's society to that of her—guardian. Your Mary Stuart likes to be amused, general, and you are too old to play the part of a Chastelard. That of Bothwell would suit you better. I shall suggest to her that she had better be careful.'

'Madame, you would not dare—'

'Dare is an odd word, isn't it, for a man, especially for a soldier, to use towards a woman! I am not afraid of anyone in the world, General Falcon. I am not even afraid of my husband; and, though that may seem strange to you, I am not in the least afraid of any stories you may think proper to tell of me. They couldn't do me any harm. They might hurt me, perhaps, if I were struggling for a place in society—if I were, in a fashion, on probation. But as it is—' Lady Saxon drew her parasol into a perpendicular position, and lowered it with an air of magnificent disdain. She wished to imply that society would not believe stories about a woman who was Marchioness of Saxon, and might any day be Duchess of Althelstane. 'I warn you, however, general,' she went on, 'that I know your secret, and that though you cannot injure me, it might be better for you and for your mistress, and for the success of your hopes, to make a friend of me instead of an enemy.'

She spoke coldly, and made a move across the grass as if she
would put an end to the conversation and join her hostess. Falcon stopped her with a gesture of entreaty, and she turned back towards him, still cool and smiling. She saw that he was at her mercy.

'Come!' she said, 'you see that your secret is more important to you than mine—if I had any particular secret, which I haven't. I can be bon camarade if I choose, and, in any case, I am not fond of telling tales out of school. I should really like to help you—if we were to decide upon being friends—just for the mere interest of the thing. There's something quite picturesque in the idea of an old soldier like you, reckless and heroic, chivalrous and all the rest, madly in love like some knight of old—and with a princess claimant, too! You should win your suit by some daring stroke—the Bothwell sort of thing, you know; and if your Mary Stuart has the blood of her ancestress in her veins, that kind of wooing might well appeal to her. I assure you, general, that I should be quite sorry to work against anything so romantic. It would be too commonplace to marry your princess to a young London Tory Democrat, whose highest ambition would be gratified by a summons to Windsor.'

Every shaft that she had aimed struck home. Falcon writhed inwardly with fury and pain; and yet he realised in a strange, confused way that there was a certain affinity between the reckless spirit of this woman and his own. Her extravagant suggestions, contemptuously as they had been uttered, seemed an echo of the wild imaginings of his brain—of thoughts and impossible projects which had haunted his dreaming and waking hours. He felt instinctively that there were passionate chords in her nature which made her comprehend his mad love for Mary.

'Lady Saxon,' he said, with impulsive appeal, 'you know how—you understand what a man feels—something tells me that you do. A man such as I am, for whom youth has gone—all its crackling fires swelled into one terrible flame that burns—and burns—and that nothing can quench except—' He stopped short, and laughed in harsh, quavering tone. 'You are a woman who knows—you have a soldier's spirit. I like the way you face danger. I'll keep your secret, Lady Saxon, though you deny that you have one, and I will trust to your woman's generosity to keep mine.'

Falcon's tone and manner were not without dignity. They touched Lady Saxon curiously. She had been perfectly sincere when she told him that she would rather be his friend than his enemy.

'You may do more than rely on my generosity,' she said. 'You may rely upon my help. Perhaps I may be of greater service to you than you think now, and you may not be sorry that I have surprised your secret. Come to me if ever you want a woman's advice—and trust me. I know it all; I know what your love is, and what it means to you. I know what you dread and would avert—whom you like and whom you dislike. Don't ask me how I know all this. It is enough that I do know, and that no one else does.'

Lady Saxon's voice was low, but her manner was intensely melodramatic. She delighted in the melodramatic. She was
never so much herself as when she was play-acting. Now she had a purpose in her melodrama, and felt such a pride in its success as Hamlet must have felt when he found that his lines of tragedy had caught the conscience of the king. She made a movement which signified that she had no more to say. She did not wish to mar her latest effect by another word on the subject just now. 'Come,' she said, 'will you see me to my carriage? I am going now to bid Miss Beaton good-bye.'

Falcon followed her across the lawn to where Mary was standing among a rapidly thinning crowd. Lady Saxon bade her a gracious farewell, and again spoke of the contemplated dinner-party, which it was decided should take place upon a day fixed after the Whitsuntide vacation.

'We are going to stay with Lord Stonehenge,' Mary said, 'and we shall not be back till after the recess.'

'I, too, shall be out of town,' said Lady Saxon, 'but my holiday-place will not be so delightful as yours, Miss Beaton. You have never seen that part of the coast. It is so wild that you could hardly imagine it comparatively near London. I have a den of my own down there. I almost wish that I were going to have one of my misanthropic fits, and to retire to my eyrie by the sea.'

'I never could have suspected you of misanthropic fits, Lady Saxon,' put in Bellarmin, with a certain forced gaiety.

'It is true, though—an effect of early barbarism, Miss Beaton. I was not trained like you to the restraints of polite society. My girlhood was an odd, unconventional one.' She darted a fearless glance at the bystanders as she spoke, and laughed her ringing little laugh, which seemed to proclaim that she considered herself above criticism; 'I like to break away from my shackles sometimes.'

'And your eyrie by the sea is near Stonehenge?' asked Mary, interested. This was a new view of Lady Saxon's character which appealed to her.

'Yes, high up on the cliffs. Lord Stonehenge can show it to you if he pleases. I wish I were going to be there to show it to you myself—and to you, Mr Bellarmin; you would believe in my misanthropy then.' She gave him a smile that said, 'You see I know all about the visit and the snares that are being laid for you, and I am quite indifferent.' Then she went on: 'You didn't know, Lord Stonehenge, that I possess the loneliest and most romantic of ruined castles about ten miles from your own?'

'You mean Petrel's Rest?' replied Lord Stonehenge. 'I go so seldom beyond my own gates when I am down there—but I have seen the place. I did not know that Lord Saxon ever used it.'

'I dragged him there once, in our honeymoon days. It was a freak of mine, and I fell in love with the old ruin, and he made it over to me as a wedding present. I keep a very primitive staff there, and when I am tired of London life and country-house parties, and want to draw a breath of freedom, and to be a savage again without shocking anybody's prejudices, I run down there all by myself for a day or two.'
Lady Saxon departed, having left a dramatic impression behind her. Falcon saw her into a carriage, and then came back to the grounds. He did not join the rest, but sought refuge in a quaint little strip of flower-garden partly screened from inquisitive eyes by a projecting wing of the house and by a spreading beech tree, through which the soft breeze gently rustled and seemed to chime with the hum of voices and laughter beyond. The windows of Mary's sitting-room looked out on the rose-beds and grassy walks. There was a broken sun-dial in the centre, and Falcon leaned his arms upon it and gazed up miserably into the foliage of the beech tree. He felt the dull, heavy pain of his old wound throbbing in his head, and the humiliation and the anxiety he had just been undergoing seemed somehow part of the wound's pain. Lo! the very secret of his heart of hearts, the secret with which he would not trust the winds or the birds of the air, which he had long tried to keep a secret even from himself, had been snatched from him by a woman who was not fit to breathe the same air as his queen, his stately innocent princess, the lady of his love. It seemed an insult to Mary that his secret—and hers: it must be hers when the time was ripe—should be in the keeping of Lady Saxon. The maddest thoughts shot tormentingly through his distracted mind. If he could but kill her!—but he must stoop to her, give her his confidence, profess to trust her, profess to be her friend, see her in familiar companionship with his mistress. One word from her might put out for ever the light of poor Falcon's tortured life.

Mary's guests were melting away. Only a few remained. Tressel, in close conversation with Lord Stonehenge, had gone towards the house after having made his farewell bow to Miss Beaton, and Bellarmin wondered within himself what political log-rolling could have induced Tressel to pay an afternoon call, and deny himself for two whole hours the luxury of a cigarette.

'Must you go, Sir Victor?' Mary asked, as she saw Champion coming up to her, evidently with the intention of taking his leave.

'I am sorry to say that I must. I have even outstayed what ought to have been my limit of time.'

'I am proud of having had so much of your time given up to me,' said Mary, sweetly. 'It is an honour any woman might well feel proud of.'

'You are not "any woman," Miss Beaton.'

'Ah! that is nicely said. I like to hear a great man pay a pretty compliment.'

'I didn't know that I was doing anything of the kind. I was only going to explain why I was so glad to outstay the limit of my time here, madame. He paid her the further compliment of recognising the formal mode of address which her courtiers adopted, in so dainty and courtly a manner that the young girl—for she was but a girl, our Princess Mary—felt her heart give a bound of gratified vanity.

'Well,' she said, 'it is a triumph for me to have kept you beyond the limit of your time. But I hope I haven't done harm, like the girl in Scott's novel who keeps the brave knight by her
side, while the standard of England, which he was sent to guard, is torn from its place.'

Sir Victor's cheek flushed slightly. His enemies had a way of saying that he had no regard for the standard of his country. But it was plain that Mary meant nothing of the kind. She noted his momentary pause, however.

'Have you not read Scott?' she asked. 'I am told no one in England reads Scott now-a-days. We do read him abroad.'

'Oh, yes! I know Scott well,' Sir Victor replied. What was there which Sir Victor could say he did not know? 'No, Miss Beaton; the comparison will not hold. Your influence will never be employed to keep any soldier of England from guarding her standard; and to prove it, I am going along now to my post at Westminster.' He took her hand and bent over it, as though he were doing homage to a recognised princess, and he, too, made his way back through the tea-room and out into the street.

Bellarmin was almost the last. Presently he, too, made his farewell.

'Are you going to the House of Commons, too?' Mary asked.

'Yes,' he answered; 'but I am afraid that my absence from the post at Westminster wouldn't be of quite so much importance to England as that of Sir Victor Champion.'

Bellarmin had been speaking in a constrained manner. He was doing his best to compel himself to look on Mary Beaton as a woman utterly away from him, and to keep her out of his heart. Mary suddenly seemed to notice something strange in his voice and his manner. Wholly unsuspicious of the real cause, she looked at him with open and sympathetic eyes, and asked,—

'Are you not well, Mr Bellarmin?'

'Oh, yes, madame, quite well.'

'You don't look like it. You are doing too much in the House of Commons. Of course you are going to Stonehenge Park? That will do you good.'

'I don't intend to go to Stonehenge Park.'

'No!' She looked at him in wonder. 'Oh, surely you will go! I look forward to meeting you there. Yes; you will go?'

He shook his head. 'No; I think not.'

'But you will go if I command you?' she said, with a smile which went through the young man's heart.

'If you command—oh, then—'

'I do command.'

'Then I will go;' and a thrill of joy and fear shot through his heart.

'Thank you ever so much; you have made me glad. Good-bye.'

She had made him glad too, though his heart had remorse and dread in it as he left her, and knew that his resolve to keep away from her had died of her first entreaty.
CHAPTER XIV.

STONEHENGE PARK.

The visit to Lord Stonehenge was arranged to take place about the time of the Whitsun vacation. There was to be a curious collection of guests under the picturesque and ancient roof of the great house of Stonehenge Park. Time was to be given to Sir Victor Champion to be melted by Mary Beaton's charms, and to make an impression on Rolfe Bellarmin. This latter opportunity was to be Champion's *quid pro quo*. 'If you give us a chance of winning you to our money claim, we will give you a chance of winning Bellarmin to your side against the House of Lords.' The position had not been openly defined in bald terms such as these, though that valuable intermediary Tressel had made it his business to throw some subtle hints into the Jacobite conclave. Lord Stonehenge, who had none of the gifts of a politician, and took very little interest in the strife of parties and the manœuvring of leaders in the House of Commons, hardly appreciated the full significance of Tressel's suggestions. He had nothing in common with the Radical Tressel, and had been a good deal surprised to see him turn up at Mary Beaton's reception. Still he was quite aware that, for the sake of Miss Beaton's claims, it would be well to have Tressel's good word in the House, though he did not yet know how or when those claims were to be advanced. He accepted Tressel's ideas, therefore, with polite cordiality; and though no deliberate scheme of the kind would ever have shaped itself in Stonehenge's brain, the true meaning of the visit came to be tacitly recognised by more than one of the party. Mary Beaton and Rolfe Bellarmin knew least of the immediate political purpose of the visit when the invitation was given. Mary thought it was got up as a pleasant holiday and novelty for her, and, till he came to the house, Bellarmin did not know that Champion was to be his fellow-guest.

Mary Beaton noted with keen and artistic interest all the features of the beautiful region through which they passed. She and her chaperone, Lady Struthers, and her cavalier, General Falcon, had been brought by special train from London some seventy miles to the nearest station to Stonehenge Park, where they found Lord Stonehenge's carriages, and from which they had still some miles to drive. The country had a sort of cultivated barrenness. There were bluff chalk-hills rising abruptly, and covered with box and gnarled funereal yews; and below these were green, pleasant valleys, and rich apple orchards, and picturesque thatched cottages, and perhaps a quiet stream meandering beneath spreading beech trees. Now they would come upon a stretch of common with its clumps of black heath, like ill-shaped mounds, and shrubs of gorse lifting golden plumes, and tall bracken spreading its fronds over the dead brown refuse of last autumn; or now the road would wind round by some wooded hillside where straight green larches and sombre red-stemmed firs lifted their pyramidal tops above the
undergrowth of hazel and alder. And oh, how beautiful were the mossy boles of the big trees! and how delightful it would be to set one's feet on the crisp red-brown carpet of withered leaves, or to lie stretched on the dry moss, and look up to the blue sky through lattice-work of foliage, or watch the gleams of sunlight slanting downwards, and the shadows shifting their pattern as the wind stirred the boughs overhead! All these things affected Mary with a curious melancholy interest. It was like passing through some land she had known in childhood, and till now had forgotten, or had seen in some tender dream of the morning. It was all so thoroughly English, but English of the past, and not of the present; the ideal England which some of us, and she was of the number, would fain believe to have once been real. The girl's eyes were moist; why, she did not know.

The carriage passed through the lodge gates, and there was a mile or two of stately pleasuance, where deer lifted their antlered heads and scampered away among the fine old trees, till at last the house came in sight. Lady Struthers' honest heart swelled with pride and joy at the thought of being welcomed and lodged in such a place. She drew back her shoulders and let her full chest expand, and her eyes sparkled even more brightly than their wont; but she kept her proud and glad emotions to herself. Not for worlds would she have had it supposed that her life from childhood upwards had not been passed in halls with which Stonehenge Park could at best only compete.

'One might be very happy in a place like this,' Mary said, with a sigh. 'It seems so much more real, so much more like a home, than our big dreary barracks of palaces in Germany.'

'Oh, well, of course! there's no place like England,' Lady Struthers affirmed, 'and you, as an Englishwoman, must feel that as well as I. Lord Stonehenge has quite a nice home of it here; very nice indeed. It reminds me a good deal of my aunt's place in Perthshire,' observed Lady Struthers, reflectively. 'She was my mother's half-sister, and a great heiress; and if all had had their dues, her property should have come to me as the rightful inher­itress. But my uncle married again, and had a son, at the age of sixty-five—a woman the family couldn't countenance, my love—and that's how wicked reprobates flourish, while virtuous paupers have to grub along as best they may. I got nothing,' pursued Lady Struthers, mournfully, 'except a parcel of Mechlin lace and a diamond heart—the jewel, madame, which you admire. I trust my dear mistress and pupil will honour me and my aunt's memory by accepting it as a wedding gift, at such time as she shall have made her choice of a husband, which will, I am convinced, be in accordance with her illustrious ancestry. It should have been an entire parure;' and Lady Struthers sighed deeply, 'if my aunt's wishes had been duly considered—a parure that would have been worthy to take its place among historic, nay, even royal jewels; but by-gones must be by-gones, as I am always telling General Falcon. It's not for us poor mortals to keep up ill-feeling when even, in Revelations, the devil was only let loose for a thousand years.'
General Falcon's eyes spoke scorn of Lady Struthers' munderings. Just then, however, the carriage drew up at the entrance to Lord Stonehenge's house.

On the steps to receive them stood Lord Stonehenge, and when the carriage stopped he came down the steps bareheaded, and handed Mary out. With him, a little in the background, were two men—one old and thin and stooped, one young and thin and straight—and a dark-haired, bright-eyed boy. After Lord Stonehenge had handed Mary out and welcomed her, the boy came forward with a smiling face, and the assured grace of one who knows that his turn comes next. Lord Stonehenge presented him to Mary as Don José, Prince of Saragossa.

Don José prettily dropped on one knee, and took Mary's hand and touched it lightly with his lips. General Falcon's heart swelled with exultation. 'We are recognised,' was the thought that passed through his mind. Mary blushed and smiled, was confused and pleased. All this was delightful to Lady Struthers, whose demeanour seemed instantly to acquire an even greater stateliness, and whose courtesy to the young prince was worthy of the seventeenth century. Lady Struthers disdained the modern bob. 'We might almost fancy ourselves again at the Residenz,' she murmured to her mistress. Then Lord Stonehenge presented Monsignor Valmy and the Rev. Dr Amblaine, the first of whom, as became a most true and fervent Catholic, Mary greeted with a deep reverence.

Don José was the heir—the recognised heir—of a lost cause. He was the head of the elder branch of an exiled royal family. He was a representative of Legitimacy, of Divine Right. He was like Mary Beaton, in a certain sense, but then he had the advantage over her that his was a country of revolution, and hers was not. The crown might be going a-begging any day in his country; and his house might put in a claim and make it good. He was a claimant of admitted rank and account. Diplomacy kept its eye upon him; he was never quite out of the calculations of European statecraft, of foreign offices and embassies, and chancelleries and drawing-rooms, and coteries and petticoaters. But in Mary Beaton's country no palace revolutions were looked for, and European diplomacy regarded the throne of Queen Victoria as pretty safe. Therefore Mary Beaton, as compared with Don José, was like the niece of a rich man who has any number of healthy children and grandchildren, while Don José was like the nephew of one who has neither chick nor child of his own, but has some few nephews or nieces, all of whom he cordially detests, but some one of whom he will have to choose for the inheritance of his possessions. No doubt any practical politician, in looking shrewdly over the field, would have betted heavily against Don José's chances; but no practical politician would have troubled his head about Mary Beaton at all. Don José was far from being a favourite; indeed, he had the field against him; but Mary was not in the running. That was the difference, and it certainly was a very considerable difference. It particularly impressed itself just now on the mind of Mary Beaton herself, and she even
wondered whether it did not impress itself upon the mind of Lord Stonehenge as well. Mary was not certain yet whether Stonehenge was a mere dreamer and visionary or not.

Stonehenge House was a vast pile of red brick and grey stone; it stood upon the brink of a broad lake. The grounds around were of immense extent; a pinewood was but an incident in the visitor's drive. Lord Stonehenge, when he was staying at this place, never left his own grounds, never passed beyond his own gates unless when he had to visit some sick tenant or neighbour—poor neighbour, that is to say, for he did not hold much intercourse with his nearest rich neighbours. One was a newly-made Radical Baronet, the other was a no-Popery Tory squire; and Lord Stonehenge naturally did not greatly care for either.

Although Lord Stonehenge was a devoted Catholic, his actual demesne enfolded the parish church and the vicarage, and even the graveyard, where the rude Protestant and Puritan forefathers of the hamlet sleep. He was not unpopular among his Protestant tenantry; he always acted liberally, and he was not in any sense a bigot. He might have been very popular if he had cared for popularity; but he loved quietude and ease, and the society of people who thoroughly understood him; and at present his mind was filled with fancies and dreams—fancies which he tried to discourage, and dreams which used to be day-and-night thoughts and projects to generations of his ancestors.

The outer door opened into a great hall, almost the full size of the middle block of the house. Ancestral portraits, most of them by famous painters, hung on the walls. Suits of armour and stands of arms were there, the empty mailcoats seeming not inapt representatives now, in their emptiness, of the cause for which they had once been dinted and battered on many a battlefield. The hall had a great stand, in which were grouped sticks and staves and cudgels and stocks of various kinds. Lord Stonehenge had a taste for the accumulation of sticks from all parts of the world. His friends who knew his taste often brought him a present of some desirable and uncommon sort of staff.

It was all new and interesting to Mary. She had never stayed before in a great English house. Her own ancestral home had been sold in her grandfather's time, and it had not occurred to her to regret it; but now, amid her ejaculations of surprise and pleasure, she could not suppress a deep sigh.

'This makes me sad in a kind of way,' she said, turning with her sweet, frank smile to Monsignor Valmy, who, standing a little apart, with his thin hands folded before him, and a gentle benevolent curiosity on his somewhat severe countenance, was watching her intently. 'I was so delighted with my little house in Kensington,' Mary went on, 'and so glad because the portraits of some of my own people looked down upon me from the walls, and in England, their own country. But now, after all, when I see this place, I can't help feeling an alien and an exile.'

Lord Stonehenge made a little movement of almost impassioned protest, but he did not speak. Perhaps shyness kept him silent.
'Surely that is an impossibility, madame, if you turn in this direction,' said Monsignor Valmy, in bland, tender accents, and he motioned towards a part of the hall where hung a collection of Stuart portraits, conspicuous among them a fine likeness of Mary Stuart. This particular painting is said to have been done by a French artist during that brief period when, in the flush of her youth, her loveliness, and her happiness, Mary Stuart presided as Queen Consort at the court of France. She is represented in the dress of that court. A royal mantle of crimson velvet, edged with minever, falls from the shoulders; she has the ungraceful puffed sleeves and the more becoming long-waisted jewelled bodice, with high collar and small ruff, which is thrown back, opening deep in front, and shows the shape of her long, slender throat. Dark chesnut hair—dark, save for the ruddy tinge running through it—wavers upon the broad, candid brow, and is confined by three rows of pearls, with one large pendent drop below the parting. The face, a perfect oval, turns a little towards the left shoulder; the large, dark, almond-shaped eyes have a clear penetrating gaze, and an almost childlike purity. The brows are delicately arched; the nose is fine and straight, and the lips gracious and slightly pouting. In spite of the girlish serenity and sweetness of the countenance, it has that expression of melancholy so characteristic of the royal Stuarts. It was impossible not to be struck by the resemblance Mary Beaton bore to this portrait, even in that very pensive shade which gave so pathetic a charm to her bright young beauty. It was remarked by several. General Falcon looked earnestly from the pictured to the living face. Involuntarily Lady Saxon's words rose in his memory: 'You may be her Bothwell!' A red wave overspread his forehead, through which the scar shone livid.

Monsignor Valmy seemed an appropriate figure against the Stonehenge background. He was Don José's tutor and travelling companion, a Jesuit priest, whose ascetic life was printed in the lines of his thin, clear, wasted face. His hair, which fell almost to his shoulder beneath the biretta which he wore, was prematurely grey. He looked seventy. In reality he was about fifty. He had fine, delicately cut features of the Dantesque type. There was power in his steady serene eyes, and a greater sweetness than subtlety in his smile. He had an air of culture and dignity, and his manner, like that of most Catholic priests of high birth and position, was singularly graceful and courteous.

Monsignor Valmy's chaplain and secretary, the Rev. Dr Amblaine, hung in the background. He was a very young man with a hectic flush, and apparently of a consumptive tendency. Mary heard later from her host that he had, in fact, but poor hope of prolonging his life. He was a scholar, and she heard, too, that he had an almost morbid love of books, and a taste for the personal possession of editions which the public could not easily get at. A little room full of books, all his own—his very own—was his happiness.

The library at Stonehenge, in which they had tea, must, one would fancy, have been a paradise to poor Dr Amblaine. It was
a great oblong room, with three tall windows looking out on the lake, and its collection of books and manuscripts was almost unique for a private owner's house. But, in fact, it gave little joy to Dr Amblaine. He had been a few weeks at Stonehenge Park, and was to be there only a few weeks longer. But he had already set up his own little store of books in his own room; and he stole every possible moment to go and look at them, and to take down this one and that from its shelf, and open it tenderly, and pat its cover and stroke its back, and study its title-page and its imprimatur fondly, and utter little half-articulate and gladsome words over it. Nor did he want to keep his treasures all to himself. He was only too delighted when he could entice someone of the company into his room, and win, by gentle extortion, a few words of admiration and of sympathy. All this seemed curiously pathetic to Miss Beaton, when, after she had been some days at Stonehenge, she made him thus happy; and she would not even smile, though Don José did his very best to force her into mirth by his odd interjections and furtive grimaces.

Don José was a clever, sweet, precocious boy of fourteen. He was an odd compound, for he had the frolicsome ness of an English schoolboy, the unleavened conceit and whims of a Parisian lad, and occasionally an interval, short indeed, of the Spaniard's melancholy gravity. When Lord Stonehenge had placed Mary in a chair near one of the windows, through which floated a gentle breeze from the lake, bearing sweet scent of June roses and honeysuckle on its breath, and was busying himself in getting her tea, Don José rushed forward with a funny little gesture of mock humility.

'No, no!' he exclaimed; 'she is my princess—the head of my family—the queen of my house! I am her page. I must pour her wine. I must bring her tea. I and no one else.'

Lord Stonehenge laughed.

'But I am her host, my prince,' he said.

'No matter;' cried the prince; and he sprang to the table, poured Mary's tea, and handed it to her, kneeling on one knee the while.

And Mary laughed too, and accepted the homage, and leaned back in her chair, sipping her tea, and feeling delightfully at home. She fell into conversation with Monsignor Valmy presently, and asked some questions about the services in the private chapel at Stonehenge. She regretted that she had as yet no chaplain of her own, and that though the Oratory was not far from her house, she attended the offices of her Church less regularly than had been her wont abroad. The priest bent upon her a look of fatherly regard.

'You feel the need of religion?' he said.

'It is difficult to lead the religious life in London,' said Mary, thoughtfully.

'And yet it is in London, where material interests and enjoyments throng around us like a vast army of shadowy forms, darkening and vitiating the spiritual atmosphere, that the religious life seems a greater reality as well as a greater need than here, for
instance, where the air is pure—morally and physically,' said the priest, with a grave smile.

'Yes, I know what you mean,' cried Mary; 'I feel that it is as you say; we are surrounded by shadows. I often fancy that other people's realities are my shadows. And then to go into the solemn security of our own Church, and to feed our own souls, and give no food to the starving, ignorant souls outside, seems to me no less selfishness than to feed our bodies, and let the poor die of hunger at our doors.'

'Madame, you allow your mind to dwell too much upon the sufferings of the poor,' interposed Falcon, abruptly.

'I have often had the thought which madame's words suggest,' said Lord Stonehenge, in a dreamy tone. 'We rich and exclusive Catholics in England are, in the spiritual sense, like Dives. Well,' he added, in a lighter manner, 'we are introducing one alien presence into our fold here—if not two. When Mr Bellarmin arrives, he will find himself the only one of the party who is not a Catholic.'

Mary made a little involuntary movement of interest as he spoke. She had been wondering since her arrival in the house whether Bellarmin were already there, and if not, when he was expected. Falcon asked the question, 'When does Mr Bellarmin come?'

'In a day or two,' replied Stonehenge. 'Presumably, he is less necessary in the House of Commons than Sir Victor Champion, who follows him when Whitsuntide recess begins.'

'You are right,' Monsignor Valmy said, presently, 'in qualifying your remark about the alien presence—in one instance at least. Sir Victor is as yet outside the fold, but his instincts are leading him to look over the pale. His mind has in it much of the Churchman; his sympathies are with the Church.'

'I have sometimes thought,' Stonehenge said, with a smile, 'that Champion would make an admirable cardinal.'

'He would like the office, I daresay—many of its functions, at least. But has he not a little too much mysticism, emotionalism, even ecclesiasticism, about him to be quite effective as a prince of the Church?'

'Yet you look to his being Prime Minister of England,' said Stonehenge.

'Oh, yes, that is different. In England you govern—'

'You govern!' Stonehenge said again, with a smile. 'Why don't you say we govern?' 'You are an Englishman.'

'Yes; but I am in spirit a mediaeval Englishman—an Englishman of the days when England still believed in her saints,' answered Monsignor Valmy.

'Well, you were going to say something when I interrupted you.'

'I was going to say that in England you govern by talking, and therefore Champion is a destined prime minister,' said Monsignor Valmy. 'But a prince of the Church must be trained to the art of silence as well as speech, and do you think Sir Victor could ever learn that? No; he must be always in some place where he can
use the great gift which Heaven has given him. He would make a marvellous preacher. If he were one of us, Monsignor Valmy added, meditatively, 'I should like to appoint him to preach in some West End church, to stir the hearts of the light-minded, and to compel Protestants to go and listen.'

'I am afraid there is a very worldly side to Champion's ambition,' Lord Stonehenge said. 'The redemption of souls might serve as an avocation for him; it would never be his vocation.'

'Os homini sublime dedit,' Valmy said, quietly. 'A man of genius and heart looks naturally up from the world. Have you seen much of Sir Victor Champion?' he added, turning to Miss Beaton.

'Yes,' she answered; 'he has called on me several times lately, and we have talked a good deal together.'

'And you like him—you admire him?'

'Oh, yes,' she replied, frankly; 'who could help admiring him? I confess that I like him best when he puts on that courtier-like old-world manner which suits him so well. I am not so much interested in him when he talks generalities to me as he might to an ordinary young London lady, and asks my plans for the season.'

'Perhaps that is Champion's diplomatic way of trying to find out something about you, madame,' said Lord Stonehenge; 'something about your own and your friends' projects and ideas, which he might think it impolitic to ask directly.'

'I would rather he questioned me outright about what he wanted to know,' said Mary. 'But I think he must have discovered after the second visit that I did not like him so well as the man of society, for he became the courtier again.'

'And Mr Bellarmin?' pursued the priest, blandly.

'Oh, Mr Bellarmin'—and Mary's colour rose slightly—'he too has been to see us three or four times. But Mr Bellarmin is different. He is younger, naturally more of the London man. Mr Bellarmin amuses me, and he interests me too; for he seems to have two sides to his character. I don't feel with him as with Sir Victor, that I ought to be on my best behaviour.' She laughed a half-conscious laugh, which both Monsignor Valmy and Lord Stonehenge noticed.

Alas for Bellarmin! It was quite true that, in spite of his prudent resolves, he had found occasion more than once to visit the young Pretendress at her house in Kensington. It would seem discourteous, unfeeling, he argued to himself, to slight the frank invitations, almost commands, of a lady in Mary Beaton's peculiar position—a stranger in her own country, a victim, so Bellarmin put it, to the accident of her illustrious birth.

At first Miss Beaton was enchanted with everything at Stonehenge Park. She loved to wander over the great old house from room to room, and corridor to corridor. From the foot of the two wide flights of stairs, which met in the middle of the hall, one might look up to a glass dome, and through it see the shadow of a little turret that commanded a view of the whole country round. Mary delighted in mounting this tower, and gazing over the broad,
fair English landscape on the one side, to the more barren stretch of country, the bleak cliffs and misty sea on the other. She persuaded herself sometimes that she saw on the horizon the outlines of Lady Saxon's eyrie, Petrel's Rest. She had thought many times, since that day of her reception, of Lady Saxon, of her brilliancy, her beauty, her vivid intriguing life, and of her frank confession of an occasional longing for solitude and savagery. Somehow Mary thought of Lady Saxon most often in association with Bellarmin, and then the young girl's cheek would flush painfully—she did not dare to ask herself why—and she would shrink and determinedly turn her mind away.

The people at Stonehenge humoured Mary Beaton's fancies, and permitted her to throw completely aside the flimsy pomp and ceremony which, in London, Falcon so strongly insisted upon. Thus, here she was more of the merry schoolgirl than the dignified young claimant who had declared herself 'every inch a queen.' Lady Struthers remonstrated feebly, but she could not gainsay the Prince of Saragossa and Monsignor Valmy, who took Miss Beaton's view of things. Mary was charmed with little Don José. The boy had picked up some London slang, which he found great pleasure in airing for Mary's amusement and social education. They became comrades, and used to have long rambles and rides together. Still there was want of force, of interest, of movement about all this, and Mary found herself secretly wishing that Mr Bellarmin would appear. He had not come on the day first appointed, but had put off his arrival two days on the plea of committees and debates.

She wanted him to come before Sir Victor. A day or two of his bright companionship without the constraint of the elder and graver statesman's presence would be pleasant, Mary thought. For Mr Bellarmin was young, and Sir Victor was—oh, well, not old, not exactly old, but elderly. Sir Victor seemed quite an elderly person to Mary Beaton. She had always been a good deal mixed up with elderly people; she was under the care and in the close companionship now of elderly people, and she yearned for the society of the young, as one weary of grey skies and dun clouds might yearn for the sunshine. Perhaps this condition of feeling, all natural and comprehensible as it was, might serve to account for the fact that elder people sometimes grew a little displeased and impatient with sweet Mary Beaton. They suspected that she yearned for younger companions sometimes, and it made them bitter. Certainly it made General Falcon bitter. General Falcon looked out for the coming of young Bellarmin with alternate sinking of the heart and rising of passion. The mere mention of Bellarmin's name brought a scowl to Falcon's face. He was beginning to fancy that he had been wrong in his first estimate of Bellarmin's position. He had believed him to be enmeshed in Lady Saxon's toils; he now suspected that Lady Saxon's influence was not entirely paramount.

It was evidence of a certain feline craft in Falcon that he should seem to countenance and even encourage any apparent admirer of Mary Beaton, whereas in reality the serious suggestion
of her marriage coming into his mind as a possibility, nay, a certainty in the future, set all his strongest passions at work, and turned him for a time almost into a madman. He had appeared eager to welcome both Bellarmin and Sir Victor Champion to the house in Kensington, and to seize on the evident attraction of both to his charge as a factor in his political schemes; but now that the attraction seemed to have become more distinct, he regarded it with a mixture of abhorrence and terror. Yet he still placed so severe a restraint upon himself that only Lady Saxon, had she been in his company, could have read the morbid workings of his diseased mind.

CHAPTER XV.

AMONG THE LILIES.

For days before the Stonehenge visit, Bellarmin's soul had been sorely racked. Soon after he had sent away the fateful letter, which was Lady's Saxon's trophy, a terrible revulsion of feeling came over him. He felt like one who has sold his soul to the Spirit of Darkness. Never had he been deceived in his cooler moments by Lady Saxon's tenderest protestations and professions. He knew that she did not love him, that she was not a woman to love anyone in the true sense. His heart revolted at the thought of her treachery to her husband. He felt himself degraded by the servitude he had allowed her to impose upon him, and now from servitude he had made it slavery. He had written to her a declaration of love; and it was not true; he did not love her. He was dazzled by her, allured by her, infatuated by her; his senses betrayed him to her; but he did not love her; and he knew it now only too well. He had a hideous presentiment that his letter would yet be made to play some part in some scheme of Lady Saxon's. So little faith had he in her, when he was not under the bewildering sway of her presence and her charm, that he actually found this thought taking possession of his mind—the thought that the letter had been drawn from him to be used in some way against him. And, added to all this, was the feeling that now he had cut himself off from Mary Beaton for ever. Little hope, indeed, had he ever that Mary Beaton could care for him, or that anything could come of it even if she did. But still he was free to think of her, to fill his soul with thought of her, to hold her always in his heart. Now he must try to think of her no more. The bondslave of Josephine Saxon must not admit the thought of Mary Beaton into the profaned sanctuary of his heart. He felt that such transactions have their own code of honour, and he must order his heart so that it should not give out its feelings to any other woman. 'A man,' he said to himself, savagely, 'ought to be one thing or the other; he ought to be either good or bad; he
ought to have the courage of his goodness or the courage of his badness; he ought to be—not like me.'

Bellarmin was for the time distinctly unhappy. He seemed to have lost interest in everything. He was out of tune with political life. There were moments when he wished he had never come up to London; never got a seat in the House of Commons. The world, his world, seemed all darkened; he could not see the sky or the stars anywhere. He was as one who suddenly finds that he has lost sight, or hearing, or power of movement, and whose senses are paralysed by the appalling knowledge. He had come to understand that in the terrible struggle between the two forces in his nature the spirit of evil had conquered, but not cast out, the spirit of good; that the conquered spirit lay, a perpetual ache and agony, deep in its prison in his heart.

Still, Bellarmin was young, and whether he would or not, his forces were elastic, and he soon determined to make the best of his Stonehenge visit, to put on an appearance of brightness, to meet Mary bravely, and to be in the world like a man of the world.

These thoughts were in Bellarmin's mind as he came down by the train—the same train which had brought Mary Beaton. He found the party drinking tea in the quaint garden on one side of the house—a garden laid out in fancifully shaped beds, bordered with box, and almost closed in by red brick walls, on which hung big yellow Maréchal Niel and Souvenir de Malmaison roses. The roses were a-bloom in sunny sheltered regions now; they grew in profusion at Stonehenge, and the very air seemed heavy with them. Lady Struthers was at the tea-table; General Falcon and Monsignor Valmy were conversing together, and Mary and Lord Stonehenge sat a little apart. They both rose as Bellarmin was ushered towards them, and Lord Stonehenge went forward to greet his guest; but Mary held back, looking very stately and slender as she stood beside a bed of tall white lilies, and, indeed, not unlike the lilies themselves, Bellarmin thought. A little blush came to her cheek, however, when at last Bellarmin shook hands with her.

"I am glad to see you," she said, simply. "We were beginning to think that you didn't mean to come."

"Oh," he answered, "I have had tiresome committees—a tedious time altogether, with only the consolation of feeling that I was doing my duty—which was not much of a consolation after all, under the conditions—and the satisfaction of knowing that I should get a holiday anyhow at Whitsuntide."

"Everyone gets holidays at Whitsuntide," said Mary, "and then—she was going to say, 'and then Sir Victor will be here,' but added, 'we were going to give you a longer holiday.'"

"Have you seen Sir Victor Champion?" asked Stonehenge, and felt immediately that the question needed some preparation, for Bellarmin gave a quick, surprised look.

"Seen him? Yes; every day. But I have had no particular talk with him."

"He is coming here in the Whitsuntide recess," said Lord Stonehenge, calmly.
'Coming here?' repeated Bellarmin, still surprised, and glance­ing at Mary; 'I did not imagine that I was to meet Sir Victor Champion.'

'You don't object?' said Lord Stonehenge. 'I know that you differ politically—perhaps not as much as people think. Here, political differences count for as little as those of creed,' and he made a gesture towards the priest. 'You will find Monsignor Valmy a perfectly delightful companion. So I hope you, and Miss Beaton too, will find Sir Victor. I have an idea, Mr Bellarmin, that if you were in the House of Lords you would sit on the cross­benches in more senses than one.'

Mary laughed, and so did Bellarmin.

'I daresay you are right,' said Rolfe. 'Anyhow, I haven't the faintest dislike to staying in the same house with Sir Victor. Quite the contrary; it is what I have often wished to do; but I have never been given the chance. I am delighted to meet him outside the field of politics.'

'Mr Bellarmin,' cried Lady Struthers from the tea-table, handing him at the same time a fragrant, steaming cup and the cream jug, 'it's a fresh brew. Do you take sugar?—though it is not the fashion in England to take sugar, I observe. The first cup was delicious, Mr Bellarmin; our second wasn't so good; but this is going to be quite as excellent as the first. And strawberries? I always assure foreigners that strawberry squash is really the typical English dish! I tell madame, Mr Bellarmin, that there's one good you get by living out of one's own country for a number of years. You notice things, and you get perspective. If I ever go back to Schwalbenstadt I shall introduce the dear grand duchess to English strawberry squash.'

That evening both Mary and Don José were in particularly lively humour. The girl seemed to have been endued with a spirit of playfulness and innocent gaiety that contrasted with her former vague depression, and which was to Bellarmin peculiarly captivating. The young Prince of Saragossa, still hailing her as his queen, made himself her cupbearer, and poured her wine and waited upon her, somewhat to the embarrassment of Lord Stonehenge's solemn butler. Bellarmin fell into the boy's fancy, and gravely paid homage to the pretty Pretendress. The priests smiled benignantly; General Falcon scowled in sullen dissatisfaction. To Lady Struthers and Stonehenge, each in a different fashion, the proceedings savoured too much of a jest on the sacred subject of Divine Right to be altogether agreeable.

But Mary Beaton and Bellarmin were very happy, perhaps neither of them quite knew why. When dinner was over, they all went back together to the drawing-room. The windows stood wide open to the terrace, and the lake shone silvery in the moon­light. Don José vaulted forth, and ran down to the boathouse, where a tiny skiff was moored; and presently they heard his clear boy's tenor ringing out a sort of boat-song in Spanish, which sounded like an invitation to follow him.
Miss Beaton paused a little irresolutely on the sill.
'I am going on the water,' said she, looking back into the room; and then she turned again and sang an answering call.

She had a very sweet but not very powerful mezzo-soprano voice, with a pathetic note in it that struck Bellarmin as peculiarly in harmony with that slightly melancholy strain he had noticed in her character.

'Madame,' said Falcon, abruptly, 'you will not trust yourself alone on the lake with the prince, who, to say the least, is young and heedless.'

'But, indeed I shall, my good general,' replied Mary, with pretty wilfulness; 'and we shall sing duets on the water, to which you may join chorus from the bank if you please. Lord Stonehenge, let us have coffee in the boathouse; and you gentlemen may talk politics or science, or anything you like, while Don José and I enjoy ourselves.'

'And I,' said Lady Struthers, 'shall beg to remain indoors, if madame and his highness will excuse my attendance. The lake has no attractions for me. I am not fond of leading the vie de canard, which appears to delight you so in England.'

'We make a virtue of necessity, Lady Struthers,' put in Bellarmin.

'Dr Amblaine and I will enjoy a game of draughts, or a little literary conversation,' went on Lady Struthers. 'The pleasures of intellectual intercourse have not come much in my way since we left the cultivated circle of the Residenz. I must confess that I am disappointed in English society,' and she threw a rebuking glance at Bellarmin. 'It seems to me that the entrée to the highest circles in London, political or social, is far from being a guarantee of intellectual distinction.'

'Quite true, Lady Struthers,' answered Bellarmin. '“You must amuse us,” is the first command of smart society. It doesn’t say, “You must improve us.”'

Miss Beaton went lightly out into the garden, singing still as she walked. Bellarmin followed her. He carried a white knitted cloud.

'Lady Struthers beseeches you to put this on.'
She let him wrap the shawl about her head and shoulders.

'I have never heard you sing before,' he said.

'Oh, I sing very passably, I assure you,' she replied; 'but I have a perverse and gamin taste for street songs, and General Falcon doesn’t encourage me in it.'

'He thinks it unbefitting your—' Bellarmin was going to say 'pretensions,' but stopped himself, and added, 'your illustrious descent.'

'Exactly, and there he is wrong. Mary Stuart never thought about what was befitting or unbefitting her dignity; and yet she was always a queen. That’s part of the bore of sham royalty,' Mary added, with a sigh. 'One has, metaphorically speaking, to keep the sceptre and crown perpetually en évidence. Now, I am sure if your Queen, when she was much younger, say, had taken a
fancy to sing "Johnny Peel," or "Up in a balloon, boys," everyone would have thought it quite pretty and nice.'

Bellarmin laughed. Mary turned her bright, frank eyes to him. They were sparkling with amusement.

'I have only seen the people in their wretchedness,' she said, and her face became suddenly sad again. 'I want to see them in their places of entertainment. Mr Bellarmin,' she clasped her hands with a girlish impulsive gesture, 'I am going to carry out the most daring project when I go back to London. I should shock you so terribly that I long to tell you what it is. But I dare not. I have only brought the general to consent by dint of coaxing and promises of the strictest secrecy.'

'I daresay I can guess,' said Bellarmin. 'A private box at the Alhambra or the London Pavilion.'

'Oh, dear, no; nothing half so much in the world. But don't ask me another question.'

Whether by design or accident, they had made a little détour, and instead of proceeding straight to the bank of the lake near which Don José was paddling, they turned up by a small inlet crossed by an ornamental bridge.

'Tell me,' said Bellarmin, looking at her in a half-amused, half-earnest manner, 'what is the meaning of it all?'

'The meaning of it!' Mary repeated; and she stopped short on the bridge, and looked up at him. 'The meaning of what?'

'This sham royalty, as you call it. What is it to end in?'

'Noblesse oblige,' said Mary, a little haughtily. 'I am the last of the Stuarts.'

'That—of course. No one doubts it. But—'

He paused. He had a vague impulse to question her that he might discover to what extent she herself was aware of any political or social machinations on the part of her adherents. Though Mary Beaton had been magnet powerful enough to draw him at once to Stonehenge, it puzzled him a little why he had been invited there. He wanted to find out what was expected of him, how far he was supposed to espouse Miss Beaton's claims, why Sir Victor Champion had been asked, whether the meeting between him and Sir Victor had been arranged by the Jacobite clan with a view to furthering the minor Stuart business, or by Champion himself for a greater political purpose. His embarrassed manner quickened Mary's curiosity.

'Well,' she said, 'what is it that you are wondering about?'

'I'll tell you; I'm wondering about two things: why General Falcon and Lord Stonehenge were so good as to press me to join this party, and, by the way, why does General Falcon scowl at me so fiercely now that I am here?' He saw in the moonlight the red blood rise to Mary's face and overspread its milky whiteness.

'You were asked because—well, I'll be frank with you—because I wanted to have someone new and entertaining, and fresh from the outside world about me. I am tired of all these fossilised interests. As for my general, perhaps it is that which makes him cross. I can't be responsible for his whims; they puzzle me quite as much as they can puzzle you.'
The Rival Princess.

'Madame,' said Bellarmin, with real feeling in his voice, 'I am more than honoured; I am deeply grateful. If you knew what a sweet and soothing beneficial influence you have over me, you would not be surprised that I thank Heaven for the kindly impulse which made you wish for my company.' There was a little pause. It seemed to Bellarmin that the red deepened on Mary's half-averted cheek.

'And the other thing you were wondering about?' she asked, presently.

'The other thing? Yes—why is Sir Victor Champion coming?'

Mary looked round at him with a bright little laugh.

'Well, I don't mind confiding to you the least little faint hint of a very tiny political conspiracy, which Lord Stonehenge got from Mr Tressel, and which he let out to me only yesterday. Mr Tressel just suggested that Sir Victor would not be sorry to see something of you in a friendly, informal way. Oh, Mr Bellarmin, it is too delicious that I should be mixed up in your English parliamentary intrigues! I wish you were on Sir Victor's side. I believe in him.'

'You wish I were on his side?' said Bellarmin, slowly.

'Not against your convictions, of course; I think, on the whole, that what interests me about you is that you are a franc-tireur. Still, I believe, I should not be sorry if your convictions were to take the same form as Sir Victor's.'

'You believe that he has sincere convictions; that he has the good of his country at heart?'

'Yes, I am certain of it! No one could watch his face and see the light kindle in his eyes when he talks of what is near his heart, and not feel that he is intensely in earnest. I have seen him several times lately. He is very good in explaining things to me, and he has such a pretty way of recognising me as a Stuart, and all that, as if he were indulging the whim of a child he was fond of. Oh, yes, I believe in Sir Victor. I am a little afraid of him. I shall not dare to be frivolous before him as I am this evening; but I admire him immensely, all the same.'

The thought came into Bellarmin's mind, as he walked along by Mary Beaton's side, that it was curious these two women, Josephine Saxon and Mary Beaton—women as unlike in character and temperament as if they had been born in different planets, and showing that dissimilarity most, it seemed to him, in the strange conflicting influence they exercised upon himself—should both feel such genuine and apparently intuitive confidence in Champion's political sincerity. Josephine's frank admission of a former acquaintance with Champion dispelled any dark suggestions that might have rankled in Bellarmin's mind. Her arguments and her appeal in their late interview had, almost unconsciously to himself, affected him strongly. Now they seemed to receive additional strength from the fact of Mary's partisanship. It was a curious convergence of opposing forces. Mary's enthusiastic expressions grated slightly upon him, but they set him thinking. If this bright, intelligent girl were so imbued with belief in Champion's high purpose, was he right in refusing
to hear what Champion had to bring forward in his own support? They had crossed the bridge, and now, by a turn in the shrubbery they had been skirting, came suddenly upon the boathouse—a kind of open pavilion with tables and lounges, where the gentlemen were sitting and enjoying their cigarettes, and where coffee was being served. Mary did not wait for any coffee, but stepped into the canoe in which Don José was established, and presently the two had paddled out into the lake.

Monsignor Valmy and Lord Stonehenge called out admonitions to keep near the shore. The boy and girl laughed and murmured together, and in a few moments their voices burst on the still, soft night, blending in a rollicking Rhine song. It was very charming and poetic, Bellarmin thought. He sat somewhat apart, near the wide entrance arch of the pavilion, silent and dreamy as he smoked his cigar, and gazed at the white figure in the boat, and the noble head and the play of features and eyes which seemed spiritualised by the moonlight. The two young people went on, singing song after song, pushing out into the lake, so that their voices sounded softer and more distant; and now they turned a little point and were hidden by a drooping willow, though the sweet, ringing melody told that they were not far. After a while they stopped singing altogether. It could be seen that they had landed on an islet in the middle of the lake, where there were more willows and another pavilion.

Meanwhile the men had fallen into general, half-political talk, and the question of Mary Stuart Beaton's inheritance was brought up. General Falcon was explaining the position to Monsignor Valmy, and while the echo of Mary Beaton's and Don José's first duet still lingered in his ear, Bellarmin was roused from his dreamlike reverie by a pointed question.

CHAPTER XVI.

'THE WHITENESS OF THE REBEL ROSE.'

'TELL me, General Falcon,' Monsignor Valmy said, quietly, 'what you want Sir Victor Champion to do—what you want Mr Bellarmin to do.' He looked towards Bellarmin as he spoke in a manner that plainly invited Bellarmin to take part in the discussion.

'Am I in this?' Bellarmin asked, half rising, and then drawing his chair nearer to the little group, which was gathered round a small table, on which coffee and cigarettes were placed.

'Surely; I was just saying to General Falcon that we should all like to know what he wants you, for example, to do in regard to these claims.'
'You see, we assume your sympathy and willingness to help us,' Lord Stonehenge said.
'I shall be only too glad to help you,' Bellarmin replied, 'if I can see my way.'
'Exactly; we want General Falcon to give you the light to help you to see your way.'
'Dry light, as Bacon puts it,' Monsignor Valmy said, quietly; 'light free from all colouring matter, I suppose Bacon meant. We want to give you that sort of light, and none other. We want to have the case put fairly before you, so that you shall judge for yourself on the facts.'
'I have studied the question pretty closely,' Bellarmin answered, 'and very sympathetically. It seems clear to me that there is no constitutional or legal claim, in the technical sense of the words.'
'Mr Bellarmin doesn't understand the question,' Falcon interposed, with harsh voice and scowling face.
'I have studied it to the best of my ability, General Falcon,' Bellarmin said, determined not to lose his temper. 'If I don't understand it, that is the fault of my intellect, and not of my effort. It is well to have everyone's opinion.'
'Oh, yes; go on, please, Mr Bellarmin!' Stonehenge exclaimed, turning eyes of expostulation on the impatient Falcon.
'I am particularly anxious to hear Mr Bellarmin's full and candid expression of opinion,' Monsignor Valmy said, gravely. 'He is one of our friends, General Falcon, not one of our enemies.'
'I ask Mr Bellarmin's pardon,' said Falcon, in a strange, contradictory flash of penitence which puzzled Bellarmin. 'I know he means to be a friend.'
'Now, Mr Bellarmin,' Lord Stonehenge interposed, a little impatiently.
'I don't see any claim that you could possibly sustain in any court of law, for instance,' Bellarmin explained. 'I don't see how the government—'
'Oh, well—it isn't the Crown really—it is the government. The Crown will, as a matter of public policy, decline to do anything but what the government advises. Now it seems to me that, as a question of generosity, there is a strong case; and as a question of public policy, even, a very good case. I think, in this instance, generosity and public policy would go together.'
'Generosity!' Lord Stonehenge began, in a doubting tone of voice.
'Yes, I was coming to that point,' Bellarmin went on. 'Are you disposed to make an appeal to the generosity of the country? Would you be willing to do that? Would Miss Beaton consent?'
'Do you mean to make an appeal in forma pauperis? Is that what Mr Bellarmin recommends?' cried Falcon.
'The Whiteness of the Rebel Rose.' 117

'No, General Falcon. I didn't recommend anything of the kind. I didn't recommend anything, in point of fact. I only asked a question or two, for the guidance of myself and of all of us. It is one thing to make a legal claim in a court of law, or even in Parliament; it is another to appeal to Parliament for fair play and moral justice and generosity—in a matter where it is frankly admitted that we have no legal claim—I mean legal in the narrow and technical sense.'

'I think Mr Bellarmin is putting the case very well,' said Monsignor Valmy.

'I am afraid he is putting it only too well—too accurately, I mean,' Lord Stonehenge added.

'Well, my idea is this,' Bellarmin went on, 'I think the claim could be put in that way in such a manner as to command the attention and sympathy of the House of Commons; and I don't say that a resolution might not be carried recommending the case to the consideration of the government. Then, of course, all would depend on the action of the government.'

'In other words,' Monsignor Valmy said, 'it would depend on who were the government.'

'Precisely.'

There was a pause full of meaning. The same thought was in the minds of each of the men.

'Yes,' said Lord Stonehenge, with a sudden vivacity of emphasis, 'it would all depend on who were the men in the government; I mean on who was the man at the head of the government.'

Bellarmin understood clearly. He thought it would be well to let his listeners know that he understood.

'Now,' he said, slowly, 'we are on the eve of a crisis of some sort. Everyone is agreed upon that, and what everyone says does now and then happen to be true; at least, it is unsafe to count on its never coming true. I don't think it would be well to bring up this claim under unfavourable circumstances. Better wait a little, perhaps. Our modern Tories have utterly forsworn or forgotten all memory of their ancient traditions and the King over the Water. The more stolidly Tory they are the more inveterately they are opposed to any recognition of a—well—a past condition of things. It would not be of much use trying on anything under them. But suppose there should be a change of government?'

'Yes,' Monsignor Valmy observed, quietly, 'suppose there should be.'

'There may be before long,' Lord Stonehenge said, significantly.

'In other words,' Bellarmin said, taking a long puff at his cigarette, and sending the smoke out before him straight as the path of a bullet; 'suppose Sir Victor Champion were to come into office?'

'As prime minister?' Monsignor Valmy inquired, blandly.

'As prime minister—yes. I suppose he will either come in as prime minister or not come in at all.'
In that case, Lord Stonehenge, Monsignor Valmy asked, with a tone of ingenuous curiosity, 'how do you think Sir Victor Champion would be affected towards these claims?'

In that case, Stonehenge answered, gravely, 'I should hope favourably—after a while, at least.'

Yes, said Bellarmin, meditatively. The answer he had received was exactly what he had expected. Their hopes were centred on Champion.

Will Champion carry the country with him? Monsignor Valmy asked, still in a tone of simple artlessness.

In what? Bellarmin rejoined, with manner equally guileless.

Monsignor Valmy smiled.

For myself, Lord Stonehenge said, abruptly, with the air of one who comes daringly to what others are only thinking of, 'I would much rather see the House of Lords reformed than reorganised—and reformed or reorganised by its friends than by its enemies. Champion has a highly cultivated mind, and he has a deep vein of sympathy in his nature. I prefer Champion as a reformer to—to Mr Tressel, for instance.'

The priest gave a little shudder.

The plain common sense of the thing, then, said Bellarmin, 'is that we should keep these claims quiet until we see whether Sir Victor Champion is likely to come into power soon.'

May I ask who are understood by "we?" General Falcon demanded, angrily.

We? Well, I meant those who are anxious to see justice done to Miss Beaton's claims, Bellarmin answered, with perfect good humour.

I was delighted to hear Mr Bellarmin include himself in the number, put in Monsignor Valmy.

So was I, added Lord Stonehenge, with a courteous bend of the head to Bellarmin.

Only I did not quite understand, said Falcon, not altogether appeased. There was a pause. Lord Stonehenge broke it.

We were thinking of something of that kind—of waiting quietly until we see what Champion will do, and what will happen. But we are not what are called practical politicians—Monsignor Valmy and I—and I am sure General Falcon would be very angry with me if I were to call him a practical politician.

I am a soldier, said General Falcon.

Exactly, Monsignor Valmy rejoined, sweetly. 'And I am a priest. We are neither of us qualified to advise Lord Stonehenge on a question of practical politics, and so we are all grateful for Mr Bellarmin's advice.'

Apparently the matter was regarded as settled. The claims were bound up for the present with the fortunes of Sir Victor Champion's next move, whatever that might turn out to be.

Bellarmin removed his cigarette from his mouth, and thoughtfully laid down the smouldering end. He looked round the little group.

I should like to ask one thing; I ask it in all sincerity and
faith, and with the fullest friendliness. These claims—these particular claims—are an end, and not a means?

The priest, who had been gazing abstractedly out on the lake, the clear-cut outline of his ascetic features defined against the dim, leafy background, turned to Bellarmin with a ray of keen interest lighting his face into a look of less other-worldliness.

'Do we quite understand?' he asked, softly.
'I don't understand,' Falcon exclaimed, bluntly.

Lord Stonehenge turned to Bellarmin.

'Do you mean, Mr Bellarmin, that these claims are all that we consider ourselves, on Miss Beaton's part, entitled to make—that on their being satisfied we are prepared to give a receipt in full? If this is what you mean—yes; certainly.' Nevertheless, Lord Stonehenge sighed as he spoke; and the spirit of his ancestors, loyal to the death to Stuarts of old time, seemed to glow in his refined Vandyke face. 'These money claims are final,' he went on, in a tone of determined resignation. 'We have no other money claims to make. The princess—Miss Beaton—only wants what is her own by right.'

'Yes; all that I quite understand. But what I would ask is, whether there is any idea of making these claims a sort of test of public feeling as to other possible claims—I am sure you understand my meaning. Believe me, such an idea would end in nothing but utter disaster, ridicule, and disgrace.'

'Disgrace!' Falcon cried, his eyes aflame with wrath.

'Yes, General Falcon,' Bellarmin replied, turning to him with some warmth; 'disgrace to the advisers who ruined a just claim, and exposed to public odium the noblest of—clients'—he was going to say 'women,' but somehow he preferred to leave the sex out of the question—'the noblest of clients, by mixing both up with absurd and hopeless dynastic intrigues.'

Monsignor Valmy's pale, delicate complexion seemed to deepen a little in the moonlight as Bellarmin spoke these words. Lord Stonehenge remained quite self-possessed.

'Mr Bellarmin,' he said, 'is naturally afraid of being mixed up with a Stuart restoration scheme in the nineteenth century.'

'No, indeed,' Bellarmin broke in, warmly. 'I was not thinking of myself—I could go into a scheme or keep out of it, just as I thought best to do. I was not thinking of danger—of real danger—for—for anybody. I was thinking of ridicule. I was thinking of public odium—so hard for a woman to bear.'

The sex which he would fain have kept out of the controversy here boldly asserted itself, and came in.

'I was thinking of all that, and of the inevitable ruin of these very claims themselves, no matter how just they may be. That is what I was thinking of, Lord Stonehenge.'

Again there was a pause; and through the silence of the arbour there floated the sound of Mary Beaton's laugh as she chatted with the young prince—that sweet, frank laugh, which, with all its sweetness and its girlishness, had in it an imperious ring. Involuntarily, at its sound, the men moved forward a little—all except the priest, and he remained still with that bland, inquiring smile on his
thin lips, as if there were in his mind no thought of the girl round whom centred these curious out-of-date suggestions of conspiracy and revolution. They could see the boat as it lay like a fairy skiff on the shining lake, and the slim youth with his picturesque Spanish face, and the slender, proud, bright maiden, whose dark wavy hair and contour of feature and smile and gesture seemed to have in them something traditional, which woke in the mind memories of Holyrood, and of reckless, winsome Mary Stuart. How out of keeping with the commonplace fret, the vulgar rush and scurry of nineteenth-century existences, were these two living representatives of dead dynasties! It had an odd bewildering effect—this spell of the past. Bellarmin felt a tightening of his heart, he scarcely knew why; and then a rush of impetuous desire to bear her away from it all—from the network of scheming and calculations and false hopes and associations that were at once tragic and poetic and absurd. He longed to sweep away the glamour of her Stuart ancestry, the poor pretence of princess-ship, and to appeal to her bravely, honestly, as the tender, true-hearted, simple English girl that she was—that, and nothing else. For it had come to this with Bellarmin in certain moods of reaction, when the other wilder passion lost its sway over him. These thoughts were moving him to the very depths of his being while Lord Stonehenge said, gently,—

'I quite understand, Mr Bellarmin. I didn't put my meaning well—at least, I certainly did not mean to say that you were concerned about yourself. What I meant was that you were afraid some unwise political schemes—or dynastic schemes, if you like—might be astir. But you may be quite reassured. Monsignor Valmy and I—and General Falcon, of course—are sane men.'

'Leave me out!' Falcon exclaimed, impatiently. 'I would go my own way if I could.'

Bellarmin made a movement as if he would pull himself out of dreamland, a gesture not lost upon Falcon.

'You see,' Bellarmin said. 'There was some ground for my misgivings, after all.'

'None whatever,' General Falcon retorted. 'I would go my own way if I could—but I can't; and I understand that as well as any practical politician who ever lived. Only I don't want to be taken as approving of every arrangement which I accept just because I can't have any other.'

Monsignor Valmy interposed,—

'It is not easy, perhaps, for Mr Bellarmin to realise our position. We have nothing to renounce—I mean, there is nothing which it is in our power to renounce. No declaration on her part could make the princess—could make Miss Beaton—other than what she is. Suppose she were to say that she renounced being a woman—would she not be a woman all the same? Suppose you were to say you renounced your right to be your father's son, would you be any less the son of your father?'

'All that I can quite understand, looking at it from your point of view—of course mine is quite different.'

'With you it is only like the case of a man who withdraws from
the candidature for the presidency of the United States, or the office of Lord Mayor of London," Lord Stonehenge suggested, with a quiet smile.

'Well, yes, if you like to put it in that way—yes, I believe in the right of a people to choose its own chief magistrate, whether for perpetuity or for four years or one year.'

'And you a Tory!'

'A Tory Democrat,' Monsignor Valmy suavely interposed.

'A Tory who believes that the world goes round, and that something must come of the discovery of the electric light,' Bellarmin said. 'But what I was going to say was, that I quite understand your principle, and that I greatly respect it. All that I want to impress on you is this—I am only talking now of parliamentary affairs; it would be absurd of me to offer you advice in any other matters—I only want to impress upon you that your last chance for your real claims—excuse me, I mean your money claims—would be gone with the House of Commons—gone with Sir Victor Champion—gone with any and every English statesman, if the claims were accompanied with the faintest—the very faintest—whisper of dynastic intrigues or even hopes.'

'There are no intrigues,' Lord Stonehenge said, slowly and distinctly; 'none whatever. I think I may tell you also, Mr Bellarmin, that to men like Monsignor Valmy and myself there are no hopes within the range of any horizon that the eyes of our intellect can compass. If the right order of things is ever to be restored, it will not be in our time.'

'It will be in Heaven's time,' Monsignor Valmy said, bending his head.

'We of this day and generation can do nothing.'

'That is quite enough,' Bellarmin replied, gravely. 'You have satisfied all my scruples and fears. Pray forgive my bluntness; I had to ask these questions.'

Even while they were speaking, General Falcon had abruptly quit the pavilion. It was evident that even if he had no hopes, he was not willing to admit the fact. Bellarmin was the first to observe that he had gone. Bellarmin said nothing then on the subject; but in his mind the ways of Falcon boded trouble.

To Mary Beaton also Falcon's manner seemed ominous. In truth, she had been puzzled and vexed by his fitful moods of late, his strange alternations of capricious fault-finding and jealous affection. It was a relief sometimes to turn to Lord Stonehenge, in whom she always found a grave, respectful devotion and care for her interests, which in many ways appeared more abstract than personal. She had come to rely upon him in an undemonstrative fashion almost more than upon any other of her counsellors, and the thought had flashed through her mind several times during the past week or two that if she were in any real difficulty, it would be to Lord Stonehenge that she would apply for advice.

He was waiting for her alone at the little landing-place when the skiff shot to shore, and the young Prince of Saragossa, with his exaggerated air of deference, bent on one knee to the ground, and held the boat steady while Mary Beaton stepped on land.
‘Madame,’ said Stonehenge, ‘I think that you have been long enough out of doors. There is a mist rising, and we must be careful of your health.’

‘It is you!’ exclaimed Mary. ‘I thought that solitary figure could only be Falcon, waiting to rebuke me for my misdeeds. Has he commissioned you to scold me? Now I am sure that you have all been talking politics and discussing my claims, and the rest. And Mr Bellarmin took the sober nineteenth-century, House-of-Commons view of the matter; and my poor general was indignant, and went off in wrath! Wasn’t it so?’

‘We were discussing your claims, madame.’

‘And you all quarrelled over them?’

‘No; we did not quarrel. We came to the conclusion that it was best to let them rest, as far as Parliament is concerned, till a prime minister came in who would give them his sympathy and support, and that may be before long.’

‘And the prime minister will be Sir Victor Champion! I think I can count upon his sympathy, if I can count on nothing else. Well, it was a wise conclusion to come to, Lord Stonehenge; but I am afraid it did not suit General Falcon’s temper, which seems irritated against us all—myself included. Then he went away in anger, and he left you as his deputy to give me my scolding. I am quite accustomed to be found fault with, and made angry, so that you need not have any scruples about beginning.’

‘Madame, I could not be so presumptuous, unless anything serious—if it were a question of your safety; and then—’

‘And then?’ repeated Mary, looking up at him as she moved on by his side.

‘And then, madame,’ he said, in a tone very unusual in him, ‘I think it would be easier to die for you than to make you angry.’

She felt the thrill of his emotion; it alarmed and bewildered her a little. Was he, too, becoming melodramatic? She glanced up at him again in a troubled way, and her voice changed as she answered, with an attempt to speak lightly,—

‘One at least of your name, Lord Stonehenge, vowed his life to the service of a Stuart, and he gave it up at Newbury. I was looking at his portrait yesterday, and do you know that your face and his are very much alike? But those days are past,’ she added, ‘happily for you and for me.’

‘Their spirit lives yet,’ said Stonehenge, ‘and it will endure in me so long as my life endures.’

He stopped and gazed at her solemnly, she, too, standing still. A shaft of moonlight pierced the thick foliage of a little grove through which they were passing to the house, and fell upon Mary’s fair face and noble form. The white scarf had dropped from her head, but she held it loosely with her two hands interlaced at her breast. Stonehenge bent forward, and, taking one of her hands in his, stooped low over it, and touched it with his lips.

‘Madame,’ he said, with an old-world chivalry which might
have beffitted the cavalier who had fallen at Newbury, 'this is my act of homage to the queen and to the woman. In all faith and sincerity I lay my heart and my life at your feet. They are yours to do with what you will.'

The young girl started and crimsoned deeply, and the tears gathered in her eyes. She hardly realised the meaning of his words; she only felt that he was intensely in earnest. She did not know whether this was a part of the fantastic dream—the romantic fealty of subject to sovereign, which even in these prosaic times seemed the birthright of Stuart blood—the rich breath of perfume from the still unfading white rose; or was it the red rose of love which was held out to her—the mere every-day offer of marriage from man to woman? She could have wept aloud in the feeling of strangeness and loneliness and odd humiliation that came over her. What was she that this man should rate her so high? Would he feel the same to her if she were only Mary—Mary, with no noble name, no historic lineage? Was she any better off; after all, in her sham royalty than the princesses who never knew what it was to be loved for themselves alone?

'Lord Stonehenge,' she cried, impulsively, 'why do you think of me like that? I'm not a queen; and I can't accept your life, or—anything except your friendship, and that I do value with my whole heart. It is more to me than even you perhaps could understand.'

'I feel glad and happy to hear you say that,' he answered, quietly. 'Since friendship is the name you prefer, we will call it so; but, madame, I want you to know fully that everything else is included. What I call it does not matter to you, and need never cause you a moment's responsibility or uneasiness, since in future it will not be for me to ask, but for you to demand, or to bestow if you think good. That is the privilege of queens, you know,' he added, with a gentle laugh.

They walked on for a few moments in silence, and then, as if determined that she should feel no doubt or embarrassment, he resumed his ordinary manner, and began to tell her the subject of their conversation in the pavilion.

'I don't understand General Falcon,' said Mary, thoughtfully; 'his manner is so strange and variable. In truth,' she went on, 'I do not know what he wants of me—or for me. I sometimes fancy, Lord Stonehenge, that he is so anxious to have these money claims settled because, living in London, we are spending more than we ought, and getting to the end of our resources.'

'Oh, no, madame,' interposed Stonehenge, hastily. 'Surely you need not be troubled about that!'

'It does not trouble me, even if it were the case. I don't suppose that I shall come to the workhouse, anyhow. And what right have I to be better off than thousands of poor creatures? What does make me unhappy sometimes is that I seem to have so little to give away. I see so much misery, and I can do nothing to remedy it.'

Mary sighed deeply. They entered the house just then; Lady Struthers, heroically waiting her young mistress's pleasure, was
nodding in the inner hall in company with the Reverend Dr Amblaine, whom the bonds of courtesy still detained.

The poor priest found no sympathetic soul in Lady Struthers, but he had talked to her about his beloved books all the same, and had accepted the receipt for a cough mixture which had benefited an hereditary prince. And then he had watched her as she nodded, and had pondered upon the emptiness of an existence such as hers. Mary Beaton, graver than was her wont, bade them good-night, and went at once to her own apartments.

CHAPTER XVII.

‘WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE ME DO?’

MARY BEATON came down to breakfast the next morning apparently in as light spirits as at dinner the previous evening. She chattered frivolously to Bellarmin, and playfully abused him for acting the Tory and being at heart the Radical. She, too, had determined that her manner should give no indication of any serious thought about him, either personal or political, and if occasionally they both relapsed from their prescribed parts, it was only when they were alone, and, so to speak, off their guard. She teased the Prince of Saragossa, and rallied Falcon upon his unsociability in a way that certainly did not tend to put that veteran into good-humour. To the two priests and Lord Stonehenge she was quite different—womanly, sweet, and faintly deferential. It was as if she wished the priests to understand that she revered their office, and to convey to Lord Stonehenge that his curious outburst of the night before had made no impression upon her, except to increase her friendly regard.

This was not quite the case, however. Mary had passed a perturbed night, and was putting some strain upon herself this morning. Of course she knew now that it rested with her to become Lord Stonehenge’s wife. She had no thought of being his wife. She had never considered such a prospect as within the range of things possible to her. But she was touched, nevertheless—the more touched because he had wooed her so delicately, and in such courtier-like fashion. She knew that he would never definitely press his suit; and he had so phrased it as to leave her the choice of accepting his true meaning. He had given her to understand that it was for her if she pleased to stretch out her hand to him, as might a queen whose rank did not permit her lover to approach her on equal terms; and he had also made it clear to her that if she did not choose to regard him in the light of a lover, she had the right to demand, and it would be his joy to tender, the loyalty and devotion of a subject. Such chivalrous homage, far-fetched though it might be, was well calculated to thrill the heart of a young girl with womanly pride and tender exultation.
A little later, Falcon, with much formality, requested an audience. Mary bade him come to her in the boudoir of the suite of apartments which Stonehenge, with much forethought and study of her fancies, had caused to be arranged for her use. She was tired, and a little overwrought and preoccupied, and in no mood for his querulous reproaches on her thoughtless way of talking, her want of dignity, her failure to appreciate the gravity of the occasion, and the necessity for ruling her conduct in such a manner as to further the objects they had in view, instead of retarding them.

'You have not come to Stonehenge Park for a mere holiday, madame,' said Falcon, in a tone severe as though he were chiding a naughty schoolgirl. 'It is not only for amusement that the guests under this roof have been brought together.'

'Indeed, general, there seems to me little likelihood of amusements under this roof, or any other, while you represent the skeleton at the feast. I thought that when people went out of town for the Whitsuntide recess they usually called it a holiday.'

'You understand my meaning perfectly, madame. You were not so blind to your interests when we first came to London.'

'To judge by your manner, General Falcon,' retorted Mary, 'I did not seem to play my part any more to your satisfaction in London than I appear to do here.'

'Oh, I wish you would play a part—any part that pleases you, so long as you choose it and keep to it, madame,' replied Falcon, gruffly. 'But you act a dozen different parts a day, just as the humour takes you.'

'Assign me a part then, my good Falcon, and I'll do my very best to play it, and to keep to it for the whole of this day.'

'I want you to impress that young man Bellarmin more than you do. He is a rising man, they tell me, and he might do service. He seems well inclined.' Mary glanced at Falcon in surprise; there seemed to her something covert, dangerous in his tone—a sort of studied self-repression. He corrected himself. 'I don't like him,' exclaimed the old man, with a sudden gesture that betrayed more than the words. 'I suffer when I see him with you, my princess,' he went on, with something of pathetic appeal. 'It wounds me; it offends me; it is sometimes more than I can bear.'

'You—general?' began Mary, falteringly. 'How—what would you have me do?'

'My liking or my disliking is not to the point,' Falcon answered, resuming his former tone. 'Everything, everything of that sort should be subservient to your interest. We are playing a game—a great political game.'

'So you have often told me,' said Mary, wearily; 'and in good truth, general, I am tired of the pastime.'

'That is how you regard it! Yes! Crowns, hearts, fortunes, the divine rights which you have inherited from your ancestors—what are they to you? Only a part of the pastime, which you relished at first, and which is now becoming tiresome to you!' He paused for a moment. Mary stood silent—conscience-
stricken perhaps. ‘Madame, I want you to impress this young man, whose political influence can be turned to our service. You have your part to play towards him, as towards Champion, Tressel—the rest. Is it too much to ask that you will play it becomingly?’

A demure little smile flickered on Mary’s lips. She said, with a spark of girlish mischief, ‘I had a faint hope, general, that I was making some sort of impression on Mr Bellarmin.’

‘Is that your sense of what is befitting for you?—you! that you should act the schoolgirl—the hoyden; run about the garden at night, play silly pranks; sing music hall songs—’

Mary flushed a deep crimson. She drew herself up in as stately a fashion as he could have wished. ‘Now, General Falcon, you go too far. We have had enough of this.’

‘Madame, if I go too far, as you say, it is because, for the sake of your dignity, I dare to make you angry. I speak, at least, with the authority which was committed to me by your father.’

Any illusion to her dead parents instantly turned the current of Mary Beaton’s displeasure. ‘Well?’ she said, in a softer tone. ‘But speak gently; and remember—’ she hesitated and smiled again, this time sadly—‘remember that I am only a girl.’

‘Madame,’ he replied, not noticing her last words, ‘you know what I mean. The pretty levity which might very fittingly attract a man of Sir Victor Champion’s age and great qualities and renown, and to which in that case I have nothing to say, would be out of place with a man so much younger, so much less distinguished. I want you to impress Mr Bellarmin with the sense of your position; of your personal dignity as well as the dignity which you inherit. I want you to show yourself a princess, the descendant of a line of kings. He comes of the middle-class, that hateful English middle-class! They respect only those who look down on them and keep them at a distance. A man must be a gentleman—more, an aristocrat, to understand that a princess may be friendly with him and remain a princess still.’

‘Mr Bellarmin seems to me a very perfect gentleman,’ said Mary. ‘Quite a chivalrous sort of youth, and on the old feudal pattern. Is that English middle-class? Well, I approve of English middle-class. And Sir Victor Champion, he is not middle-class then, since I am to be permitted a touch of levity in my manner to him?’

‘You wilfully misunderstand and mock at me. Levity is too strong a word. I should not have used it. You have a certain manner—ah, I know its charm!—a girlish impulsiveness, which to a statesman of mature years would be but a delicate compliment, a condescension—’

‘I see. Rank may stoop to elderly renown. But tell me, I am curious, is Sir Victor Champion middle-class?’

‘He comes of the middle-class. Yes.’

‘Then through all my condescension, I must impress him too with a sense of my dignity?’

‘You must, madame. I especially request it.’
'What would You have Me do?'

'Observe, I want to learn my part, which seems a complicated and rather contradictory one. Is there anybody else, General Falcon, to whom I may be affable, or must be haughty—anyone who is to be impressed with a sense of my dignity?'

'Yes, there is, madame—one for whom it is far more needed than for any other.'

'Indeed, dear Falcon; and who may that person be!'

'Yourself, madame.'

Mary laughed, gleefully.

'I thought we were coming to that,' she said. 'Well, now, what about Lord Stonehenge?' Her voice faltered a little; she gave him a furtive glance from beneath her drooped lashes. 'How am I to comport myself with regard to him? He is an aristocrat, I suppose you will concede that, and equal to drawing subtle distinctions. Is it to be a case of dignity or impudence?'

'Madame?'

'Don't be shocked. I was only alluding to the name of a picture—Landseer's—don't you remember?'

'No, madame, I don't,' said Falcon, decisively, with the air of one who turns the picture to the wall. 'But I wanted to speak to you about Lord Stonehenge. I am glad you brought up his name.'

'I am glad I did anything right, general. Well?'

'Play off Champion, and—yes—and this young Bellarmin, against Stonehenge and the priests,' Falcon said, with a sudden vehemence that almost startled Mary, accustomed as she was to his changing moods. 'Let Stonehenge see that you have other friends.'

'I don't understand you at all this time, my good Falcon. Tell me what you do mean?'

'I don't distrust Lord Stonehenge,' Falcon said, hurriedly; 'I don't wish you to distrust him; but we must show him that we have other friends. About these money claims he is of no use at all. He can't be of any use. We must look to Champion for that. Lord Stonehenge had better get to know that, and be reminded that there are higher claims that not he, nor any man on earth, must talk of compromising.'

'General Falcon,' Mary spoke very gravely, 'I cannot understand why you speak in such a way of Lord Stonehenge. If any woman ever had a true friend, I have one in Lord Stonehenge. Do you think I don't know that? He is as true to me as—as yourself.' She turned on him a searching, half-alarmed look, which seemed to disconcert Falcon, for he lowered his eyes to the ground. 'I will play no part with him—or—with anybody. I will be myself; what God made me. Princess or no princess, what do I care? Ah, yes, I do care! Do not be afraid, general, that I shall act in any way unworthy of my Stuart blood. I will keep my own self-respect. I will not stoop to intrigue or double-dealing. I am a Stuart, yes—but I am an honest English girl, and—and—I will not play off Mr Bellarmin against Lord Stonehenge, or Lord Stonehenge against Mr Bellarmin; or Sir Victor against either. Oh, you make things too hard for me! Is there nothing due to
myself? Am I to have no consideration? Because I am a Stuart, and have claims and rights which, sometimes, Heaven forgive me! seem as shadowy and unreal as if I were a stage princess and nothing more—because of these, am I not to be allowed the rights and the feelings that other girls have? No, I can't bear it. I will not have it, Falcon—'

Tears gushed from Mary's eyes, and an hysterical sob choked her voice. She waved her hand in an agitated manner, in sign that Falcon should leave her.

He bent on his knee at her feet, and kissed the hand with which she was dismissing him.

'Oh, my queen!' he exclaimed, passionately. 'It is because you are the girl, the woman, that I seem hard with you; because you are so adorable—because—Oh, how can I explain? Mary, forgive me. Have patience with me.'

'I forgive you, general, if I have anything to forgive,' said Mary, recovering herself at the sight of his agitation. 'But I am tired and a little overdone, and I am weary of all this talk about playing parts and securing allies. Let me be for the present; and when I am enjoying the roses and the moonlight, and—and Don José's fun, don't frown upon me and poison all my harmless pleasure. It's only for a few days, general. Let me be happy for a few days.'

He left her; and for the rest of that day was soft and tender in his manner as she could wish.

'I fancy "the zeal of your house has eaten him up,"' said Bellarmin.

He spoke of General Falcon, whose moody manner had been the subject of discussion; if, indeed, that could be called discussion in which Mary's part consisted only of constrained and embarrassed answers. They were walking alone together in the grounds of Stonehenge, and their footsteps had turned towards a little pine forest, not far from the house, which was one of Mary's favourite resorts. Mary was grave, and seemed depressed. Bellarmin was grave, too. Sir Victor Champion was to arrive that day. He was concerned also on Mary's account. He feared that her poor little project would only break to pieces among all the schemes that were going on; and he was daily growing to have been more and more distrust of the discretion of General Falcon.

There was a little summer-house standing on the green moss just at the pinewood's edge.

'Let us go in,' Mary said, abruptly: 'I want to sit in that summer-house; it is of bark, and it reminds me of Karl August's summer-house of bark—that Goethe was so fond of—in the park at Weimar. Don't you remember?'

'No, I never was at Weimar.'

'How strange? Why don't you go at once?'

He did not particularly want to go anywhere, at the time, away from the spot where they were standing.

'I am so busy with politics,' he said; 'I am tied to London.'
He spoke almost sullenly. He was a little vexed with her for dropping the subject of Falcon. She seemed to guess his thoughts, for she said, in a meditative but resolute manner, as she sat down on one of the bark seats,—

'Yes, I know it. Indeed I am afraid Falcon makes a conscience out of me. He compels himself to believe that whatever is of advantage to me is the right thing to do. I almost think I could make him run away from a battle if I could only appear at the critical moment and tell him that it would interfere with my plans if he did not instantly quit the field. It is very serious having the soul of a grown man thus on one's conscience.'

'I have an instinctive impression that General Falcon doesn't like me,' Bellarmin said. 'I am sorry, for I wanted to like him. He hardly takes any pains to conceal his dislike.'

'Oh! that is it? He thinks you are too light and frivolous, I fancy,' Miss Beaton said, with an evident effort to seem unconcerned. 'And then I don't suppose he takes much to anyone who interests or amuses me. He has not really any conscientious objection to my being amused; but he thinks I ought to be amused in a more queenly sort of way. I should not be surprised if he were to get it into his mind that you abet me in my frivolity instead of discouraging me. But, pray, don't try to win his affections by joining with him to discourage me. Life is in general a very melancholy piece of business, Mr Bellarmin. The sadness seems to peep out upon us from all sides, as something gruesome appears to do sometimes when we are walking in the dark—don't you know? And I think we want every help to get us out of the gloom and the morbidness as often as we can. At least I find it so,' she said, with a half-suppressed sigh.

'Yet surely life must have been very bright and happy for you?' Bellarmin said, in a tone of the deepest interest.

'You think so? Why?' said Mary, turning upon him with a sort of mournful solemnity. 'Because my mother died when I was only a child; because my father died when I was only a girl; because I have no kith or kin who are in any true way dear to me; because I have to live the life of a sham princess; because I am surrounded by a tiny mock court; because I have to do the things I don't want to do, and can hardly ever do any of the things I want to do; because I have always been walled about with forms and ceremonies; and because I know that I am a centre of all manner of plans and schemes which are not likely to come to anything; because I hardly ever knew any young people, or could talk to other girls freely; because—oh, a lot of other becauses, which I don't mean to run through? If all this means happiness, then indeed, God-a-mercy! I am the very happiest young woman in England!'

Bellarmin was infinitely touched by her words, which seemed to him but the echo of some of his own thoughts. He was impressed, too, by the evidence of the clear good sense and reasonableness which her little speech contained. It broke down all the barriers of reserve he had set up within himself. 'Madame,' he said, with a certain diffidence, and yet with impulsive earnest-
ness, 'may I speak to you a little freely? You will not take
offence at what I say?'

She fixed her deep, soft eyes on him. ‘Yes; say what you like,
Mr Bellarmin. I know you would not say anything which was
meant to wound or to vex me. I am not a woman to take offence
at the words of a friend.'

'It is this: why allow yourself to be employed in these
visionary schemes? Why keep chasing a phantom? You must
have seen for yourself long ago that there is no chance, no hope,
or even ghost of a chance. Why waste away the sweetest years
of your life in an ambition which can come to nothing, and which
I don't believe is your ambition at all?'

'And it is Mr Bellarmin who speaks to me in this way,'she
said, with a dreamy, far-off look in her eyes; 'Mr Bellarmin, of
whom his friends and his enemies alike say that he is the most
ambitious man in England?'

'Do they say that of me?' Bellarmin asked, with a shadow
coming over his face. He would have wished her just then to
think of him as made for something better than mere political
ambition.

'Yes; they say that of you. They say that you threw in your
fortunes with the Tory Party because you thought there were
much better chances for a man of talent or genius, or whatever it
is, with the Tories than with the Liberals. See how I have
learned your political gossip and your political vocabulary already!
Yes; they do say that; and do you know, Mr Bellarmin, I was
rather attracted by it. It seemed interesting; the idea of the
young man thus letting his ambition go its own way. If I were a
man, I should be in your House of Commons. It seems to me
the only place left now where the honourable ambition of a man of
spirit can find outlet or goal. And you preach to me against
ambition!'

'I am not so ambitious as I was,' he said, slowly; 'at least, in
the same sort of way. I think differently about some things; I
have altered my standard of value; I shall perhaps alter it more
and more. Besides, even if I were acting only out of mere
ambition, it is an ambition which has clear, practical objects before
it—objects that one might in reason hope to attain.'

'And mine has none such,' she said, gravely. 'I understand
what you mean. But you don't quite know what my secret
ambition really was. Shall I tell you? From my childhood up,
those around me kept telling me I was like Mary Stuart. Well, it
became my pride to be like her; my one ambition to be more and
more like her. Yes; you can't know, you couldn't know, how this
ambition filled my soul, and governed almost every movement I
made. To be like Mary Stuart; to captivate hearts of women as
well as men, just as she did; to be a great politician like her—
even to go to the scaffold like her—that was my dream. It was
charming enough over there, when one was a sort of star of a
small court, and had nobody near but those who flattered one's
vanity, and taught one to believe in one's self. But here—well,
one learns a different lesson. It is like coming straight from the
"What would you have me do?"

What would you have me do? dream of the morning into the cold, hard life of a London street, where you are jostled by a whole crowd, and known by nobody. My dream is over.

As she stood up, and let her hands fall by her sides with the gesture of one who dismisses an illusion for ever, she looked more like Mary Stuart than she had ever seemed to Bellarmin before. His soul was filled with sympathy, with pity, with intense admiration.

'From that dream,' he said, softly, 'who could wish to rouse you? Not I, at least. But the other illusion, why encourage it—why keep it up? It can only end in the most utter disappointment; even, perhaps, disaster.'

She turned upon him vehemently, passionately.

'What would you have me do?' she asked.

'Live here in England, and be happy, since you like the place. Give up all the appearance and the retinue of a court—the sham royalty; drop the part of exiled princess—you don't seem to like it, or to believe in it any more than I do; meet society as an Englishwoman, as the daughter of an English peer—as what you are. You will find in English life all you want—all that even ambition can want; and you will have the sense of being real.'

She smiled, a rather wan and melancholy smile.

'Yes, they are right, Mr Bellarmin. You are an ambitious man. Perhaps all men are like that in one way or another. Don't you notice that you have not appealed to me by one single word which did not concern my personal ambition or my personal feelings of some kind? Why did you not tell me that if I settled down to the quiet life of a London lady I might have plenty of opportunities of doing some good for the poor and the miserable, about whom you have so often heard me lamenting? I suppose you suspected that there was nothing very deep and lasting in the tone of the lamentation—that it was of the same order of sentiment as my sham Mary Stuartism, and my sham pretensions to the place of a princess. But, do you know, I think you were wrong; I think you judged me wrongly. I think if anyone could show me how I could better serve some unhappy human creatures, I might be glad to give up my way of life and my claims and my aerial royalty, and to live and die a benevolent old maid. There, I have been talking enough about myself, and enough of nonsense—for once; and see, Mr Bellarmin, there is Sir Victor Champion.'

The statesman was coming towards them in the company of Lord Stonehenge and Monsignor Valmy. He was deep in conversation with the priest, and his fine intellectual head, with its clear-cut features and rather long hair, was bent in grave interest. Both Mary and Bellarmin noted the firm elastic manner of his tread, his look of force and vitality, and the dominance which his whole bearing suggested.

'He is a great man,' said the girl, almost below her breath.

'Yes, he is a great man,' Bellarmin answered.

Sir Victor's face lighted with pleasure—and something more
than pleasure—at the sight of Mary Beaton. His manner of
greeting her was peculiar. He took her two hands in his as a
fatherly old friend might have done, but he bowed over them with
all the deference of a courtier.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE STONEHENGE NEGOTIATIONS.

It was perfectly well understood at Stonehenge that Sir Victor
Champion was to be pleased and conciliated. Nobody said this;
nobody distinctly gave it out; certainly neither Lord Stonehenge
nor Monsignor Valmy uttered a word on the subject to the
general company; but the purpose was afloat all the same. The
nearest approach to any open allusion to this policy was made
one morning by Stonehenge to Monsignor Valmy in one of the
libraries—the house had several libraries.

‘How does one best please a great man?’ Stonehenge asked,
as if abstractedly.

‘By making him think he is pleasing everybody,’ was the ready
and quiet answer.

Stonehenge smiled.

‘I believe you are right,’ he said; ‘but are there not great men
who don’t care to please?’

‘I never met one. Great men, like small men, get sour and
rough when they think they have not the art of pleasing. A man
must care for men before he can become a misanthrope.’

Everyone, according to Horace, drags his tail. Everyone,
according to the American politician’s expression, has his axe to
grind. There was some silent preparation for the grinding of
axes at Stonehenge. Lord Stonehenge’s icy integrity of purpose
did not in the least interfere to keep him out of this general grind­
ing operation. He was one of the men who will readily do, for a
cause, things which they would disdain to do for themselves. He
was therefore willing to go out of his way to conciliate Champion,
and even to conciliate Bellarmin, for the sake of Mary Beaton’s
claims. The money claims are, of course, understood; Lord
Stonehenge knew far more about Mary Beaton’s pecuniary affairs
than she did herself, and knew that her suspicion was correct; and
he knew that Falcon was playing a venturesome game, and that if
the money claims on the British government were not soon
acknowledged, the poor princess’s court and state dignity, such as
they were, must all too soon contract, or even collapse. He was
fully convinced of the moral and even the legal justice of the
claims, but he knew they would stand in need of vigorous and
clever parliamentary pushing. A man like Bellarmin might be
very useful; but a man like Sir Victor Champion would be invaluable.

Monsignor Valmy was of the same mind as Lord Stonehenge, and was prepared to assist him in his projects; but the priest's motives were not quite the same as those of his host. Monsignor Valmy was particularly anxious that Lord Stonehenge should marry. It was about time, he thought. Stonehenge was no longer young; Stonehenge's brother, who would succeed in the event of the elder having no son, was a good-for-nothing creature, a purposeless idler, and a man about town. Therefore Monsignor Valmy wanted Stonehenge to marry, and the dearest wish of his heart on that subject was that Stonehenge should marry Mary Beaton.

Sir Victor Champion came to Stonehenge Park very much because Mary Beaton had attracted him, and he wished to see more of her, but principally to have the opportunity of talking over Bellarmin. Bellarmin came to meet Mary Beaton because she had bidden him; not because he intended to be false to Lady Saxon's claim upon him—but perhaps because his conscience revolted against that claim, and Mary's influence was like a soothing anodyne. Mary had come to be amused, and she found, alas! that amusement was not precisely the object she had attained. She did not analyse her feelings, however, but allowed herself to drift as the current bore her. And Bellarmin did the same; and he relaxed his guard upon himself, and allowed his scruples to be lulled under the sweet charm of her society.

So these two young people grew into closer intimacy and companionship; and, almost unconsciously to both, neither of them looked forward with any great eagerness to Sir Victor's arrival. It seemed to Mary, somehow, that the best part of her holiday would be over; and Bellarmin found reason to believe, from what Mary had said to him, that Sir Victor would try to make a political convert of him. Lady Saxon had prepared him for this too; and he remembered his promise to her, and faithfully intended to keep it. But she had not given him to understand that Champion would go out of his way to make immediate overtures. The idea was a little embarrassing, but he could not run away. Indeed, he had no wish to run away, and he was only made uncomfortable by his own attitude of uncertainty and Sir Victor's coolness. Nor was his discomfort in any way diminished by the manner in which Sir Victor devoted himself to Mary, and the increasing gratification which—he told his vexed heart—Mary was learning to feel from the great statesman's attentions.

Certainly Sir Victor Champion was very much attracted by Mary Stuart Beaton; and certainly also no one suspected the true nature of the attraction less than Mary herself. Falcon observed it, and grew more and more silent and sullen; and Bellarmin noticed it and was jealous, though he told himself that he had no right to care; and Stonehenge saw it, and his manner to Sir Victor became even more courteous, and his manner to Mary even more gentle and friendly still. But the sadness in his refined face deepened; and there seemed in it a yet greater likeness to his
melancholy-featured ancestor who had given up his life for the king at Newbury.

To Mary, and even contrary to her expectations, Sir Victor's presence was a relief and a pleasure. She was a little wayward, this girl, and there had come upon her a vague reaction, after her innocent flirtation with Bellarmin. She felt so safe with Sir Victor, who was so much older than the rest, not very much younger than Falcon; for what difference is there between a man of forty-seven and a man of sixty-five in the eyes of a girl of twenty? And then the man who would be prime minister of England was upon a plane far removed from that occupied by the others. It did not occur to her that he might be looked upon as a possible suitor. She need not stand upon ceremony with him, or have any fear of giving cause for misconstruction. His great gifts and his important position in the service of his country justified her in granting him privileges to which even Falcon could not object. In this regard she had the pleasing consciousness that she was fulfilling Falcon's behests, and that in a way that was perfectly natural to her. She had got over her first little shyness with him. She even presumed sometimes to make a jest of his political prospects. "When you are prime minister, and busy abolishing the House of Lords, you won't have time to explain the British constitution to me," she would say, laughingly. But in the meanwhile she begged him to tell her all about the constitution, and about many other matters besides; and she would listen to him with the deepest attention, and would ask him sudden naive questions about the English court, and about the business of statecraft, and about the great measures he had helped to make law. Sometimes, too, they would talk seriously about legislation and the amelioration of national evils; and he would listen to her ignorant criticisms on life, which were withal so fresh to him, and encourage her to give out to him her crude enthusiasms with an interest and indulgence which would have made some of his political followers, anxious to get the ear of their chief for their own particular theories, turn pale with wrath and envy. Thus Mary found a constant and delightful companion in Sir Victor, and was innocently flattered by his attentions. She had perhaps visions of doing good, and of exercising a beneficent political influence; and she had already made him promise to go with her to visit her Southwark parish, that he might see for himself the poverty and the misery which she fancied he had never had time to look into; and he was going to help her in emigrating some of the starving artisans; and he was going to give consideration to the feasibility of providing food for the children who came breakfastless to the board schools, and went home with little prospect of a dinner. All this so filled her mind that she almost forgot the Stuart claims and the part she was expected to fulfil. Had she remembered, she might not have succeeded in playing her part so well.

There was a certain strain of mysticism and veneration in Champion's nature that struck a chord harmonious with that devotional tendency so marked in Mary Beaton, and which was perhaps an hereditary trait in her. To Sir Victor the society of
the priests was a source of peculiar pleasure. He liked to lead up to philosophical and metaphysical discussion, to talk of the development of creeds, to compare rather than to contrast the doctrines of schools, to endeavour to enter into the feelings of the worshipper of Pasht, and the self-suppression of the hermit in the Thebaid. Materialism was the only form of human belief or disbelief into which Champion found himself absolutely incapable of entering, which had for him no meaning, and won from him no sympathy. Monsignor Valmy also delighted in such subjects of discussion, and Champion found something strangely congenial in the strain of spiritual idealism which the ecclesiastic infused into his conversation. Monsignor Valmy's Catholicism was of the widest range; to one not of his own faith he rarely talked of creed, save in its most abstract sense. Men not of his own faith sometimes found fault with his very wideness of view and his comprehensive, candid tolerance of differing opinion. It was the arrogance of the Roman churchman, they would have it; he was so satisfied of the final triumph of his own Church that he already regarded every other human creature as one of the same fold, whether the other human creature would have it so or not. The gentle resignation and sweet piety of Dr Amblaine had, on the other hand, a soothing effect on the mind of the world-fretted statesman, and helped him the more to enjoy his holiday at Stonehenge. It was one of the peculiarities of Champion's complex nature that, iconoclast as he was supposed to be, iconoclast as indeed in one sense he was, his soul was suffused with the sentiment of reverence and religion.

One day Monsignor Valmy touched delicately on this seeming contradiction.

'Vet sounds strangely in my ears, Sir Victor,' he said, 'when I hear people talk of you as a man of revolutionary ideas. I always think of you as, in spirit, one of us—of us who believe in the Guiding Hand from above, in faith founded at the beginning of things, and in the divine order of the universe.'

'I understand you,' Champion said, musingly; 'I confess it is a thing by which my own mind has sometimes been vaguely puzzled. But you will not think me arrogant when I say that I believe the destroyer of the form is often he who is most profoundly reverent of the spirit. Would you not admit that something of the kind might be said of Pascal?—not that I am vain enough to compare myself with Pascal. It is the tendency of our progress, or what we call progress, to thicken and increase the outer layers which envelop the soul of a national or a religious institution, so that the inner light shows more and more dimly, until at last it ceases, to most eyes, to be visible at all. Then is the time for the reformer to rend and tear away; and while he is doing this, he seems no doubt to be putting the light out, but his only object is to let it blaze forth to the world again in all its pure and pristine brilliancy. I hold,' he went on, after a brief silence, during which the priest's eyes had been steadfastly fixed on his face—'I hold that the reformer is as much the product of previous causes and effects as the very condition of things it is his mission to destroy.
The Rival Princess.

He is but an instrument, and has no power of controlling the tendencies and the sometimes contradictory impulses which guide him this way or that, but always to a certain goal—unrecognised, it may be, even by himself. What seems a stupendous egotism may be but instinctive submission to a compelling destiny.'

'Yes,' answered Monsignor Valmy. 'Amid all our philosophies and attempts at solution of the many problems of life, it seems inevitable that the soul should fall back upon the idea of the Hebraistic God—the personal ruling divinity.'

'You are right,' said Champion. 'It is a strange feeling,' he went on, thoughtfully, his dark eyes dilating as they always did in moments of earnestness, 'to find one's self, after having tried to worship the Pantheistic God, as all with the artistic temperament are sure to do, in touch once more with the Hebraistic Deity of our childhood. Wasn't it Heine who said at the last, "The Pantheistic God is of no use"? One is forced, as you say, to submit to the idea of a celestial despotism—the edict given forth from above—and to the practice of a blind faith. The worst of it is, a horrible doubt whether our drafts of faith will be honoured. It does sometimes seem, in our disheartened moods, as though the Demiourgos had been permitted to make a world and were laughing at his own experiment; and it is this kind of mood, Monsignor Valmy, that the Church and its discipline alone can combat successfully.'

'We have the law from above, and the interpreter here below,' replied Valmy. 'It is often said that the discipline of the Church exercises a stultifying effect upon man's will. Not so; the object of discipline is to train and purify and eventually free the will, so that it becomes, in a sense, a separate entity. Sorrow, struggle, and experience are needed for this; and the spiritual education that the Church gives may be more rapid and effectual than that wrought through the illusions of life. Face to face with love and death—either in spirit or body—the Pantheistic God vanishes.' As he uttered the word 'love,' a certain far-off human emotion seemed to light the priest's thin ascetic countenance. He looked dreamily towards Bellarmin as he spoke. 'What support is there in flower or sunset, in forest glory or beauty of trackless sea, to the soul fighting in the open? "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" becomes its natural utterance in the hour of crisis.'

'What puzzles me most,' broke in Rolfe Bellarmin, who had come nearer during the discussion, 'what puzzles me most in the method of humanity's government is that process of education by illusion. It makes us sceptics at one stage or another. We go through so many phases that sometimes it is impossible to believe in the reality of any of our emotions. That's the most hurtful sort of scepticism, I think, and the most likely to make us feel that everything is chance, or that a devil has the management of affairs. Seems an odd form of education, don't it, which creates distrust in the whole scheme? I have sometimes got hold of a notion that our bodies are taken possession of now and then by wandering spirits, and that we die and are born again many times in our lives. One looks
back upon a love that is dead, a condition of mind that has completely altered, an enthusiasm that has vanished to the winds, and the remembrance of which only provokes a smile; and though there runs a certain slight thread of continuity through all, the man who passed through each of these stages is, without doubt, a different I.'

Bellarmin spoke with bitterness. He was thinking of experiences of his own.

'Ah!' began Mary Beaton, impetuously; 'I, too, have felt the same.'

She had come nearer also. It sometimes seemed as though Champion unconsciously exercised a sort of psychical influence, so that when he talked, those who were a little apart dropped their own conversation and drew towards him. The girl glanced at Bellarmin with quickened interest. They had been sitting together, and their talk had touched upon one subject after another in a vague, fugitive manner till, a little while before, they had subsided into silence. It was a rainy afternoon, and several of the party had collected in the vast hall, which was large enough for each one to pursue his or her separate avocation quite alone and apart if so inclined. The sound of falling drops on the glass dome overhead, the subdued light entering through stained windows, the oak-panelled walls and massive carved mantels, the dim faces of the portraits, the spectral suits of armour, and, indeed, the whole atmosphere of the place, produced a dreamy sense of languor, and a not disagreeable melancholy that was conducive to such a tone of conversation.

'I don't believe that we are ourselves,' the girl went on, in an eager tone; 'I mean that I half believe in the theory that we have all lived before, and that everything we do and think and say is just carrying on what we were in some former life—like a flower that springs up again when summer comes, the same that it was last summer, only that is another flower.'

'A new rose on the old stem,' said Monsignor Valmy, smiling indulgently upon her.

'Monsignor,' said Mary, turning to him in a reverential manner, 'I hope that you do not find anything heretical in my fanciful idea, which, after all, is so old and so much in people's minds now-a-days.

'The bosom of our Mother Church is great enough surely, and tender enough, to enfold all theories which, in darker ages, have brought troubled humanity nearer to the Divine Ruler,' replied Monsignor gravely. 'I have never thought of the theory of reincarnation as totally opposed to the divine revelation which we have received. It would, on the contrary, seem to throw some light upon difficult problems with which, however, we need not greatly concern ourselves, seeing that God has given us faith and light for our guidance in this present life, and the assurance of a most blessed spiritual condition when it is ended.'

The priest leaned back in his chair, and his eyes were lowered to the cross on his breast, as if he were silently communing with his soul. There was a little pause. Presently Champion said,
glancing from Miss Beaton's face to the portrait of Mary Stuart which hung near to where she was sitting, 'Madame's theory might certainly gain corroboration from that picture, and would open out a field of very romantic speculation.'

'At least,' said Stonehenge, who had come in a few moments before, 'it would go towards explaining that curious thread of destiny which seems to run through all human relationships, and which draws certain groups of persons together. Has it ever struck you, considering the inexhaustible capabilities of life, how limited is the sphere of each of us, and how, in spite of continual efforts that some of us make to change surrounding conditions, we are impelled by persons, associations, tendencies—all sorts of intangible but irresistible influences—to follow a course perhaps entirely opposed to our wishes and inclinations?'

'In fact,' said Champion, 'every group represents a psychological drama, for the dénouement of which we can only wait.' Then he branched off abruptly to discussion of the Greek Fate, and its influence upon later drama. 'Fate works on groups;' he said; 'never on one sole human being. Man is never alone with Fate; the Greeks understood this.'

Shut off from the outside world though they were, the little party found no lack of interest and amusement. A week passed very quickly, amid such surroundings as those of Stonehenge Park. They did not go out on the lake again after dinner; but it was discovered that the Reverend Dr Amblaine had a passion for the violoncello almost equal to that with which he cherished his books, and that Champion added to his varied gifts a fine, cultivated taste in music. So there were concerts every evening within doors. The Prince of Saragossa and Miss Beaton sang duets to the accompaniment of piano and violoncello; Lady Struthers performing on the former instrument, and the two young people representing an operatic scene in dramatic fashion. Then Mary's sweet, clear voice would sometimes break into a Border song or a melancholy Scotch ballad, and Champion himself was more than once caught joining in a spirited Jacobite chorus. Sometimes Bellarmin would steal out through the open window into the night, and from the shelter of a trellis of roses he would gaze into the lighted room and upon the fair face of Mary Stuart Beaton, as she stood by the piano, with her bosom gently heaving under the stiff brocaded bodice, and her soft brown eyes upraised and alight, and all her heart in the pathetic words of the well-known song which thrilled her listeners:

'Yest'r-e'en the Queen had four Maries,
The day she'll hae but three:
There was Mary Beaton, and Mary Seton,
And Mary Carmichael, and me.'

It was a mournful plaint, and the young girl's voice trembled with genuine emotion when she reached the last verse.

Somehow it hurt Bellarmin that anything so tragic should be associated with his bright, winsome Mary. The same thought must have been in Champion's mind, for he went up to her when she had ended and said with affectionate insistence,—
'Oh, do not sing that again while we are here! Do me this great favour. The feeling you put into it is too real. You ought to awaken only joyous memories. Our Mary Stuart shall recall no darksome suggestion of Holyrood. The brightness and the bloom shall be hers. Let the tragedy remain in the past.'

Notwithstanding his earlier designs, it is possible that Sir Victor was so much engrossed with Mary Beaton's society as to be willing to let all vulgar worldly considerations go by for the moment. Or, perhaps, with a certain epicurean thoroughness, which characterised his temperament where his pleasures were concerned, he wished to enjoy to the full the idyllic charm of this country visit without too hastily introducing a discordant element. It was enough to talk ecclesiasticism with Monsignor Valmy, literature with Stonehenge and Dr Amblaine, abstract Jacobitism with Falcon, and to explore the recesses of Mary's intelligent mind, without bringing practical politics to the fore—at anyrate, for a day or two. However that might have been, he did not rush at Bellarmin. He was extremely courteous and friendly to the young man, but nothing in his manner showed any desire for a private conference. Bellarmin began to think that Miss Beaton must have been mistaken, and that no purpose beyond that of enlisting Champion's sympathy in the question of the Stuart inheritance had been in anyone's mind. Perhaps he was, after all, just a little disappointed. He was not, then, so important a personage as people imagined.

Some two or three mornings after Sir Victor's arrival, Bellarmin was standing on the terrace looking vaguely over the trees and the lake and the whole landscape. He was moody and discontented, though he hardly dared to analyse his feelings; and he was beginning to be conscious of an uncomfortable question within himself as to why, having obeyed Miss Beaton's command and come to Stonehenge Park, he now remained there when he did not seem to be much wanted. The whole of that morning he had not seen Mary. She did not seem inclined to visit the summer-house now. 'She is better occupied,' he said to himself; and then came the murmur, 'I think I'll go back to London.'

'This is better than London, Mr Bellarmin,' a rich and musical voice said at his very ear. Bellarmin almost started. The words sounded so like an answer to his thought that for a moment he doubted whether he had not expressed his thought aloud. But Sir Victor Champion, who had come out of the house and was standing beside him, was evidently offering a general observation. So Bellarmin agreed that the terrace at Stonehenge was a better place on which to pass a fine morning than even the terrace of the House of Commons.

'You know the history of this place, no doubt,' Sir Victor said, carelessly; 'Lord Stonehenge would have told you.'

'I have a rough general idea,' Bellarmin answered, not feeling quite sure whether Sir Victor really wanted to talk about Stonehenge Park or not; 'I haven't had much chance of hearing Lord Stonehenge talk about it.'

'Not yet? No? Well, it is one of the most delightful
narratives in the history of our great family houses. I am satisfied that no country is so rich as England in the history of houses—family houses. But I must not anticipate Lord Stonehenge's description. He can show you everything—the exact spot of which each tradition speaks. Get him to show you. He will like to be asked. He is shy. He wants to be made to talk—to be drawn out.'

'I shall be delighted to hear something about it from you, meanwhile, Sir Victor. I am sure you know all about it just as well as Lord Stonehenge.'

'No, no. It would be unfair—in a man's own house. Besides, as I have got hold of you, Mr Bellarmin, I think I should rather talk to you about something else—just now.'

'My time is come,' Bellarmin said to himself. Aloud he said, 'Anything you wish, Sir Victor.'

'Suppose we walk up and down, Mr Bellarmin. A little chilly still, don't you think so?'

Bellarmin remembered Osric's way of falling in with the Lord Hamlet's changes of mood concerning the weather. But he said nothing on that subject, and the twain began to pace up and down the great terrace.

'We are the only two politicians in this house at present,' Sir Victor said, 'you and I. One can hardly call Lord Stonehenge a politician—he lives in a more rarefied atmosphere than that of politics; although I, for one, have not admitted that a politician may not breathe the very purest air.'

'When are we coming to the point?' Bellarmin asked himself; 'when are we to hear of the new political combination?' Sir Victor apparently was not coming to it at all, for he only said,—

'I have observed your parliamentary career with great interest, Mr Bellarmin. You seem instinctively to have gone the right way about it. A young man now must seize the attention of the House of Commons if he wants to get a chance within any reasonable time. It was different in my early parliamentary days. Then we young men were supposed to be bound down by all sorts of forms and rules not to open our mouths until the middle of our second session, and so on. All that was absurd. I believe in young men, and the fresh breath coming in from the outer world.'

There was a subtle suggestion in all this that Bellarmin's early escapades in the House of Commons were the outcome of deliberate purpose and keen parliamentary foresight. Bellarmin was pleased, but he felt that he could not accept the praise with a clear conscience.

'I am afraid that it was schoolboy impetuosity, Sir Victor, and not any reasonable purpose.'

'No, no. I am sure you do yourself injustice. It only amounts to this, that you came in under new conditions, and you saw—instinctively perhaps—that there were new conditions, and what they were. I have observed other young men who came in about the same time as you, and, if you will excuse me for saying so, under more favourable auspices—such as the traditional influence
of great families and all that—and they are yet waiting to begin, while you have already—well, made a name.'

Bellarmin could not but feel gratified. Sir Victor's words sounded genuine.

'Of course you have yet to make your way,' Sir Victor went on; 'but you will do that. The quick judgment which has guided you so far will guide you still farther. You have not been speaking quite so often of late. That, too, is well—in a young man who wants to show that he can be something more than a young man. You were right at first, and you are right now.'

'I fear I only followed my humour in both instances,' Bellarmin said, with a boyish smile. At first Bellarmin had felt somewhat as a snake might have felt when about to be brought within the sphere of the serpent-charmer. He fancied that he was, in a sort of way, entrapped into the magic circle, and that he would need to have all his faculties at work if he would escape with his freedom. But as he got into easy talk with Sir Victor he found this sensation began to fade, and he felt with each instant less and less necessity for keeping on his guard. Sir Victor did not seem to be greatly interested in any partisan plots or schemings. He appeared only to be occupied with a kind of professional or artistic interest in the parliamentary career of Bellarmin himself. He spoke as the veteran general of division might talk, when in sympathetic mood and in the sheltered familiarity of private intercourse, to the promising young cadet whom he has already seen more than once under fire.

'Well, yes; I said that you had got into the right way instinctively; but in all such cases what we call instinct is only unconscious intellectual foresight. You began, of course, where I began—where we all begin. Strange what a fascination for young Englishmen that conservative principle has! There is something romantic and pathetic about it, I suppose. One venerates it—like an old English ruin with the ivy clinging round it.'

'Must one cease to venerate the ruin, Sir Victor?'

'Oh, no; I hope not—surely not; but one finds he can't live in the ruin and make it his home. I found that; you are finding it. I should not hasten my discovery if I were you, or my disillusion, or whatever it is. It will come in time. Let it wait.'

'People say you would like to rush things, Sir Victor, don't they?'

'Do they? Yes; I suppose they do. But that is quite a mistake. The only foundation for it is that I like to have the country prepared for a change that is inevitable. To go back to our ruin—when I see some of the walls of the house beginning to crumble, I think it well to set about arranging for rebuilding or removal. I don't believe it wise policy to wait till the roof comes crashing in. That is my idea about the House of Lords.'

Sir Victor looked Bellarmin frankly in the face. There was frankness, more than frankness—there was an implied fulness of confidence in the words and the look. The plans about the House of Lords were supposed to be so entirely confidential between Champion and his closest political agents that any agent who
made the very disclosure he was sent out to make might be repudiated by his chief. This had been put very plainly to Bellarmin by the unabashed Tressel. Bellarmin was therefore all the more surprised to hear Sir Victor now refer so openly and directly to his policy about the House of Lords. It could only be a compliment to Bellarmin. Bellarmin accepted it accordingly.

'You see you have raised the question yourself,' Sir Victor said, with a good-natured smile. 'You were thinking about the House of Lords, of course, when you spoke of what people were saying of me, and my desire to rush things.'

'I am afraid I was thinking of that,' Bellarmin answered, a little angry with himself for having given Sir Victor his chance so easily, and a good deal amused too.

'Yes; why not? I am not at all sorry that you have come to the question so frankly and directly.'

'Did I come to the question frankly and directly?' Bellarmin asked.

'As you have touched upon it, I may say that I am rather glad to have a chance of saying a word or two in the way of explanation, perhaps.'

Bellarmin bowed. He did not want to commit himself too rashly again.

'You must understand that I had no idea, or hope, or wish even, to induce you to separate yourself from your party at such a stage of the question. You understand that?'

'I was not quite certain,' Bellarmin answered, rather coldly; 'it was all somewhat vague.'

'Vague? Oh, no! I wanted to give your party—your friends—a fair chance. I wanted them to do nothing more than simply say they don't pledge themselves to oppose all reform in that direction. But I don't suppose they will do even that.'

'Oh, surely, yes,' Bellarmin said, hastily. 'No man in his senses goes in for finality in politics now.'

'They will say they do, I am afraid, in that.'

'They may refuse to say anything, at some particular moment, on some sudden demand. That I could quite understand. No one has a right to make a sudden call on a great party for a declaration of policy on some question which has not yet come up.' Bellarmin spoke warmly now.

'Of course not; such a demand would be unreasonable, and your friends would be quite warranted in refusing to answer it. But they won't be content with that, Mr Bellarmin. You will find it before long. Your leaders will pledge the party to what they will call an absolute, final, and irrevocable decision.'

'It can't be; it is impossible. They would have consulted me,' he was going to say, but he checked himself. 'They would have consulted all of us.'

'They certainly ought to have consulted you. I was quite willing and anxious, as you know. They do not seem to have thought it necessary. But they have made up their minds all the same.'

'Made up their minds! about what, Sir Victor?'

'Sir Victor looked at him with a benevolent, or even a com-
passionate, smile. ‘I see they have not taken you into their con-

fidence,’ he said. ‘Well, Mr Bellarmim, it is just this. Their

leaders had the opportunity, the full opportunity, of consulting and
co-operating with me as to the course which a scheme of reform in
that direction ought to take, and they rejected it—positively and
finally rejected it. I see you are surprised at this, and I don’t
wonder at your surprise. I own I was a little astonished myself,
although I didn’t expect much. Well, we can talk about this
another time, if we haven’t talked about it enough already.’

Bellarmin felt touched to the very quick. Sir Victor had put
the thrust home. So then his own party, his own leaders, had
been acting without him, had never consulted—never, apparently,
thought him worth consulting; and all the time he had been
fancying himself a sort of leader, an ally, at least, who must be
thought of and consulted at any crisis. Could it be true? It must
be true. Champion was up to many political crafts and parlia-

mentary arts, but no one had ever accused him of a readiness to
say the thing which was not. It must be true; and this, then, was
the return for all the bold service he had rendered, the risks he
had run, the chances he had deliberately thrown away! Sir Victor
Champion had thought him worth consulting, and he had held
back and refused; and this was his reward. The young man’s
heart burned within him. He was in the Coriolanus mood.

‘The truth is—I believe—I am told,’ Sir Victor said, hesitat-
ingly, ‘they don’t quite appreciate anything original and brilliant,
especially anything humorous.’

Bellarmin could not help thinking that people generally said
that Sir Victor himself was sadly lacking in appreciation of the
humorous. But that was not a matter quite to the point just
then.

‘Surely De Carmel,’ he said, naming the brilliant Tory leader,
now extinguished altogether, ‘surely De Carmel was not of that
way of thinking?’

‘Ah, De Carmel? Well, no; not he; De Carmel, of course,
was a sort of Bohemian, a sort of Zingaro; he had a sort of
Maugrabin art and humour of his own. I never thought very
highly of it myself—not very highly. But even he, when he got
into the Lords, became so different. He always seemed to feel
that, after all, he was only an outsider—that he didn’t belong to
the place; he had to be very respectable, and to go in specially
for consulting all the proprieties and the conventionalities. Like
Miss Fotheringay, you know, when she got elevated into Lady
Mirabel—you remember—Pendennis?’

‘Yes’—Bellarmin quite remembered.

‘It was something like that with De Carmel in the Lords.
Besides, he was absolutely in the leading-strings of Lord Bosworth;
and Bosworth lately became quite determined, they tell me, that
the party was to be altogether respectable in its action, and that
eccentricity of any kind must be absolutely discouraged. So De
Carmel, who made the party by his eccentricity—what a man like
Bosworth would call eccentricity, Mr Bellarmin—what you and I
would call originality, brilliancy, boldness, spirit—and so even De Carmel had to conform himself. Very absurd; but why did a man like him ever consent to swamp and submerge himself in a dull marsh like that? Sir Victor asked, quite angrily.

Bellarmin was not thinking much just then about De Carmel's reasons for consenting to be transferred to the House of Lords. He was thinking of Champion's words about himself. Could it be possible, then, that the leaders of the party to which he had attached himself and had devoted himself looked upon him only as a sort of gamin, whose freaks were to be tolerated when his party was in opposition, because such freaks annoyed and thwarted the men in office, but were to be repudiated the moment the opposition had, and partly by his means, been transformed into an administration? And could it be that he, who had always gone in for the right and duty of Conservatism to move abreast with the best movements of the age, was to be pledged by his leaders to a policy of stupid and impossible finality, no consent or concurrence of his being given or even being asked? Bellarmin would gladly have persuaded himself that his strongest feeling of dissatisfaction was on public grounds. 'They will wreck the party,' he said to himself, grimly.

'Well, you will find that your leaders are pledged to finality,' Sir Victor said, with a smile, 'and that they have pledged you too. I can't offer them another chance. I see, by the way, that Tressel has a motion down about the House of Lords. I don't know whether he means to bring it on. He is an odd sort of person, Tressel, as you know. One can't pretend to control him. If he should bring it on, that might give them an opportunity of qualifying in some way what I understood to be their decision. But I don't believe they will qualify it. Bosworth is master for the present. Well, I sha'n't move until the right time. Of course you will understand that this little morning talk of ours is entirely between ourselves? Ah! here comes Lord Stonehenge. Get him to tell you all about this place.'

Sir Victor left Bellarmin, and presently attached himself to Monsignor Valmy, to whom he poured forth a dissertation on the inner discipline of the order of the Jesuits. Monsignor Valmy listened with a bland, indulgent smile.

CHAPTER XIX.

PETREL'S REST.

A MYSTERIOUS note was brought to General Falcon one morning, just before the break-up of the Stonehenge party. The messenger had orders to wait. The note was addressed in a bold, slanting
hand. It was sealed and impressed with a curiously twisted monogram, and ran thus,—

‘PETREL’S REST, June —.

‘The bearer of this will have a carriage at the Stonehenge Arms, in which you can be brought here at once. I want particularly to see you; and I don’t want any fuss made about my sending for you, or about my presence in this neighbourhood, though there is no reason why the fact shouldn’t be chronicled in the county newspapers. J. S.’

Falcon sent a message to the effect that he would be at the Stonehenge Arms in half-an-hour. He made a short cut through the park, and was at the lodge gates soon after the bearer of the missive had passed through. He found a quiet-looking dog-cart standing in front of the inn, with a foreign servant beside it. The man touched his hat, and asked in German if he were the gentleman going to Petrel’s Rest. Falcon got into the vehicle, and was driven at a rapid trot along the lanes in the direction of the sea.

The country about Stonehenge Park was well wooded and garden-like, with here and there a patch of pine forest, which gave variety and picturesqueness to the landscape. Nearer the coast it grew wilder and more barren looking—bleak downs and wastes of moorland, with scarcely any sign of habitation, rising gradually; and then an abrupt dip, as if a sort of natural rampart guarded the jagged fringe of land, which, with its beetling cliffs, its hidden gulfs and inlets, and its rugged, forbidding appearance, suggested thoughts of mediaeval romance, and tales of smuggling and piracy, and dark and dangerous deeds.

Nothing could have been more isolated than the situation of Petrel’s Rest. It was four miles from the nearest railway station, and there was scarcely a hamlet or even a cottage within sight of it. The little tongue of land upon which it was built jutted out in the centre of a gloomy bay, closed in by lofty promontories that terminated in bold precipices of black rock. From the moorland, one seemed to look down upon the grey beacon-like tower, the foundations of which were washed on three sides by the waters of the bay; but after passing through the belt of pinewood that stretched from the downs to the very gates of the place, it was difficult to believe that the country at the back was in reality higher—the cliff seemed so like a mountain crag, the still bay with its rocky walls so like a lake; while the descent from the tower platform was so perpendicular that without going to the very edge of the terrace it was almost impossible to realise that the sea lay so close below.

The castle had evidently been fortified at one period of its history. Part of it had fallen into ruin; and, indeed, the square tower and a small wing of more modern date, built on at the back, seemed the only portions fit for habitation. It stood in a kind of courtyard, with great iron gates and a stone archway carved with armorial bearings. The gates were open now but
one could well fancy the clang with which they might close upon some hapless prisoner or little band of armed desperadoes. The place seemed a survival of feudal times, and in its greyness, its look of age, its fortress-like simplicity, seemed so strangely out of keeping as a background with the personality of Lady Saxon—brilliant, modern, meretricious—that Falcon was set wondering and speculating upon the motive which induced her at times to seclude herself in so impregnable an eyrie. 'She does not bring her husband here with her,' he said to himself, with a grim smile. 'I should like to know who has been given the key of those rusty gates.'

He was admitted by another foreign servant, an elderly man, whose face seemed familiar to the eyes of the old general. It was Falcon's boast that he never forgot the countenance of any man or woman with whom he had once conversed for ten minutes.

'I think that I've seen you before,' he said. 'You used to receive Doctor Langenwelt's patients?'

'I was in the service of the late Baron Langenwelt,' replied the man, bowing.

General Falcon began to understand that Lady Saxon might find it convenient to employ foreign servants in this residence of hers, and especially servants who had known her as Madame Langenwelt. Doubtless they were well paid.

He followed the butler through a dim hall lined with tapestry, and in which a fire of pinewood burned brightly, and into a sort of boudoir, where it was evident, from the gorgeous colouring, the heavy Eastern carpets, the magnificent hangings, the luxurious divans, and fantastic Parisian knick-knacks, that Lady Saxon's taste reigned supreme. There was a fire here also. Bowls of roses were scattered about; a stack of French novels lay on a bookstand near one of the couches, on which was stretched the skin of a leopard. The effigy of an Indian god held a jewelled casket, which was open, and filled with the most exquisite sweetmeats.

Lady Saxon was not in the room. The servant told Falcon that she had been informed of his arrival, and would appear presently. He lingered, putting another log on the hearth and drawing down the outer blind.

'You prefer this country to Germany?' asked Falcon.

'Ach, yes! Bad-Schwalben is a dreary place in the winter, when the roads are blocked with snow and there is not a single visitor.'

'I should have thought that this place must be quite as dreary as Bad-Schwalben in the winter;' said Falcon.

The man gave his shoulders a shrug, and answered civilly,—

'One does not wish for more than the good of his family. Her gracious ladyship has given my wife and son and daughter-in-law a home here.'

'Ah!' said Falcon.

The man withdrew, and in a few minutes Lady Saxon entered. She greeted Falcon with a certain impetuosity of gesture which
called up the idea that she had thrown off her shackles, and bade
him be seated. She looked anxious, a little excited, he thought,
but quite at her ease.

‘You have cut short your visits in the country?’ he remarked.

‘Oh!’ She threw up her hands with an impatient movement.

‘Heaven preserve me from male dummies and fools in petticoats.
Have you heard, my brave Falcon, of that irresistible longing
sometimes which comes over the civilised savage to throw off his
clothes and execute a war-dance in his native paint and feathers?
I came here to dance my war-dance. You may be sure that there
is nobody to tell tales.’

‘You are alone, then?’

‘Alone!’ she repeated, sharply. ‘Did you suppose that I had
brought Lord Saxon with me?’

‘No, I did not suppose that.’

‘Lord Saxon is with the duke, who has a fit of the gout. Lord
Saxon is one of those amiable husbands who indulge their wives’
whims, even when the whims are a little wounding to marital
vanity. Lord Saxon is a model of all that is agreeable—in a
husband.’ She put out her hand and took one of the sweetmeats
from the casket, and ate it delicately. ‘Will you have one?
They are filled with a liqueur that is as expensive as attar of
roses.’

Falcon politely declined the proffered luxury.

‘Perhaps you are surprised that I should have sent for
you in this sudden sort of way?’ Lady Saxon said, in an abrupt
manner.

‘No, I am not surprised,’ Falcon answered, grimly.

‘Meaning, I suppose, that nothing I could do would surprise
you in the least?’ Lady Saxon said, with a laugh. ‘Well, we are
confederates—pals, I presume, we may be called, in a sort of
way—at least, for one particular purpose—’

‘Yes,’ Falcon said, with a face of unabated gloom.

‘You don’t seem as if you altogether liked it.’

‘I am not good at paying compliments, Lady Saxon.’

‘I don’t want compliments—you may believe I have had my
share of them already. Well, I sent for you because I was
impatient to know what was going on at Stonehenge Park.
Who are there, and what are they doing? I came down
here to be near at hand, if there was anything that had to be
done.’

‘What could there be to be done?’ Falcon asked.

‘That is exactly what I want to know. Where there are plots
there can be counter-plots.’

‘I don’t know that anything that could be called a plot is going
on at Stonehenge Park. There are talks, and perhaps arrange­
ments, about the property claims—’

‘Stuff! I don’t care about that. I wouldn’t have come in
this secret way down to this place to hear about some trumpery
money claims. Tell me of what I want to know—’

‘But, Lady Saxon, I don’t understand what you mean—I am
too dull to guess. What is it that you want me to tell of?’
'Tell me about the plans for marrying off your princess—that is what interests me; tell me about them—'

'There are no such plans!' Falcon exclaimed, angrily, and with a face literally darkened by emotion. 'Who has dared to say that there are any plans like that?'

'You are too simple for this world, General Falcon. I tell you that there are such plans; I will tell you what it seems you don't know, although it is all going on under your very eyes. The priests want your princess to marry Lord Stonehenge; she herself wants to marry young Bellarmin—'

'Oh!' he exclaimed, and he clenched his hand.

'Yes; in her heart she would like to marry him. She is only a woman, your princess. And he is handsome and young and fascinating! Oh, yes; I can read a woman's heart as well as the heart of a man.'

'Lady Saxon—he! A man of low birth—of no position—'

'Oh! Are you then a prince in disguise, General Falcon? It is not only men of royal lineage who may presume to love your Mary Stuart! But you need not be unhappy about Bellarmin. If it ever comes to a serious question with her, and if she has any pride, I shall be able to settle that matter.'

'You, Lady Saxon! How?'

'Never mind. All in good time. But now—now—there is another—now, I am certain—my heart tells me—Victor Champion wants to marry her! He does! He is there, is he not—Victor Champion?—he is there already!'

'Yes, he is there; but I believe he has only come to patter politics with these other men—he could not have the audacity to hope—'

'The audacity to hope—and he the greatest Englishman of his time! The audacity to hope what General Falcon hopes! Yes, my poor Falcon—as your princess sometimes calls you—yes; the great man intends to marry your princess, if he can.'

'He shall not, by God!' Falcon exclaimed.

'I am glad I have stirred you up at last, General Falcon—I thought I should find you sensitive. But how, may I ask, do you intend to prevent it? If she doesn't marry Champion, she will marry Stonehenge or Bellarmin. It will be all the same for you.'

'I will do anything to prevent it!' he exclaimed, and he let his hand fall heavily on the table.

'Well, you will have, perhaps, soon to exert all your powers, whatever they are, in that way. Now I will speak out to you—I will act on the square, as they say. I don't mean to let her marry Bellarmin; I don't want her to marry Champion—I couldn't endure that; I would rather kill her or myself than have that happen! But, for the rest, I don't care whom she marries or when she marries, or what happens to her in this world or the next.'

'I wish you wouldn't speak of her in this manner,' Falcon said, sternly; 'it is not right for me to hear it.'

A sense of the degradation of his alliance with Lady Saxon was
aroused in him as he heard the woman thus speak of his princess. Lady Saxon understood him, and changed her tone.

'I am sorry if I have hurt you in any way,' she said, gently; 'although she can laugh at you when she is in the mood for laughter—which I fancy is pretty often.'

'Let us leave her out of our talk as much as we can.'

'Yes, yes; forgive me; but, as you see, I have my own feelings, too, and sometimes they are too strong for me. Well, I want you to be on guard; to keep your eyes and ears open, to see who walks with her most and talks to her most—'

'I can't play the spy, Lady Saxon. That is not at all in my line,' Falcon interposed, with a certain dignity.

'Play the spy!' she said, contemptuously. 'He calls it playing the spy, just to observe what lover comes nearest to the woman he himself loves!'

'Oh, how you degrade her and me!' Falcon groaned.

'Have you no influence over her? Can't you get her away from Stonehenge Park—get her out of Champion's way? I wish we had her here,' she went on in a lighter tone—and all the while she kept her eyes fixed on Falcon's face. 'What a charming bower this would be for a captive Stuart princess! How safely she might be immured here—kept in gentle and honourable captivity by some gallant Bothwell who wished to save her from political plotters, and prevail on her to marry him! What a delightful and romantic notion! She is a romantic young princess, too. I fancy the enterprise itself would have a charm for her. See, General Falcon,' she rose from her chair and went to the window, drawing aside the curtains that veiled it. 'See, how lonely it is in this bay! Look at the descent of that cliff on which our eyrie is perched! Look how far down the sea breaks at its feet! Who could come near her without her faithful gaoler's consent? And see my little schooner yacht below—how temptingly it spreads its wings; how easily a yachting excursion might be planned, and the yacht come to an anchor here! One would not need here a company of armed Border men to enact the Bothwell episode.'

General Falcon followed her to the window. He, too, looked out upon the blue, hazy sea, and down at the tarn-like bay, the lonely cliffs to left and right. He turned abruptly away, and paced moodily up and down the room; then he stopped in front of her.

'Lady Saxon,' he said, 'have you any purpose in these strange words?'

'Yes,' she answered, boldly. 'I have a purpose, but the time is not ripe for it yet; nor are you, my good Falcon, ripe for it either.'

They were both silent. Falcon's face worked with emotion. A vision of an earthly paradise opened itself before him. His Mary—his queen—a captive in his power—alone with him in this wild place, to be won by his daring, by his passionate entreaties, by his deep respect, by his ardent love—the bare thought was intoxicating. Lady Saxon watched his face. A kind of reflex emotion kindled in hers. If she herself might only be
The Rival Princess.

borne away hither by the man that she loved! Then—let the world go by!

'I wanted you to see this place,' she said, presently. 'That is one reason why I sent for you here. If you come to think of any way in which it might be of use to you in your plans, I shall be happy to lend it to you for a week or two. The servants are to be trusted.'

Falcon made no answer. He appeared to be considering deeply. Lady Saxon left the window and seated herself on the couch which was covered with the leopard-skin. 'Come here,' she said; 'I want to talk to you. I want to hear about Champion. How long has he been at Stonehenge?'

'Something less than a week.'

'And Bellarmin?'

'A little longer.'

'A week!' she repeated. 'And he never told me that he was going. Does he talk with her—hang about her—behave like a lover? You know what I mean. I am speaking of Champion.'

'It appears so.'

'But he is interested in everything that is new, fresh, picturesque. Her birth, her position, the historical associations—all this would attract him. He has such an extraordinary power of projecting his sympathies. It is his temperament. I know him so well.'

'You know him so well!' repeated Falcon, slowly.

'It does not mean love,' Lady Saxon went on, as if speaking to herself, and taking no notice of Falcon's interruption. 'He is not a man to lose his heart to a girl; he who—' Her mind framed the words, 'he who loved me.' But she said aloud, 'He who, since he became a widower, might have married any woman in England had he chosen. But the name is historic; he might fancy that such a marriage would increase his power. It would be a mistake. He could not gain anything from her. But it is possible that his imagination might mislead him. His first marriage was a sacrifice to ambition.'

Falcon heard her in grim silence. Then both were silent for a few moments. The minds of both were travelling swiftly through the region of possibilities. Lady Saxon heaved a sigh rather of satisfaction than alarm. She was not afraid. Champion was once more under her influence. This time she could defy ambition.

'When does he leave Stonehenge Park?' she asked, turning on Falcon almost fiercely.

'To-morrow, I understand. The House has already met.' Falcon's tone seemed to indicate resentment at Sir Victor's absence from his parliamentary post.

'Mere routine business,' said Lady Saxon, impatiently. 'And Bellarmin?'

'He, too, goes to-morrow; but they do not travel together. Sir Victor takes an early train.'

'What about Bellarmin and Champion?' Lady Saxon questioned. 'Have they come to any agreement—any political agreement? You know the rumours.'
I neither know nor care anything about your parliamentary intrigues, except in so far as they concern the Stuart claims.

But you can observe. You know, at least, whether these two have had any private conversation?

They walked together for some time on the terrace one morning. I should say they had been talking politics, and that Bellarmin is favourably disposed towards Champion's views, whatever they may be.

Ah!' Lady Saxon seemed to be considering deeply. Presently she abruptly changed the conversation. 'I don't wish this visit of yours here talked about.'

Falcon bowed. 'Certainly not, Lady Saxon.'

There's no object in chatter. Not that I want to make a mystery; but it would annoy me to be invaded.'

Falcon bowed again.

'I shall return to London in a day or two,' she resumed. 'We shall meet there.'

'You have not forgotten that Wednesday is the date fixed for your dinner-party to Miss Beaton?'

'No; I had not forgotten.'

Lady Saxon seemed moody and thoughtful. After a little while General Falcon took his leave, refusing the luncheon which she offered him. He was driven back in the direction whence he had come.

Lady Saxon had a wild impulse to waylay Champion, to bid him come to her at Petrel's Rest. Her heart throbbed at the thought. There had been tender passages between them in London. He had come to the confessional. But her love made her timid. She did not dare to assert her hold upon him too imperiously. There was an iron hand, she knew, beneath the velvet glove. The heart that beat under that caressing manner could be steel at times. She would wind her meshes more closely round him. She would make herself necessary to him. She would not resent even his attentions to Mary Beaton. Her woman's craft got the better of her woman's impulse. He should not dream that she suspected him—that she had played the spy. She told herself that she understood the reason why he had dallied at Stonehenge Park. He did not wish to appear too eager. It would not be wise to let Bellarmin imagine that the trap had been laid and baited, and that he was to be secured forthwith. She told herself all this. Nevertheless, she wrote to Champion a letter, which should meet him in London—a letter, in its earlier pages, more political than personal, ignoring the fact that he had not told her of his proposed visit to Lord Stonehenge, but taking for granted that he had accepted the invitation in order to gain a good opportunity of getting at Bellarmin's views. Bellarmin's adhesion obtained, and with it the chance of his band being augmented by other Democratic Tories, and also the adhesion of the extreme Radical or Tressel Party,—then the Whig section, in the person of her husband, might be cautiously attacked. Lady Saxon gauged the situation with a keenness and grasp that might have been envied by many a trained politician. She threw out subtle sugges-
tions, showing a man's courage and a woman's finesse. She gave adroit hints concerning the wires by which certain of the political puppets might be pulled to his side. He should see clearly that her influence was far-reaching, that her assistance was not to be despised.

And then from a politician she became suddenly a woman of the world—bright, amusing, witty. She described her country-house visits with a satirical humour—a clever seizing of characteristic points only possible to one who had regarded life from another level. It was a very well-schemed letter. There was a touch of veiled sentiment at the end, a note of repressed passion, a suggestion of regret amid all the splendours which surrounded her—regret half bitter, half melancholy, for the 'beautiful past'—that, had Champion failed to be touched by it, would have proved him something more than man.

Champion's answer arrived by return of post. It was couched in the brilliant, tender, poetic style peculiarly his own, and which, when he chose to employ it in winning a woman, became irresistible. Lady Saxon did not object to a certain delicate diplomatic reserve. She was alive to the desirability of caution in the correspondence of a statesman. At least, he showed her that he understood her talent and her power, and he appreciated and frankly accepted her devotion to his interests.

CHAPTER XX.

LORD SAXON.

LORD SAXON sat in his study one morning. His face wore a troubled look. He had been reading the papers, and the papers had a bad effect on him. The papers were most of them full of attacks upon Champion. This in itself would have annoyed Saxon, but there were other considerations too. He saw that nearly all the papers had got filled with the idea that Champion was planning some grand coup to make himself more popular than ever, and to get himself back into office; and he did not believe in anything of the kind; it was all lies and nonsense. Still, the lies and nonsense vexed and disturbed Lord Saxon all the same. If you feel perfectly well, and people come telling you, one after the other, that you look very unwell, you may not believe them, but their assurances make you feel uncomfortable. So with Lord Saxon. He did not believe that his friend and leader was deceiving him; but to be always reading assertions which pointed that way made him feel not exactly distrustful, but decidedly uncomfortable.

Lady Saxon had, he knew, gone off on one of her eccentric trips to Petrel's Rest. He was expecting her return some time during the day, for he had been given to understand that they had a
dinner-party that evening. Suddenly she burst in upon him in all the glory of her beauty and her splendid vitality, and with a certain radiance of the morning about her.

"Well, Josephine," Lord Saxon said, in his ineffusive manner; but a change came over his face as she entered, and the cloud lightened.

"You didn't expect me quite so early, dear. I wasn't altogether sure myself that I could get up in time for the first train. But it was lovely driving over the moors this morning; and I had things I wanted to see about. I am too late for your breakfast though, I see. No, I don't want anything more. I had some coffee at a station. Have you been dull these days, breakfasting without me?"

It was Lady Saxon's chief concession to the domestic virtues to breakfast late every morning with her husband. It kept him in a good-humour—not that Lord Saxon was ever in a bad-humour with her. It made him believe in her; and she got over her duty early in the day, 'swallowed her physic before it had time to stand,' as she put it to herself.

"Yes, of course—you know," he said, with awkward fondness. He did not ask what she had been doing at Petrel's Rest. She had long ago given him to understand that she did not choose to be asked questions about her movements, and that he must be content with such information as she herself volunteered. Lord Saxon was not inquisitive, and made much concession to his wife's mood. On the whole, the strain of independence and originality in her pleased him. And then he was always delighted to have her with him, ready to take her on her own terms.

Yet in spite of her radiance and her beauty she seemed agitated, excited, he thought. Something had put her out. 'Women are easily put out,' Lord Saxon reflected. 'It is their way; if not, they wouldn't be women—certainly not charming women.'

"You were looking worried," Lady Saxon said. "What is the matter? Anything wrong in politics?"

"Nothing that I know of. I have been reading the papers, and I'm so sorry poor old Greenleaf—don't you know—is dead." He read her a paragraph from a paper:

"Death of a veteran M.P.—We regret to announce the sudden death of Mr Greenleaf, one of the oldest members of the House of Commons, and who represented the same constituency for more than fifty years. The death was sudden; it took place in the House of Commons library about two o'clock yesterday. Mr Greenleaf was reading in the library, and perhaps had fallen asleep. Some of the officials of the House were testing the division bells; and the bells were made to ring sharply. Mr Greenleaf started up on hearing the sound, and was heard to cry, 'A division already?' and he ran towards the door. The only other member in the library was Mr Bellarmin; and Mr Bellarmin called out, 'No, no; they are only trying the bells; the House is not sitting.' Mr Greenleaf, however, hurried on, and just as
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he reached the nearest door he fell on the floor. Mr Bel­
larmin and one of the librarians ran to his assistance, but they
found that the poor old gentleman was dead. It used to be a
boast of Mr Greenleaf's that he never missed a division of the
House.''

'Poor old creature!' Lady Saxon said, carelessly. 'It was the
right sort of way for him to die.'

'Seems to me terrible,' Lord Saxon said; 'a sudden death
like that. Fancy being full of life one minute and dead the
next!'

'Oh! but a poor old thing like that—what did it matter?'

'Sudden death is not only for the old. Poor Greenleaf!'

'Why, Saxon, you are quite tragic over this dreadful old man.
He had lived long enough.'

Lord Saxon said no more on that subject. His wife evidently
could not be got to feel for poor old Greenleaf and his sudden
death. Lord Saxon turned listlessly to some other part of the
paper he held in his hand. Lord Saxon felt that one of the duties
of his position was to read the papers every morning, and accord­
ingly he read them. Sometimes they made him very angry; more
often they made him yawn. 'The fellows seem to know so little
about anything,' Lord Saxon often said. He was very conscious
of his own defective education; and he was satisfied in a stolid,
resigned sort of way that his was a very slow intelligence. When
he found that on some political question he knew more of the
realities of things than some writer of a leading article in a news­
paper, he was not elated, he was merely disappointed. This day
he was particularly displeased.

'What's the good of reading a paper if the fellows who write
don't know half as much as one knows one's self?' he said, irrele­
vantly, without waiting for an answer to his question, as he tossed
aside one of the dailies over which he had been poring.

Lord Saxon was a man absolutely without self-conceit. He
honestly understood his own capacity, and was inclined to overrate
the abilities of others. He was selfish in a certain sense—that is
to say, he did not know how to deny himself any momentary grati­
fication which he coveted; but in a broader sense he often showed
himself quietly self-sacrificing. He stuck to politics and the House
of Commons because the family traditions and his father's wish
told him that he ought to do so; and he had even drilled himself
into an interest in politics, and had trained and hammered himself
into a really powerful, hard-hitting, straight-from-the-shoulder sort
of parliamentary debater. He was often taken for a haughty and
sullen man, when he was, in fact, only shy, slow of speech, and
awkward. A spoiled child, he had at least some of the character­
istic virtues of spoiled childhood if he had most of its characteristic
vices. He loved his father dearly, and thus far he adored his
wife: he put absolute trust in her.

Lady Saxon stepped rapidly towards her husband, and stood
for a moment behind his chair, looking at him with a curious
contemptuous smile on her face before she spoke.

'What is the good of reading the papers?' she said. 'Why,
Saxon, dear, I like to make sure that "the fellows" don't know what I know. Think of the thousands of people who read those articles as if they were gospel. It amuses me to know that I am ever so much better informed than they are. It's like having private proof of the spuriousness of the Bible, or like hearing a man tell the House of Commons from the Treasury Bench that the government never did make certain proposals to some foreign power after he has himself shown you in confidence a copy of the despatch and the reply. Well, but what have the papers been saying now?

'Stuff about Champion.'

'But they are always talking stuff about Champion. What are they saying now?'

'Saying that he is planning some great *coup*—some popular thing—to get back into office.'

'I wish to Heaven he were!' Lady Saxon said, emphatically.

Lord Saxon looked up amazed.

'Why so, Josephine?'

'Because I am ambitious for him and for you. I hate to see two such men out of office. You ought to be in power; you ought to be governing England—you two. Why, your father says it himself—he said it to me the other day.'

'Ah, but he might not quite like some of Champion's notions, all the same.'

'He would when he came to understand them,' Lady Saxon said, in a tone of decision.

Lord Saxon was a little puzzled by his wife's manner.

'Did you see Champion when you were at Petrel's Rest?' he asked, suddenly.

'Why should I? I went away for quiet. No; I didn't go near Stonehenge Park. I didn't want to go there. I didn't fancy myself with all those Jacobites and Legitimists. But Sir Victor Champion, of course, thinks it is his business to know everybody—and he is quite right.'

'Of course, of course.' Lord Saxon was turning over something slowly in the recesses of his mind. At last he seemed anxious to put away the topic of conversation.

'By the way, Josephine, who are coming to dinner to-day?—besides Champion, I mean.'

Lady Saxon had moved from him and begun to open some letters which she had brought in with her.

'Who are coming to dinner to-day?' she said, presently. 'The princess, of course, to begin with.'

'The princess? Which princess?'

'The Stuart princess; the young Pretendress; the lovely Jacobite.'

'Miss Beaton, do you mean?'

'Miss Beaton, yes.'

'Dear Josephine,' Lord Saxon said, with a heavy smile, 'don't call her a princess, please. She isn't any princess. I wonder if she has any sense that she can let people talk about her in that way—it's nonsense.'
'I suppose she likes it. It was only my fun, dear, calling her a princess. I wish you would pay her some attention, Saxon; it would look well from you. And she is so much admired.'

'Oh! she is a deuced nice-looking girl, and all that,' Lord Saxon conceded, not with the air of one who is deeply engrossed in the subject; 'and Champion thinks her clever—so I am told.'

'Told—by whom?' Lady Saxon's voice had a little suggestion of sharpness in it as she put the question to her unconcerned husband.

'Don't quite remember, Josephine, I'm sure. Everybody, I think.'

'The people who are coming?—let me see.' She named two or three great political peers.

'Oh, that lot!' her husband said, with an air of profound depression.

'Must, Saxon, must—you grumbling person. They want to meet the fair princess—oh! I beg pardon—of course, I mean Miss Mary Beaton.'

'All right, Josephine. Is there no one new or interesting except Miss Beaton?'

'I don't know whether you would call her aide-de-camp, or master of the horse, or whatever he is, interesting—General Falcon.'

'Certainly not,' Lord Saxon replied, promptly for him. 'And do you know, Josephine,' he said, partly rousing himself up, 'there's something odd about that man—something I can't quite make out. I must have seen him somewhere—I can't remember if that's it. His face impresses me in a devilish uncomfortable sort of manner—kind of man to cut his throat, or do something of that kind, in some odd, unexpected, public way.'

'My dear Saxon, what very horrible ideas! But we have to ask him, you know; and that dreadful old Lady Struthers. They are supposed to be in attendance on Miss Beaton, and they would expect to be asked.'

'Oh, of course, of course; they would expect to be asked.'

'There is Mr Bellarmin. Do you call him interesting?'

'Yes, I call him interesting. He is coming to the front in the House—I should like to see more of him.'

'You might easily do that; he comes here very often,' Lady Saxon replied, carelessly.

'To your luncheons, I suppose. That set isn't in my line.'

'Not political enough,' suggested Lady Saxon; 'though that doesn't quite apply.'

'No. They are too—I don't care about their talk—too many fireworks.'

'Let us say that they are too epigrammatic for you,' said Lady Saxon. 'You must have had some of Mr Bellarmin's fireworks in the House.'

'Oh, he is a clever fellow. Some people say he is self-
conceited, and a puppy, and all that; but I don't quite think it of him. He would get on if he had money, but I am told he has no money; and, by Jove, Josephine, it's hard for a fellow to get on—no matter how clever he may be—without money. I have thought of that sometimes.'

Lady Saxon had thought of it a good deal in former days, and could have illustrated it by experiences of her own had she been so minded. Just now, however, she did not care to pursue the theme.

'Well, that's about the whole lot,' she said, when she had given him the names of a few more of their guests.

Lord Saxon went back abruptly to Bellarmin.

'Bellarmin's looking out for a woman with money, I have heard men say. I should think he could find one easily enough—he is a handsome, well-set-up fellow. But that always seemed to me the deuce of being poor—that one has to look out, not for the woman he would like to marry, but for the woman with money.'

He looked at his wife as he spoke. Lady Saxon smiled on him with gracious affection.

'Now,' Lord Saxon went on, in a meditative way, 'if a girl like Miss Beaton had money, and were to take a real fancy for a young fellow like Bellarmin, that wouldn't be half a bad thing for both of them. They say he sticks very closely to her.'

Lady Saxon winced and chafed under these remarks. She would not so much have minded the idea of Bellarmin's marrying for money; but it made the nerves of her vanity sore to hear him talked of as an admirer of Miss Beaton. And if Saxon of all men had heard of such a thing, and noticed and remembered it, rumour could not speak altogether falsely.

'My dear Saxon, it is something new to hear you entering into these marriage speculations and love-makings! I never thought you observed things of that kind.'

'One sometimes observes more than people fancy, Josephine.'

The words were carelessly spoken, and had no special meaning. Lord Saxon was feeling a little surprised at himself for indulging in so much gossip, and was wondering where he had got it. But Lady Saxon almost started; and she turned her head away for a moment.

'You were speaking of Sir Victor Champion,' she said, presently, in her tenderest tone; 'I want you to think about him, Saxon.'

'My dear Josephine, I think a lot about him; I am always thinking about him more or less.'

'But I want you to believe in him; to trust him; to trust in him; to trust in him fully; to have entire faith in him; to trust yourself to him. He is a great man; all his views are great. I want you and him to govern England together.'

She came over to him and leaned upon his shoulder, and bent her head down winningly over his and gazed into his eyes. He did not understand her; he had no perception of her meaning; but he felt the fascination of her manner and her eyes.
'Look here,' she went on, earnestly, and with that dash of the melodramatic which had grown to be characteristic of her; 'I want you to be a great man, Saxon; my husband! I want to be proud of you; I am proud of you, as it is; but I want you to do great things; I want you to be a great English statesman. You have all the brains and all the courage—'

'Not all the brains, Josephine, dear; no—no; but I hope I have courage enough—if one only saw one's way, and if—'

Lord Saxon paused, and sighed in a heavy, perplexed manner, strange in one ordinarily so stolid and composed. Lady Saxon did not notice the sigh, but exclaimed, eagerly,—

'Exactly; there it is. One don't always see one's own way; and then is the time for trusting someone who does.'

Lord Saxon raised his head a little, and looked at her in some surprise.

'Yes, Saxon; I know what I am saying. Sometimes, perhaps, you may not quite see your way—you are a slow old darling now and then; but when you do see your way, who can tread it so firmly and so boldly as you can? Oh, I have been so proud of you often—proud of my husband. Dear, I couldn't care for any man in all the world if he were not ambitious—ambitious of greatness.'

'But, Josephine, my dear—I don't understand; really I don't.'

'It's this: Victor Champion always sees his way. No man in England can read the signs of the times as he can. I want you to go with him; to believe and to know that what he does is wise and right; and not to let anyone estrange you from him. You must promise me that! You will promise me that?'

She threw her arms fondly round his neck, and drew his head closer to her.

Saxon faintly struggled with the embrace; but only in order to give expression to his perplexities.

'Well, but, Josephine, who talks about our being estranged? Are we not the best of friends? Why, everyone knows that I am devoted to him. They are always reproaching me with being too devoted to him—some of them are.' What does it all mean? Is he really planning something?

'Dear, how should I know? But of course his mind is always full of England's future; of course he must be thinking of something great. Whatever it is, I want you to be in it. Promise me, Saxon, that you will not lightly allow any people or any idle talk to come between you and him. You must promise me that; I ask it for your own sake. I want to see you and him always associated—I want you and him to govern England.'

'Josephine,' Lord Saxon said, gravely, 'there are only three people in the world, I think, that I care for really—and you know who they are—you yourself, and my old governor, and Champion. It would be a curious thing that you and Champion wanted me to do and that I did not do, wouldn't it? You wouldn't ask me to do anything that I oughtn't to do; and neither would he, I am sure. So there's nothing to promise, is there?'}
'That is promise enough,' she said, and she touched his forehead with her lips.

He drew her down to him closer, and folded one arm about her, gazing up at her beautiful face, which she held back slightly averted. Something of almost poetic yearning shone in Lord Saxon's dull eyes, and lightened his heavy, reddened features. For a moment or two he did not speak.

'Well?' she asked, laughingly. 'Bear! what is it? You have been so remarkably sociable of late that I have almost forgotten my nickname for you.'

'Have I been less bearish in society of late, Josephine? I am never bearish to you!'

'Never, dear—I must pay you that compliment. But, really, your sublime resignation to circumstances while we were doing our visits was something beautiful to behold. It was I that showed the wild beast, and had to run off to my lair.'

'I wonder why you like to rush off in that wild way to Petrel's Rest; and why you won't let me go with you. I should enjoy doing "Darby and Joan" there with you once or twice in the season, Josephine. I get a little tired of it all.'

"Darby and Joan," and "John Anderson, my Jo," are not in my line, Saxon, as I told you when we married, dear. Nevertheless, if you wish it, I am willing to do that or anything else, at one of the other places—not at Petrel's Rest. That's my own particular lair; and I love it the more because you gave it to me to growl in, and because you are such a gentleman, Saxon, that you respect my whim still. A woman likes that, you know—'

'You are a strange creature, Josephine,' he said, in fond pride.

'You knew that from the first. I always told you that I wasn't the Patient Griselda sort of woman, or the conventional beggar-maid, who waited so submissively for King Cophetua to step down to her. I have often thought that the beggar-maid must have felt the pinch of her gold-embroidered shoes, and must have longed to take them off and go barefoot again now and then. I have walked barefoot, Saxon—yes, barefoot after a caravan, when I was a little girl; and I, too, have felt the craving to take off my smart shoes sometimes. But Queen Cophetua wouldn't have liked her king to see her when she had one of her wild fits on. She would have wanted to go all alone from the palace, and forget for a little while that she was a queen.'

'But she would have been glad to come back to the palace and to Cophetua once more; and she might not be sorry then that she was a queen,' said Saxon, tenderly.

'Dear Bear—dear practical, statistical politician! can it be possible that I am making you poetic?'

'I don't pretend to be poetic, or out of the common, or—or anything like you, Josephine.' Lord Saxon reddened to a deeper tint than even was natural to him. 'But I think I'm not quite the stolid, statistical sort of person you make me out, or I couldn't have wanted so madly to marry you. There never was a woman in the world that suited me as you do—and I couldn't have cared for you if you had been the conventional kind—of one sort or the other.
I've known plenty of them—Griseldas and Vere de Veres, and beggar-maids, too, by Jove!—and you were the only one I wanted to settle down with as my wife. Perhaps I'm slow at showing what I feel. You don't like me to be demonstrative; you don't like to be effusive either, and I'm not sure if I don't admire you all the more for that—but there it is. It's a fact. And sometimes, by Jove, Josephine! I wish that we could leave it all—the show and the business and the House of Commons—for a bit, and go and set up a cabin somewhere in the Wild West by ourselves.'

'That wouldn't please me, Saxon, for more than a day or two. The show and the business is what I like, just as I liked the booths and the fairs in the old caravan days. You know I never pretended to you that I was anything but a caravan child, who might have grown up to be something too dreadful to think about, if a kind, generous man hadn't been touched by my youth and my innocence.'—Lady Saxon gave a queer little half-pathetic laugh as she spoke—'and my beauty, I suppose, and if he hadn't taken me away and educated me and married me. The taint of the caravan clings to me still. I like glitter and show. I like a retinue, I like—this—' and she waved her hand towards the splendidly furnished room. 'But you—well, I can understand that the society business bores you. You should be glad that you have a wife who is capable of doing it alone, and will leave you with your blue-books in peace. But the real business of your life—you couldn't get away from it if you would, and you would not if you could—politics, statesmanship, government! All that. It's in your blood. You have inherited it from the Athelstanes and the Saxons and the rest. Do not think I am not proud of that! This is your part in the world, and I want to spur you on to reform of old abuses, to power, to the governing of a great nation. It is to this you will come if you join Victor Champion.'

She had moved from him as she talked, and stood before him, her eyes alight, her bosom heaving.

A vague expression of doubt and trouble crept over Saxon's face.

'Can there be anything? Are the papers on the scent? Do you know anything, Josephine? It is not possible. I will not believe that Champion could have spoken of any project he may have had in his mind to anyone before he spoke to me.'

'No, no!' exclaimed Lady Saxon eagerly, 'how could you imagine it! But I have intuitions—even you have said so. Didn't I foretell Glengordon's resignation? I can read the signs of the times more quickly than you. There will be a change—a great scheme—and Champion will speak of it first to you—to whom else?'

Saxon rose from his seat with a reluctant preoccupied air.

'Well, it will come, if it is to come,' he said, slowly. 'Not too soon, I hope.'

'I hope that it will come before the session is over,' she answered; 'and that England will have to thank you for a big thing.'

'You are all at me,' Saxon went on—'you, the governor, the
papers, everyone. You all talk of my doing something big before—before—' He hesitated.

'Before you fossilise in the House of Lords as Duke of Athelstane,' she put in.

'No—yes. I sometimes think, Josephine, that you will never be Duchess of Athelstane.'

'What do you mean?' she asked, her face blanching. This was a contingency she had never contemplated. She meant to be Duchess of Athelstane. 'You are not ill, Saxon—you—why, you look in the most robust health.'

'I am big enough, and red enough, and muscular enough, and all that,' he answered, laughing a little grimly. 'But I didn't want to frighten you, Josephine. I did not really mean that the governor might outlive me, though I shouldn't be surprised at it. He is better after the grouse on the moors than I am. I don't quite know why I said that, unless it's because I have been feeling rather down lately—a fit of the blue-devils—a sort of lethargy, and queer sensations now and then. Liver, I suppose. Everything is liver with us London men. We smoke too much, and drink too much, and live too hard when we are young fellows.'

'You should see a doctor,' said Lady Saxon. 'I have often told you, dear, that it is a sluggish liver that makes you so disinclined to go out among people. Call in Geddes; I wonder why you have such an invincible objection to being photographed and to seeing a doctor?'

'Perhaps because I am afraid of the result in both cases,' answered Lord Saxon. 'I know that I'm not a beauty, and I've always had a queer instinctive kind of notion that I was not altogether sound in the wind. Anyhow, I hope that I am not a coward, and if there should be anything wrong with me, I'd rather know it. I'd rather know anything than live on in a fool's paradise. A fellow can take a long breath then, and look round him. There's only one thing—by Jove, Josephine, if you were to play me false, I'd rather be hoodwinked into believing you true!'

Lady Saxon kept her eyes lowered. 'You love me so much, then! I am glad. About this doctor? I am anxious.'

'Oh, I am rather ashamed of having got funkled. I was so blue last night that I wrote a note to Scourfield making an appointment. I shall look in on him on my way to the House.'

'Scourfield!' repeated Lady Saxon, for her husband had named a famous specialist. She made no further comment, however, and they separated.

Lady Saxon thought no more of her husband. She went to plan the arrangement of her little dinner-party. She liked to plan her dinner-parties. Lord Saxon's house had become famous for its little dinners since Lady Saxon had become its mistress. Lord Saxon's father made it his study to advance his son to political leadership. It was a fine tradition in that great Whig family that the eldest son should always be a political leader in the House of Commons, and that the father should find liberal
means for the elder son to fulfil all the social as well as the political duties of leadership. The Duke of Athelstane had wished his eldest son to be married as soon as possible, and to be married to the daughter of some great English Whig peer. But Lord Saxon disappointed his father in the two conditions: he did not marry early, and he did not marry the daughter of an English Whig peer. He remained until his fortieth year unmarried, and then he came home from Germany bringing with him as his wife the widow of a doubtful baron, some Residenz doctor who had been ennobled because he restored to imaginary health a dyspeptic or hypochondriacal German prince. Still, the duke was heroic enough to make the best of things even then. Lord Saxon's reckless youth had inspired the duke with a secret dread that he might be entrapped by even a less eligible comate than this widow of a doubtful German baron. And there were other and more occult reasons, which, however, the duke would not readily have acknowledged, that made him willing to indulge his son in all ways.

So Lord Saxon's father accepted Lady Saxon, and even put on a goodly show of welcome for her. She was very handsome; she proved to be very clever, and there was nothing against her—at least, there was nothing known against her; and she flattered the old man a great deal, and before long had talked him over. Lady Saxon's father-in-law came to put some trust in her, and to regard her as a sort of fellow-conspirator and colleague. She had a genius for political combinations and for dinner-parties, and the head of the house gave her full means of testing her capacity. The duke was old, and was anxious that his son should make a name and an influence in the House of Commons before destiny, cruel in two ways, should remove the father from the House of Lords, and entomb the son alive in the father's vacated place. Thus the stiff festivities at the family mansion, in which men only had taken part, now gave place to a more brilliant and even more lavish form of entertainment at the house in Seamore Place.

CHAPTER XXI.

LADY SAXON'S DINNER-PARTY.

Lord and Lady Saxon were in their drawing-room receiving their guests. Lady Saxon, full of animation and talk, looked more than usually Juno-like and magnificent in her rich draperies and her wonderful parure of uncut sapphires and diamonds. Who could have believed, even on her own confession, that she had once walked barefooted behind a caravan? Lord Saxon, on the other hand, was duller and heavier than his wont. He
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had a stupid, preoccupied air, and when he spoke he seemed hardly to lift his eyes from the ground.

Lord Saxon's father, the Duke of Athelstane, had arrived. He was a hale, handsome, erect old man, who, people said, looked, but for his white hair, younger, straighter, and of keener vitality than his son. There had also come the Duke of Nornside, old-young, dandified, unmarried—to the eternal disgrace of chaperons—who had succeeded to his dukedom in his minority, and who prided himself upon having seen a good deal more of the world than most people—all other dukes included; his mother, the Duchess of Nornside; an archbishop, and several people belonging entirely to the world of fashion and politics.

Presently Mr Bellarmin was announced. Despite all his recent troubles of spirit, he seemed to bring with him that which was his peculiar charm—a certain breath of youth and sweetness and enjoyment of life, not altogether congenial with that somewhat luxurious and languorous atmosphere.

'Anything in your House to-day, Mr Bellarmin?' the Duke of Nornside asked.

'No, nothing to speak of—a local Sunday Closing Bill; it was talked out. By the way, you weren't there, Lord Saxon?'

'No,' returned Lord Saxon, monosyllabically; and Lady Saxon darted a glance at her husband. For the first time since the morning it occurred to her that he had seen Sir Oscar Scourfield that day.

The Duke of Nornside began to talk politics at once. It was not that he took great interest in the subject; but he had a way of talking familiarly about anything that came up, whether he knew much about it or not. 'I daresay you fellows are breaking your hearts to get back into office, eh, Saxon? eh, Mr Bellarmin? Are you and your Tory Democrats—your merry men—isn't that what Tommy Tressel calls them?—going to help these Liberal fellows to get back again?'

Bellarmin smiled, and made a jesting rejoinder. Lord Saxon's heavy brows met in a slight frown. The Duke of Nornside never allowed himself to be disturbed by the consciousness of having made a *malapropos* remark, and added a few more in the same strain.

'The system of government by party is really deplorable,' said the archbishop, shaking his head despondingly.

'But what to put in its place? That's the point,' cheerfully observed the elder duke.

'We don't want to get into office,' broke in Lord Saxon, brusquely. 'Fact of it is, what the country wants now is quiet. We have been putting in a lot of change lately; and I am sure people want to be let alone now for a little. So do I.'

'Yes, but people say that "Lucifer" is getting restless. He wants to stir up the Constitution, don't he?—to make a sensation?' said the Duke of Nornside.

'I don't believe a word of what people or the men on the papers say; it's they who want to stir up things for a sensation,' said Lord Saxon, decisively. 'Champion's all right.'
'You are a great believer in Champion, Lord Saxon,' the archbishop said, with another shake of his head.

'Well, naturally. I am a great believer in Champion. He gets hold of the people somehow—don't you know? One can't tell how he does it. Wonderful head!'

'Wonderful voice!' the archbishop conceded.

'Wonderful tongue!' the Duke of Nornside put in.

'Yes, he has a wonderful tongue,' Lord Saxon replied, simply.

'But it is not all tongue, as some of you fellows try to make out. You say that you believe it; but I don't fancy that you really do. Champion is a great man; and of course he is a great friend of mine.'

'But you don't want to go in for all sorts of revolutionary schemes—abolishing the House of Lords, and all that?'

'Of course I don't; but no one does. Don't you believe a word of it.'

'Still, by Jove!' the duke exclaimed, 'you know everybody is saying things, and everybody can't be wrong.'

'Everybody? Who is everybody? The fellows on the evening papers? or Tommy Tressel?'

'No; Tommy Tressel told me it was bosh, and that there was nothing going on; but I always believed all the more that there was something. I know Tommy was only trying to put me off the scent.'

'But you don't really imagine,' Saxon said, very gravely, and supporting his chin with one hand while he looked fixedly at the young duke, and his face wore an expression not altogether unlike a scowl—'you really don't imagine that Champion would, in any case, make a confidant of Tommy Tressel?' Come, you can't believe that?'

'Don't know what I might not believe of Champion.'

Lord Saxon's face changed its frown or scowl into a rugged smile.

'I verily believe,' he said, 'some of you fellows think Champion is the devil.' And just at this moment the name of Sir Victor Champion was announced.

Sir Victor paused for half a second on the threshold, and flashed his deep brown eyes round the room and over the company. His eyes had the peculiarity of seeming to rest on everyone in a company at the same moment; and Champion could always individualise with a glance everyone in a group. Lady Saxon went forward to meet him. There was a radiance about her as she held out her hand. She felt sure that things were going well with him; and she had a sort of pride of ownership in him and his plans just then. She thought there was something significant in the very pressure of his hand. He began to talk at once; ostensibly to the Duchess of Nornside, really to the company generally, about some new play which he had seen and admired; and he even quoted some lines from it, giving them out with far finer dramatic effect than can always be commanded by actors even of the highest class. While he was still declaiming, Mary Beaton was announced. Perhaps no other comer could
have drawn attention away just then from Champion's declamation; but the curiosity about Miss Beaton was intense and overpowering, and Champion stopped in the middle of a sentence. Even the archbishop was not so devoted, or so bigoted in his devotion, to the Act of Settlement, as not to be curious to see something of the young lady who was given out as a Stuart princess, and was alleged to have at least a moral right to the Crown of England.

Bellarmin, recaptured in the toils of Lady Saxon, with whom he had been exchanging a few low-toned words, half bantering half serious, about what she called 'the Stonehenge negotiations,' turned, too, at Mary's entrance.

Though it was in reality only a day or two since he had parted from her, there seemed a lapse of years between then and now, and he had a fantastic sense of a gulf fixed between them. He had returned to London with the determination to put away all hope of winning her, to deck himself once more in Lady Saxon's gilded chains, and to deaden the tender memories of Stonehenge Park by plunging into the whirl of social and political excitement. But everything seemed to stand still for him as she approached, and the lights and the forms and the faces of the people round him, and even Lady Saxon herself, in all her luxuriant beauty, paled and dimmed, and became unreal as the phantoms of the Walpurgis night might have seemed to Faust when he beheld the vision of Margaret. How fair and sweet and noble she looked—his White Queen—as she paused, with a certain stately expectation, just within the threshold of the door, and seemed to wait for her host to lead her forward. Mary Stuart Beaton might in truth have been the Blanche Reine, for, true to her traditions, she had arranged her costume of stiff white brocade, with its pointed bodice and straight folds, and a curious little coif of rose diamonds upon her chestnut hair, so as to forcibly suggest her illustrious ancestress of unhappy memory; while General Falcon, with a foreign star and order on his breast, and Lady Struthers, in ruby velvet and Venetian point lace, seemed by no means unfitting attendants to a young lady of royal descent.

Lord and Lady Saxon advanced to welcome her, the latter with considerable effusiveness; and the Duke of Athelstane, the archbishop, and the Duke of Nornside were presented.

Lady Saxon did not approve of what she called the *table-d'hôte* system of dining. She had arranged this dinner after a plan of her own. She broke up the dining-room into several small tables, each accommodating six persons. She carefully arranged who was to dine with whom, and thus made thoughtful provision for each party to allow of political combinations and political confidences, with a leaven of beauty and wit and fashion to give vivacity to the lump.

There were three tables set out this evening. Lord Saxon presided at one, Lady Saxon at another, and the Duke of Athelstane at the third table. If you did not sit with Lord Saxon, then perhaps you sat with Lady Saxon—and you could not grumble at that; and if not with Lady Saxon, then be pleased to remember
that you sat with the grandest old Whig peer in England, the living head of the house of which Lord Saxon was only the heir-apparent. There! Thus each guest might reason to himself.

At Lord Saxon's table sat Mary Beaton, Sir Victor Champion—had Lady Saxon displayed her usual generalship in this respect?—but she had so arranged that she could watch him from where she sat, and she had placed the two as far apart as is possible at a round table—the Duke of Nornside, Lady Mavis Redhouse, who was tall and dark, and had a fixed, dreamy smile, and was, in fact, or liked to be thought, the Primrose League Egeria of the ultra-Tory Party; and Lady Eastgrave, a beauty in her meridian, who wore a marvellous Paris costume of black and yellow, and whom Lady Saxon had placed there with an artistic sense of variety as presenting an exact contrast to the modern Mary Stuart. Lady Eastgrave had yellow hair—not bright gold, like Lady Saxon's, but a beautiful crépé arrangement, fresh from Bond Street, which only the eye of a hairdresser—or a woman—could detect as postiche, yet which seemed worn more as a concession to fashion than with a view to artifice. She had black eyebrows and clear dark eyes, and the thin, high-featured face which one associates with a certain type of the English aristocracy—the type which holds its head erect and looks vacuous and bored as it tools along the Ladies' Mile, which clips its g's with high-bred scorn, and languidly vituperates Radical abuses, and is never anything but Whig-Tory or Tory-Whig. Lady Eastgrave's colour was a little fixed, and her diamonds were magnificent. She seemed at once ingenuous and blâsté, and turned directly to Miss Beaton and made a remark on some commonplace subject, which, however, conveyed with fine directness, 'I know who you are, and I want you to know that I know.'

Mary Beaton, seated between her heavy, taciturn host and the young Duke of Nornside, had an opportunity for making a mental note upon the lack of brilliancy displayed by the British peer. Lord Saxon said very little, and there was long pauses between his sentences. He asked some questions about the little Schwalbenstadt court. His notions about the government of Schwalbenstadt appeared dim, and he was constantly recurring to Frankfort, a city which seemed to have made a more abiding impression upon him than any other he had ever visited. This was natural, perhaps; but Mary did not know that it was there he had married Madame Langenwelt, and so was at a loss to understand why German life should be regarded solely from the standpoint of Frankfort-on-the-Main. Then Lord Saxon said that he thought English people were worse educated in the matter of geography than any other people on the face of the globe; and he told Mary that he was always busy—that he didn't find being out of office made much difference in the amount of work that he got through; and that if a fellow did his duty conscientiously in the House of Commons, and got up his facts, there was no time for anything else—the only result of being in office was that you had to trust to other people to get up your facts for you; but he always liked to get up his own facts if he could.
The duke, on the other side, kept up a sort of rippling monologue. He was very good-looking. The aroma of rank and fashion which seemed to exhale from him would have delighted the lady novelists who make their heroes talk French, and who revel in 'le high-life.' The duke did not talk French, or even very grammatical English. He, too, clipped his g's, and he drawled a little, and put in 'don't you know' at the end of every sentence. His eyes had a funny twinkle; he looked exquisitely clean and well got up. His hair was shorn very close, and parted in the middle; and he seemed to feel that his station involved certain duties, one of which was that of being affable to everybody.

The duke asked, too, about Schwalbenstadt. He was very communicative about his opinions and his fancies. He was very fond of travelling. He always had travelled a great deal. In fact, he would like to be at it now, going round the world on a bicycle, don't you know, and that sort of thing. 'But I am tied by the leg. Must stop in England. Fact is, I'm a conscientious fellow. In these times I think a fellow ought to stay at home. It's his duty, don't you know, and a word to his people now and then, and seeing to his farms, and making friends out in the hunting-field, and that sort of thing; why, it might help to stop a revolution, don't you see, and everyone says there is a revolution coming.'

The duke paused and looked at Mary, not certain as to how far he was treading on personal grounds. 'I hope you are not going to start a revolution, Miss Beaton. It would lead to no end of bothers, don't you know. And then there's the Act of Settlement; you can't get over that.'

'I don't want to start any sort of revolution,' replied Mary, 'though I think you need one, duke, to put crooked things straight.'

'Oh, that's all Champion's doing!' murmured the duke. 'It's he who upsets things. He has got a bee in his bonnet; he is too clever. Saxon will find it out. They say he wants to do away with us, and we couldn't stand that, don't you know. You should write a book, Miss Beaton, if you want to put things straight. The fellows wanted me to write a book, though perhaps you wouldn't believe it—about the Turkish war. I was out there, and I talked to no end of distinguished people. I could throw no end of light on things, if I could only remember what they said, but I can't; I didn't even put down headings. You should always put down headings of the conversation when you talk to distinguished people. The fellows said that if I'd give 'em the facts they'd work them up, and I wish I had; for Bellairs—Bellairs—you know Bellairs of the Guards? You must have heard that he is the most stunning liar—really the most awful liar. He has written a book all about the same things and the same people; and there isn't a word of it true.'

Mary wished that she had had Bellarmin next her instead of the Duke of Nornside; and Lady Saxon, in arranging her guests' places, had the amiable intention of provoking Rolfe's jealousy by the spectacle of Mary Beaton engrossed with the duke. So she had put him at her own table, in full view of the fair Stuart, with
The Duchess of Nornside, the wife of a foreign ambassador, the archbishop, and General Falcon. At the Duke of Athelstane's table sat Lady Struthers, the ambassador, an ex-lady-in-waiting, a brilliant American beauty, and a handsome guardsman.

But Mary Beaton's eyes and her attention had wandered across the table. She was listening to Sir Victor Champion's silvery voice as he assured Lady Eastgrave that French dramatic art is too subtle to be popular in England, and deplored British realism, and the terrible system of making points and playing to the gallery. He described Rachel and her exhibition of tragic passion in the famous recitation of Adrienne, a few lines of which he repeated with something of the same magnetic charm as that of which he had been telling. And so on to Bernhardt.

'She is a maigre,' put in Lord Saxon, who had joined in the theatrical discussion. 'I incline to the Grand Turk's opinion. I like plenitude and bountifulness in a woman.'

'Oh, she is a fausse maigre,' said Lady Eastgrave. 'Her bones are very small.'

The duke, meanwhile, had got on to psychology. 'I believe in intuition, don't you know. I buy my pictures and my bric-à-brac by intuition; and I choose my friends by intuition. I get on ever so much better than the fellows who reason. People who reason always go wrong. There's Champion, don't you know,' and the duke lowered his voice. 'He reasons. He's a what-do-you-call-it?—makes black seem white—sophist—rhetorician. I never went in for rhetoric—couldn't do it, don't you know. When I'm at the Dilettante Club, and fellows begin about philosophy and Egyptian antiquities, and all that sort of thing, I shut up. But I don't make mistakes. Champion does. You should follow out his policy and his mistakes, and you'll find they all come from reason.'

'I don't think he makes mistakes,' Mary said, in a tone of grave reproof. 'I don't understand anything about English policy,' she added, 'but he seems to me to know all about everything.'

'Uncommonly interesting man,' assented the duke. 'If Bellairs was here he'd have all that down for his memoirs. It'll be valuable stuff fifty years hence, though it is only about actresses. That's what these literary fellows think of. Why, a lot of headings of conversation of eminent men, don't you know, are as good as a life-insurance policy. It might be the Eastern question, you know, and that would be history, paid for accordingly.'

Mary laughed. 'I wish he would say something about political questions,' she said. 'This talk about books and pictures and the drama is charming, but he seems thrown away on such things. He is a maker of history, and I always want to hear him tell of his own deeds.'

'Tell you what,' whispered the duke, 'if you want him to talk politics, Miss Beaton, I'll try if I can't draw him out.'

'Oh, no, please!' 'Yes; you'll see.'

'Then be very careful, or he will see what you would have, and refuse to be drawn out.'
'Oh, I'll manage him all right!' So, by way of managing him all right, the duke blurted out, 'I say, Sir Victor, what are you going to do with us?'

'Whom do you mean by us, duke?' Sir Victor asked, with a determined smile, which had something ominous in it.

'Us? Well, of course, I mean our unfortunate House of Lords. Everyone says you are preparing to make some grand attack on us. Papers all say so, don't you know.'

'I don't read the papers very much,' Champion said.

'Oh, well, they say it every day! They say Tommy Tressel and you are up to something.'

'Fancy,' Lord Saxon interposed, 'Sir Victor Champion and Tommy Tressel being associates!'

'Everyone says they are, though, all the same,' the persevering duke went on.

'Mr Tressel,' Champion said, gravely, 'is a very capable man, and, so far as I can judge, a very sincere and earnest man. A man may be witty, and may be even cynical in manner, and yet be a sincere politician, duke.'

'I didn't say a word against Tommy Tressel, Sir Victor. I like Tressel. I like his dinners, and I like his stories; uncommonly spicy stories Tressel tells. And I like Mrs Tressel and her stories; she is as good as a play, Mrs Tressel—uncommonly good-natured, too, don't you know. I think Tressel has some very sound opinions. Had a long talk with him about the Bonapartes the other night, and I quite agree with him that they're no good—ought to be done away with, don't you know. It wasn't I, it was Saxon, who repudiated Tressel.'

'I didn't think he was the sort of man to be in close association with Champion,' Saxon said. He was gazing steadfastly all the time at Champion. Champion said nothing.

'Then you won't divulge your projects in advance, Sir Victor, not even for the benefit of Miss Beaton?'

'Pray, don't bring me into so indiscreet a proposal, duke,' Mary hastened to interpose.

'There is nothing Miss Beaton could ask me that I could refuse to tell her,' Champion said, with a bend of the head and a gracious smile directed at Mary.

'Now, then, ask him,' murmured the duke.

'Thank you ever so much, Sir Victor,' Mary replied; 'but I have nothing to ask, except that you won't think I was foolish enough to ask you anything.'

Champion bowed again in acknowledgment.

'Do you know,' he said, addressing the company generally, 'that I have lately come across a most interesting relic in a rather curious way? It is a bundle of proofs of Walter Scott's 'Peveril of the Peak,' with Scott's own corrections and additions, and charming little annotations for Ballantyne's instruction; and he went on to dilate on the interesting nature of this treasure-trove.

'He won't be drawn,' the duke whispered.

'Hush, pray!' Mary said. 'You didn't go very well about it, duke.'
The Rival Princess.

'Extraordinary that such things should get into the papers! Saxon suddenly said, as if he had not heard a word about the proof-sheets of 'Peveril of the Peak.'

'But, if they're not true, why don't somebody contradict them?' the duke asked, still trying to manage his little game.

'Oh, well, I don't believe in writing to the papers to contradict things,' said Saxon, quickly. 'If a man began at that sort of work he would never get done with it.'

'But there must be something in it all,' the duke urged.

Lord Saxon looked again at Sir Victor; but Sir Victor either had not heard or would not hear what they were saying. He had now gone off on the question of reputed plagiarism among living authors. Lord Saxon's heavy features wore a look of something like pain. The idea was forcing itself into his mind that his old friend and colleague was keeping something a secret from him for some reason; and that for some reason, too, the secret was partly made known to his wife. But it was quite clear to him that the present moment was not the time for asking any questions, and that in no case could the Duke of Nornside be considered an appropriate questioner. So Lord Saxon tried to appear greatly interested in the subject of reputed plagiarism.

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CHAPTER XXII.

SIR VICTOR'S MASTER.

A SLIGHT lull occurred at Lady Saxon's table while the little passage-at-arms took place between Sir Victor and the Duke of Nornside. Bellarmin noticed that though Lady Saxon smiled sweetly upon the archbishop, and interjected an occasional remark into his somewhat florid dissertation upon recent archaeological discoveries in Central America, her attention was strained, and she was, in reality, listening to the conversation at the other table. Bellarmin, too, followed it with interest, and was, for a few moments, scarcely so ready in his replies to the frank confidences of his transatlantic neighbour as he had been at the beginning of dinner. He was particularly struck by the few sentences which Lord Saxon uttered, and by the general manner of his host, which somehow to-night seemed to suggest a greater depth and reality in the man than his demeanour ordinarily indicated. Bellarmin had never known much of Lord Saxon personally. He had always avoided him, having got the idea, perhaps truly enough, that Lord Saxon avoided him. He had made up his mind that Lord Saxon was haughty, self-opinionated, and rude. But quite lately he had found himself beginning to change his opinion. It was clear to him that Lord Saxon liked to be talked to by those who knew how to talk frankly and unaffectedly, and thus to encourage him in talking in
the only way he could talk—frankly and unaffectedly. It seemed to Bellarmin that one explanation of that reserve in Lord Saxon, which so many people took to be pride and sullenness, was found in the fact that for Lord Saxon there was no alternative but frank, unaffected talk, or complete and stolid silence. To-night he found himself curiously drawn towards Lord Saxon. 'It would be well,' he found himself thinking, 'for the man who should win and hold Lord Saxon's friendship. And the woman who had won his love? If she should lose it?'

These thoughts were in Bellarmin's mind as the ladies passed out of the dining-room. It was plain that, for some reason or other, Sir Victor Champion had kept Lord Saxon out of his confidence with regard to the move he was about to make. The question which seemed very doubtful indeed to Bellarmin was, whether the disclosure, when it came, would not come too late for Saxon; whether his loyalty to Champion would stand so much of a strain; whether he would not feel that he had been deliberately deceived, and would not renounce the political companionship of a leader who had thus slighted him. Bellarmin thought of his own feelings the other day, and he felt somewhat in sympathy with Lord Saxon—had even a sort of compassion for him.

There was talk of Sir Victor Champion in the drawing-room among the ladies. Lady Mavis Redhouse reproached her hostess, half banteringly, half in earnest, for placing her in such close proximity to her political arch-enemy. Lady Mavis was a dame of high degree in the Primrose League. She had all the courage of her opinions, and sometimes even flaunted the Primrose skirt. She was poor and proud, and her good looks were waning. She had been for some years a widow, and had apartments in Hampton Court. She had been a great politician, and professed to have carried two counties and three boroughs by her own personal exertions. She detested the Radicals, of whom she believed Sir Victor to be the chief, but tolerated the Whigs; declared a certain admiration for Lord Saxon as being a man of principle, and at heart one of themselves. She was a professional diner-out, and never refused an invitation to this particular house, because, though she inveighed against Lady Saxon's political eclecticism in the matter of her guests, she was as likely to meet a Conservative as a Liberal; and, on the whole, thought it advisable to embrace opportunities for encounter with wavering partisans on both sides, for she liked to be talked of as a wire-puller. People were glad to have her because she was amusing in her way, and she was an aristocratic institution, and would not go to the house of a newly enriched or ennobled manufacturer or City man: 'No, not if his wife begged me on her bended knees, my dear,' Lady Mavis said, complacently.

'I wonder what poor dear De Carmel would have said!' she exclaimed, pathetically. She prided herself upon a close friendship with that late renowned Tory chief.

'He would have advised you to make the most of your opportunities,' replied Lady Saxon, laughing. 'Poor Lady Mavis! I must arrange to put you between two Conservatives next time.
The Rival Princess.

Only think, Miss Beaton, the last time Lady Mavis lunched here she had the misfortune to sit beside Mr Tommy Tressel!'

Mary smiled with grave graciousness, but did not speak. It was not her way to talk much in the company of ladies with whom she was not perfectly congenial.

'Tommy Tressel is a Jacobin,' said Lady Eastgrave. 'I should hate him if he did not tell such amusing naughty stories. But I know that he would put on the red cap in a minute, and sentence us cheerfully to the guillotine. He wants to do away with us.'

'Like Sir Victor Champion,' put in Lady Mavis, savagely.

'Oh, no,' softly interposed the foreign ambassador's wife, who spoke English with scarcely an accent, and was sweetly neutral in politics. 'Sir Victor has the qualities of a statesman. Of course, it is his wish to destroy something. That is the way with them all when they are reformers. But he is not a Jacobin. It is only the hereditary right, is it not, that he would do away with? But, and she threw up her pretty hands, 'it is a grand power in England—the aristocracy!'

'I am told that in private Champion says he would be quite willing to do away with the Church—our Church. I have always suspected him of a leaning towards Rome,' said the Duchess of Nornside. 'He thinks it's too troublesome an undertaking, though if he could find a man who would undertake knocking it to pieces quietly, he would let him try.'

'Just as if he were sending for a plumber!' cried Lady Mavis. 'My dear Lady Saxon—don't say anything to me in praise of such a wretch! he is a wretch. We all know it. He must know it himself. He can't help knowing it.'

'Come, now—my husband was a colleague of his—and I am sure you won't say Lord Saxon is a man to patronise wretches,' Lady Saxon said with a smile.

Lady Mavis shook her head. 'Ah, my dear, Lord Saxon will find him out in time. I always said so. He will find him out very soon. There will be a split-up before long. Everyone says the wretch is planning some frightful stroke of policy now—some horrible plot against his own sovereign and his own country. I don't believe he could be happy if he were not doing something to degrade and dishonour his own country. Look abroad! Look anywhere. Nothing is felt but contempt and pity for us—pity for England, my dear, because of that wicked man.'

Lady Saxon, on her part, felt the most utter contempt for Primrose League dames who talked and argued after this fashion. But she had a secret pleasure in drawing the talk out sometimes. And she was anxious, for reasons of her own, to get known as a votary of Sir Victor Champion. 'Perhaps he doesn't mean to be wicked,' she suggested. 'I give him credit for patriotism, Lady Mavis. But what is this great plot people are talking of?' she asked, with a simplicity that seemed delightfully childish. 'I don't believe there is anything of the kind. Lord Saxon would have known; and Lord Saxon would have told me.'
'Lord Saxon! My dear, Lord Saxon is the last person in the world Sir Victor would consult about a plot of that kind. No; it is his policy not to let Lord Saxon know anything about it, until it bursts upon the world and Lord Saxon is no longer able to prevent it.'

'Well, you know everything that is going on.'

'I know most things,' Lady Mavis replied, decidedly; 'and so, I think, my dear, do you.'

'All the same, I fancy you are mistaken about this. Tell me—why do people think Sir Victor is meditating any move?'

'Why? Because he appears to be doing nothing. Don’t you know that when children are perfectly quiet they are always at some mischief? It is just the same with him. Months and months nothing, or next to nothing, has been heard of him—writing essays on history, they say. Essays on history, indeed! As if that sort of work would satisfy him or his master!'

'Sir Victor’s master, dear Lady Mavis—whom do you mean?'

'The devil, my dear—who else?'

Everybody laughed—except, indeed, Miss Beaton; and just then the entrance of the servants with coffee put a stop for the moment to Lady Mavis’ anathemas. Lady Saxon moved about among her guests. She talked with much cordiality to Mary Beaton, and asked many questions about the visit to Stonehenge Park, about Sir Victor Champion, about Bellarmin. But Mary was grave and reticent. She could not have defined the feeling which made her shrink from discussing these two men with Lady Saxon, but it was very distinctly present with her. Lady Struthers felt gratified by the demeanour of her young mistress. This stately grace reflected credit upon herself, and was in every way befitting a Stuart princess. Certainly no one would that evening have suspected the strain of frolic and dare-devilry which was a part of Mary’s nature. In truth, the girl’s mood bordered upon melancholy. She was a little bewildered, too. Her experience of English society had, so far, been limited, but she found nothing in it that harmonised with her temperament. The want of reality oppressed her. She seemed to be assisting at a masque, in which each had a part to play, and wore a costume appropriate to the part. She felt a momentary scorn of her own part and her own costume. What man or woman with one grain of poetic instinct, with one ray of ideal craving, has not felt the same when moving in the world of so-called pleasure? The women were narrow and artificial, walled round by the prejudices of their order, of the political creed to which they had been born, knowing no language but the shibboleth that prevailed in their own particular circle. She had already discovered that unmeasured reprobation of Sir Victor Champion was a characteristic of certain phases of English society. She had not expected to find it here, in the house of his colleague and friend. Was sincerity an impossibility with people such as these? Did convictions mean nothing? Was loyalty to a leader only a profession on the floor of the House of Commons?

By-and-by the conversation drifted on to current gossip and
scandal—to the talk at Pratt’s, on a ‘society’ night as retailed to Lady Eastgrave—so she said—by her husband. She was careful to inform the company generally that he had gone off suddenly on a short yachting excursion. She was sure that everybody must be wondering that he was not with her this evening.

The old Duchess of Nornside murmured maliciously that this view of the subject had not occurred to her; and Lady Mavis Redhouse whispered to Miss Beaton that she supposed Lady Eastgrave wanted them all to believe that the little difference about Count Cania had been squared. The American beauty, who had not long been over, and was in the first modest flush of success, did ‘not want to seem too green,’ and appealed to Lady Struthers as to what was quite the ‘smart’ thing to do under given social contingencies, with a frank directness that called forth the eloquence of that authority on court usages.

The gentlemen came in while Lady Eastgrave was giving her views upon a political conversazione at which she had been assisting, and where a certain Lady Eleanora Fitzgriffin had made a long Radical speech, in which she proclaimed that ‘the sun of England’s liberty and progress was rising from the borough of Northampton.’

Lady Mavis shook her head. ‘Good gracious! I don’t know what we’re coming to.’

‘Oh, yes,’ Lady Eastgrave continued, ‘and several members of Parliament made wild speeches, and one man was invited to make a speech on the strength of his having been a defeated candidate for a provincial borough. Why, I have a cousin who actually goes in for provincial politics, and is standing for the town council of Manchester!’

‘Manchester is rather low form; but we must all begin in the provinces, you know; Lady Eastgrave,’ said the handsome guardsman, who was thinking of going on the stage.

‘It seems to me,’ said Lady Mavis, ‘that we get everything from the provinces now-a-days. The picture buyers come from Liverpool, the heiresses from Leeds, and the new peers from Burton-on-Trent. I sat at dinner next to a man from Birmingham last night, and he assured me that nobody ever is born in London now. People all come up from the provinces.’

Sir Victor found an opportunity of coming up to Lady Saxon, and saying a few words for her private understanding.

‘Everything is going well. I want you to know that; and I shall have Bellarmin with me, I am sure—thanks to you for that.’

‘I am working for you.’ Lady Saxon reddened under his earnest look, so deeply did the look and the word of recognition touch her. For the moment she forgot her jealousy, her vague distrust. ‘You will have more than Mr Bellarmin with you, I hope,’ she added, quickly; and glanced towards the part of the room where her husband was standing.

‘You hope so—you think so? I am not so certain; but if it should be as you think, then it will be your doing also.’
'No; he believes in me; but he believes in you, too—trusts you, thinks it impossible that you could have any project on foot about which you had not consulted him. He is stupid—ah! stupid enough to kill one with boredom; but he has a sort of loyalty—it's in the blood. It's one of the privileges you Radicals can't despoil them of, Victor. There is something in "race," after all.'

'Could I ever deny it?' he exclaimed, with low-toned warmth. 'The courage of race, the loyalty and chivalrous sense of honour, the noblesse oblige traditions—who could deny that such things be?'

He glanced involuntarily in the direction of Mary Beaton. It seemed to Lady Saxon's jealous heart that he unconsciously indicated this girl as the inheritress and the embodiment of true nobility. She lost command over herself for a moment.

'I understand,' she said. 'You have been studying the qualities of race at the very fountain-head. I forgot for the moment that you had but just come from the camp of the Legitimists. Tell me. Are you, too, captivated by the charms of our young Pretendress? She has a long list of admirers, I hear—Bellarmin, Lord Stonehenge, the ex-prime minister. In good truth, the young lady has cause to be proud of her list of victims—or should we say her suitors?'

Champion's steady gaze did not falter before the flash of Lady Saxon's eyes, as he answered, quietly: 'Miss Beaton could hardly fail to interest even a man so preoccupied as I am. But you, Josephine, know that there is one woman who claims my warmest regard.'

'Yet you are cold—unemotional,' she whispered, passionately. 'Your letter the other day! It was the letter of a diplomatist, not of a—of a man of heart. Must I still—must I be always a sacrifice to policy?'

'No—a trusted comrade—a woman who can for the moment put love in the second place. You gave England the first place. Remember our compact. At this crisis you would not have me anything but reserved in my letters to Lord Saxon's wife.'

She changed her tone at once. 'Victor—yes. I will keep to our compact—but—I am a woman!' She gave her shoulders a little impatient shrug, and moved towards a picture on an easel, which stood in a more distant part of the room. She appeared to be pointing out its beauties to him, while she spoke in a low, rapid tone. 'You must speak to Saxon as soon as possible. If he guessed that Bellarmin had been sounded—that Tressel had your confidence—your hope of him would be at an end. And it is in the atmosphere—you know how whispers are carried by the birds of the air. The papers are full of it. There is a rumour that the Tories want to forestall you. Speak to him at once—vaguely at first. Get his promise. He will be a drag on the wheel, of course; but trust to time and to me.'

'I suppose you are right—I have no doubt you are right,' said Sir Victor. 'I will speak to him, yes. The opportunity
may occur this evening. Better here than in the House of Commons.'

'Yes. I am going to the D'Estivals' ball when these people have left. Will you come on there afterwards, Victor?'

'I—at the D'Estivals' ball? That isn't in my line, I am afraid. No. Let us meet to-morrow at the House, and take a turn on the Terrace.'

She gave a little nod of assent.

'It is quite as well that we should be seen together, especially there,' she said. 'It will give a sort of contradiction to these rumours of a split between you and Saxon.'

She moved away and began to talk to the archbishop. Sir Victor, too, passed on, and seated himself beside Mary Beaton. Lady Saxon fell into a mood of sullenness, which was shown clearly enough on her face. It was only for a moment, however. She recovered herself and her smiles, and was the brilliant hostess, the coquettish beauty, once again.

Bellarmin was by Miss Beaton's side. The young man's heart had been heavy within him during the evening; but he smiled and jested and uttered complimentary nothings, as men and women do in the great world, even when the fox is gnawing their vitals. He had scarcely talked to Mary that evening until now; and even the little interchange of commonplaces which had first passed between them had seemed to his guilty conscience a treason to her and a treason to Lady Saxon. Now they spoke of Stonehenge Park, and of the roses and the lilies, and the walled garden, and the still lake, and of the almost conventual calm which seemed to have settled over everything there, and which had such a soothing effect upon those who came within its influence. Mary spoke with tender regret of the pleasure Monsignor Valmy's conversation had given her, and of the services in Lord Stonehenge's beautiful oratory. It was a trait in the young man's character, that while he professed all the modern materialism, he loved to indulge a certain devotional tendency by dropping in occasionally at the Catholic churches while the mass was going on. The sacred music, the tapers and flowers, and swaying censers and fumes of incense, the pageantry of it all, gave him a dreamy sense of satisfaction, and appealed to the mediæval strain in him. He was wont to say that he preferred the music at the Carmelite Church to that at the opera, and that music could only be fully enjoyed in silence, and under accompanying conditions of solemnity.

He had thus lightly explained to Mary his presence in the chapel the first time when she had observed him, quietly seated under the shadow of a pillar, and evidently anxious not to obtrude his attendance. And then she had smiled in grave, sweet rebuke, and had said: 'Ah! the Divine Voice is speaking to you, though you do not know it.'

He thought of her words now, and of the exalted look on her face—a look that he had never seen in the face of any other woman, though he had known several who were good and religious enough, he thought, to be angels on earth.
'Religion is much in your life,' he said, abruptly.

'Yes,' she answered, with her gentle seriousness; 'it is a part of me, or I am a part of it. I mean—' She paused an instant, and then added, with some slight hesitation: 'Once you talked to me of giving up the sham court and the part of exiled princess, you called it—and, indeed, it often appears to me a sham, and I am weary of the part. That is when the world presses upon me, and I see only the hollowness and the vanity of it; in other moods, I know that there is for me a reality in it which nothing could change altogether. Well, Mr Bellarmin, I could not tell you, and perhaps you would not understand, how the religious feeling is mixed up even with what you call the sham royalty.'

'Miss Beaton,' he said, earnestly, 'I used the words only in the superficial sense; I knew that you agreed with me too. It was because I feel so—so deeply about you, and I cannot bear the idea of your being in a false position. But in the real sense, of course, you do come of a line of kings and queens, and nothing could alter what is in your very blood, or make you different or less royal, either by birth or nature. And if you only knew how much I am concerned about you, and how much good it does me to hear you speak in this way—'

'Well,' she said, still hesitatingly, 'you know that it was for religion the crown was lost; and perhaps it is a wild fancy, but it may be that England will return once more to the faith which made her greatness. Ah, yes, it is so; and she will dwindle and die if new life is not put into her, the life of religion. I have a deep and a steadfast hope, Mr Bellarmin. Some time—some time—it may be long hence—truth will conquer. It seems to me that what you need now in England more than anything is the sense of religion—such as we Catholics have—some of the old superstitions, as you would say; the dear, dead traditions of your men who lived for piety. I think England would be greater if there were more men in her like—well, like Lord Stonehenge.'

'Why do you instance Lord Stonehenge?'

'Because—I hardly know. Because he is a very fervent Catholic, and the embodiment of all that past, all that I am talking of—but you wouldn't understand.'

'Oh, you must not say that!' exclaimed Rolfe, in low-toned almost passionate insistence. 'I do understand—'

He broke off abruptly.

'Madame,' said Falcon, grimly, at Mary's elbow, 'Lady Saxon wishes to present the German ambassador to you.'

Mary's eyes, which had been fixed on Bellarmin's face in a kind of wonder and tenderness, turned away with a sudden startled consciousness. Bellarmin got up. He felt a sick revulsion. Had Falcon overheard his agitated expostulation, and guessed the secret his tone might well have betrayed? It would almost seem so, his face was so thunderous.

Indeed, all the evening Lady Saxon had easily seen that there was something disturbing the mind of General Falcon. The symptoms would perhaps not have been noticed by anyone else; but they told the story to her. She saw that, for all his effort at
politeness of manner, he was unable to keep his attention fixed on the passing conversation, and that he looked anxious and troubled when his eyes rested upon Mary Beaton's face. She saw that he sometimes glanced at herself with the glance of one who has something he wishes to talk about, yet shrinks from saying.

CHAPTER XXIII.

'I HOPE OUR ROADS MAY NEVER PART.'

After a little while the party broke up, only two or three of the men lingering downstairs lighting their cigars and drinking seltzer water. Champion took Saxon's arm, and in his impulsive, imperious, friendly manner, led him into a room opening off the hall, which was, in fact, Lord Saxon's study.

'Come here,' he said; 'I want to talk to you.'

Champion flung himself on a couch and pulled forward a chair, in which Saxon seated himself more deliberately. Saxon had one thing on his mind—one only, just then.

'I wonder how these things get into the papers?' Saxon said. 'It's rather annoying, don't you think?'

'What things?'

'Things about your getting up some scheme or other in alliance with Tressel.' Lord Saxon brought the words out slowly, and evidently was under the influence of strong emotion.

'As to schemes, Saxon, a man in my position must keep always looking forward to the future. It is out of the question that things could always remain stagnant as they are. English political life is not a marsh or a dyke.'

'No, of course not. I quite feel all that with you—quite; and you know that I want to follow wherever you give the lead, if I possibly can.'

'I never could doubt your loyalty and comradeship, my dear Saxon.'

'No; if I'm good for anything, I'm good for that. But it is rather annoying when fellows like Nornside go about telling one of great schemes got up by one's leader and one's party, of which one has never heard a word one's self.'

'You can have the most absolute trust in me, Saxon. I shall take no decided step in anything without consulting you; I shall mature no scheme without having your judgment on it.'

'Then you are thinking of something?'

'Thinking of many things. I have to think of many things. Why, our party has to be literally recalled to life. It is inanimate. Its lungs must be filled with the breath of a new life. You see that, I am sure.'

'Yes; I see that,' Saxon answered, in a rather depressed tone; 'I see all that; but I want to know what is going to be done before I am asked to do it.'
'Surely you can have no doubt on that point?'

'Well, that is all I want. I think, Champion, I am entitled to expect that much. I hope I shall see my way to go in any direction just as far as you want to go; I am sure I shall see my way; but I am slow, and I want time to think things over. I haven't your inspirations, and I like to talk matters out,'

'A man,' Champion said, evasively, 'has to act sometimes on a sudden impulse, and trust to the confidence of his colleagues to understand him and his reasons, and to go with him, even if, perhaps, they are taken by surprise at the moment.'

'Yes, yes; I admit all that; when a thing has to be done on the moment, and won't keep. But that's different, and then all the man's colleagues are in the same boat, and nobody can complain.'

Champion made no reply at the moment; indeed the Duke of Nornside, coming up with some question, gave him an excuse for not replying. But the impression on Saxon's mind was one of deepening uneasiness. He could not help thinking that something was going on which was kept from his knowledge—not purposely kept, he still hoped and believed. All could be explained satisfactorily in the end, no doubt, when the right time came; but meanwhile he felt perplexed and distressed.

While Champion was talking to the duke, he made a gesture to Saxon not to move away. Presently the duke had lighted his cigar and said good-night. He was free again, and able to continue the conversation. Perhaps Champion had not been sorry to have an opportunity of thinking over things. He could think over things very keenly, even in a moment, and even while he was talking with someone whose concerns did not come into his thoughts. Every stranger, man or woman, who got a few moments' talk with Champion, could tell of something delightfully interesting that he said, and tell of the fluency and earnestness with which he had said it. Those who knew Champion pretty well, knew that he generally poured forth his easy conversational eloquence in order to give himself time to think of something entirely different, and in which he felt a genuine interest.

'That man is a bore,' Saxon bluntly observed.

They were quite alone now. All the men had gone. Champion resumed his seat on the couch, and Lord Saxon, after carefully closing the door, came back and threw himself into the arm-chair.

Champion laughed. 'No, no; I didn't find him so. Do you know, I don't believe I ever met a bore. Every man has his uses,'

'I wish I could find that so,' Saxon said.

'Wait till you come to forty years, Saxon.'

'I am not far off forty years,' Saxon answered, not appreciating the reference to Thackeray's ballad. 'By Jove! I mayn't, perhaps, ever get there, all the same.'

'How do you mean?' Champion asked, in great surprise.

'Well, I have been looking up Scourfield to-day—you know him, of course—and he's been looking me up. And he says I must be awfully careful, and all that; and tells me things are looking
rather serious; I must avoid shocks, and a lot of that sort of thing. I have not said a word to my wife, and I don't mean to—just yet, anyhow. It would do no good; the whole thing will probably come all right; even he don't say it won't, although he is a tremendous alarmist. So I haven't told her. I tell you, Champion, because if ever I should seem to shirk political work, you will know the reason why, and you won't tell anyone—'

At that moment there was a rustle of silk in the vestibule; the door opened, and Lady Saxon appeared, a radiant sultana, carrying a bouquet and a large feather fan, and with a soft furred wrap falling from her shoulders.

She glanced keenly from her husband to Sir Victor, who had risen at her entrance.

'Ve see that you are deep in politics,' she said. 'I won't interrupt you. I am going to my ball. Good-night.'

'You are going to your ball,' Lord Saxon repeated, mechanically, his eyes fixed upon her. He had risen too. Something in his expression and his manner struck Josephine, and thrilled her with a vague uneasiness. She looked again at Champion. His bland smile reassured her.

'We have been discussing bores,' he said; 'and I have been insisting to Saxon that I do not find even the Duke of Nornside a bore when he talks politics. Allow me,' and he helped her to adjust her cloak.

'Good-night!' she said, again. 'No, don't come out with me. Good-night, Saxon—unless I should find you up when I come back. I shall look in here. Meantime, I leave the destinies of Europe in Sir Victor's keeping and yours.'

Lord Saxon went out with her to the carriage. He seemed unusually solicitous about her to-night. When he came back, Champion exclaimed, impetuously, and with real feeling,—

'But, my dear Saxon, what you have told me is alarming. You must have rest. You must not take any trouble or thought about anything!'

'Oh, well, there is no need for being so careful as all that,' Saxon replied, with a smile. 'I have no doubt I shall pull through all right, and I don't want my wife to be frightened. She has not a notion that I am in the least out of health.' He was silent for a moment, and then he added, in a burst of frankness much out of keeping with his odd, shy reticence: 'Things would be different with my wife if anything were to happen to me while the duke was alive, and if I shouldn't leave a son behind me. I've been thinking all day what a pity it was my poor little two-days'-old chap didn't live.'

Yes, it was a pity. Champion could well understand that. He had good reason to suspect that, owing to the peculiar circumstances of Saxon's marriage, the old duke had a great deal in his power; and that, though under any contingencies Lady Saxon's income was of course secure, her settlements were not so magnificent as would have befitted a future Duchess of Athelstane married in the regular and orthodox way. The childless widow of the heir-presumptive, with no prospect of reigning even as a
sort of regent, and no special claim upon the younger brother, who would be head of the house, would certainly find things very different. These thoughts ran through Champion’s mind, but he only said,—

‘My dear fellow, you must not think of such a terrible possibility. As you say, Scourfield is an alarmist—doctors always are; it is their trade. ‘How many of them have predicted the same sort of thing for me myself! And even he tells you all will be right.’

‘Well, that’s how it is,’ said Saxon, slowly; ‘and I think that was one reason why I wanted to know something about what you were going to do. I should like to act with you, and to follow you as long as ever I could.’

Champion paused for a while. He was really much shocked by what Lord Saxon had told him. He knew that Saxon was neither an alarmist nor a hypochondriac; and he assumed that Saxon had rather minimised than magnified the seriousness of his condition. He felt a pang of conscience at having kept all his project from Saxon thus far, although he still believed he had good ground for the course he had taken. But he knew that he must say something now. He must tell something—not too much.

‘Well, Saxon, I have for a long time, as I think you already know, been turning my attention to the question of reforming the House of Lords, so as to make it a real living institution, and put it in harmony with the spirit of the times. I am convinced that this can be done as a genuine reform, not as a work of destruction. But I also confess to you that I do not as yet quite see my way to the precise scheme of reform which I should like to submit to your consideration. It is of little use talking over mere abstract propositions, especially between men, who, like you and me, are, I hope, pretty well agreed as to principles.’

‘I hope so; I hope so,’ Saxon said, eagerly.

‘I am sure of it; I am for reform, not revolution; and so, of course, you would naturally be. I am now telling you the direction my thoughts have long been taking; but I may tell you more; I have been lately coming to think that this must be the next great reform. Yes, the next; I acknowledge that I have advanced to that point. But the principles of the scheme of reform—now I wish you would think over them; think over them carefully, deeply, at your leisure; and I do hope we shall agree.’

Lord Saxon’s mind was greatly relieved. He believed that he was now in full possession of the confidence of his friend. He thought he could easily understand how the mere fact that Champion was thinking over such a scheme had found its way into the perceptions of others, and got crystallised by the breath of rumour into the form of an actual scheme already made.

‘I tell you this at once,’ he said; ‘I will think the whole thing over, and with a sincere wish, Champion, to be able to help you in your work. I will go with you as far as ever I can fairly see my way; and I hope our roads may never part; I do indeed!’

‘I think we understand each other, Saxon,’ Sir Victor said; and then for a second time his conscience smote him. But he re-
duced it to quiescence and even to acquiescence very soon. 'Saxon is an overgrown schoolboy,' he said to himself, 'with a schoolboy's pluck, and a good deal of the stolid capacity for dealing with simple subjects which belongs to some of our public schoolboys. He must not be told all until the fighting time. Murat himself would not expect to be told long in advance when his cavalry were to move, and where.' This illustration seemed to him effective, and it contented him. But, to do him justice, he was far from content with what he had heard about Saxon's state of health. There was a curious tradition in the family of the Duke of Athelstane that the eldest son succeeded in two generations, but never in the third; and the Duke of Athelstane had succeeded his father and his grandfather. Lord Saxon represented the fateful third generation.

Nothing more was said between Lord Saxon and Sir Victor Champion that night. Sir Victor was, on the whole, not dissatisfied with what had happened. He would have preferred to keep all his plans unknown to Saxon until the moment should come when, in his opinion, it would be expedient to take him into full confidence; but as apparently this could not quite be done, he thought things had, on the whole, turned out very well, and that he had played his cards cleverly; which it always pleased him to think.

Lady Saxon came home comparatively early from her ball, and she looked into her husband's study, as she had promised. She found him there, alone, sitting in the same moody and meditative attitude as when she had interrupted the talk between him and Champion.

She went up to him and bent over him, placing herself on the arm of his chair. The perfume of the fading flowers she carried, the rich, sensuous atmosphere that surrounded her, seemed to envelop and partially intoxicate him. He made a little passionate movement and leaned back against her, his head resting upon her bosom, without speaking a word. So he remained for some moments. As she looked down upon the heavy, flushed face, with its thick red beard, its drooping eyelids, and rather coarse features, the vision of another face, clear-cut, refined, pale, and all alight with genius and sensibility—that eagle look, the silky hair, the magnetic influence which to her was so irresistible—a wave of passionate determination swept her being. Yes—every gift, every allurement of hers should be turned to the service of this other man whom she loved. She would crown him, her king of men—and afterwards—his love. She felt a certain hatred of her husband at that moment; she could have thrust him from her with her beautiful, firm arms, which were so strong. But she wound them round him more closely, and she put her lips to his forehead. 'Well?' she asked; and she could not hide the tremor of anxiety in her voice—'Sir Victor has gone?'

'He left half an hour ago.'

'And you were talking—you did not talk about bores all that time? Has he told you anything fresh in politics? Any new scheme?'

'Yes; he has told me, in vague terms—there are no definite lines laid down as yet—of his scheme for reforming the House of Lords. It will be the next great measure.'
Lady Saxon drew a quick, long breath. He felt her bosom heave and her heart beat where his head lay. It seemed to him that he could hear the heart-throbs loud and tumultuous.

‘You are excited,’ he said; ‘I did not think you took so much interest in the constitution of Great Britain.’

‘War-horse scenting the battle,’ she answered; ‘my wild spirit thrills to the sound of the fanfare. I am ambitious for you, my husband. You cannot be the leader, but he is a great leader; and I want your name to be written with his in history.’

Saxon did not answer except by a heavy sigh.

‘And you, Saxon,’ she went on; ‘he was here to consult you, I suppose—to ask for your co-operation? What did you say?’ She caressed him again, and he yielded to the caresses with a kind of stupefying enjoyment, and as though he would willingly have let statecraft go by then. ‘Are you in this with him?’

‘I have promised that I would go as far as I could. Don’t let us talk about it all now, Josephine. After all, it is only in the air, a long way off. Why should you care so much?’

‘I have told you. Oh, it is grand, it is glorious, to see a general making ready for the battle, to see a reformer willing to risk personal popularity, even the break up of a party—for the sake of the reform.’

Saxon seemed to rouse at her words. He moved, releasing himself from her enfolding arms, and turned half round facing her.

‘The break-up of the party?’ he said, slowly, and with a disquieted look upon his face. ‘You must have misunderstood me. The party is agreed upon principles. It never could come to that.’

‘It would come to the break-up of a party,’ she said, quickly, ‘if the Progressive Tories joined us.’

‘Oh! Bellarmin. Well, I suppose Champion is calculating on that. Don’t let us have any more politics now, Josephine; I am not in the mood, somehow.’ He leaned towards her again, and put his head upon her shoulder and kissed her soft neck. ‘Tell me that you love me,’ he said. ‘Seems an odd thing for a husband to want a wife to say, when he is as sure of her as I am of you, I suppose; but I do want to hear you say it. Tell me that you love me, Josephine.’

‘You know it so well,’ she answered; ‘but if it pleases you to hear the words, I will say them again and again: I love you—I love you—and again, I love you.’

CHAPTER XXIV.

TOMMY TRESSEL APPEARS.

The bells in the churches were all chiming and tolling one Sunday morning after Lady Saxon’s dinner-party: the bells in the great
cathedrals and parish churches and fashionable chapels-of-ease, tolling with deep, rich sound, suggestive of good revenues and influential congregations; those in the smaller Nonconformist meeting-houses clinking in mild persuasive appeal, as if some sense of the old-time disabilities and disqualifications still lingered in their metallic hollows.

This Sunday morning found Bellarmin in his rooms in a meditative mood. Our poor youth was burning his candle pretty freely at both ends. He had come into public life with a magnificent constitution, which was well-nigh destined to serve him as Gretchen's beauty did her, and prove his ruin. The man who sets out with the consciousness that he has great physical resources behind him is very apt to act on the assumption that they are inexhaustible, and the too-familiar fable of the hare and the tortoise is thus illustrated over and over again in the race between the cautious invalid and the reckless Hercules. Bellarmin loved to tax his splendid powers of action and endurance. He would do everything; would give up nothing. It delighted him to sit up all night at some long, exciting debate, and, when the House adjourned, to bring some two or three friends home to his lodgings, and talk over things, and smoke cigars until the sunlight streamed in, and then to declare that it was too late to go to bed, and accordingly take a bath and start for a walk to Hampstead. He was fond of society; he liked dinners and receptions and balls. He was fond of dancing as he was fond of riding, and of debating, and of fencing, and of the companionship of pretty and intellectual women. He carried no one liking to excess or extravagance; but the truth is, that he was in this one characteristic akin to Goethe's Edward: 'Nichts übertriebenes wollend, aber viel und vielerlei wollend;' he liked far too many things, and he was not always able to contrive to pack them all comfortably and satisfactorily into the compass of his daily life. So he treated that daily life as people once used to treat the old-fashioned carpet-bag; he stuffed in what he pleased, whether the bag was made to hold it or not. He was beginning to suffer tortures about Mary Beaton; and, also, it must be owned, tortures about Lady Saxon. There were moods in which he hated Lady Saxon. Again, there were moods of passion and revulsion when that worst half of him, which her influence roused and strengthened, came uppermost and got the better of the purer self. Sometimes he dreamed of Lady Saxon—of his avowing his love to her, and of her returning his words with passionate welcome; and he cried out in ecstasy, and the dream was gone; and in his first half-waking moment he seemed to see the sweet face of Mary Beaton turned wonderingly, reproachfully on him; and he called her name and cried to her for pity and forgiveness before he quite knew that he was in his own room and all alone. 'Conscience,' says Scott, 'anticipating time, already rues the unacted crime.' Bellarmin's conscience had no crime on it, acted or unacted, to rue; but he sometimes suffered as much agony of remorse and shame as if he had actually been Lady Saxon's lover, or had tried in serious earnest to make her love him. 'I don't love her—no—I don't love her,' he would say to himself again and again. Yet when that other mood came,
and he was stung and maddened by a sense of unworthiness, he would fly from the thought and presence of Mary as from an accusing angel, and would go and steep himself in the glamour of Lady Saxon's fascinations, would frequent the houses where he might meet her, would follow her at parties and public places. A glance, a smile, a little upward movement of her chin, beckoning to him, would bring him away from any talk in any crowd to get to her side. Lady Saxon paraded him as her victim, and he knew it; and he was sometimes furious with himself, and yet he had no power to break away. The turn of her neck, the movement of her arms, the rise and fall of her eyelids, sent a fire and a fever through him. All the time he well knew that she appealed only to the sensuous in his nature, and the cynical in his mind. But she did appeal to him; other influences, which might have been much stronger, let him pass unchallenged. There were moments when he felt a sort of morbid longing to cut himself off from Mary Beaton for ever; to do something which would make it impossible to have any hope of winning her. Indeed, he had not now any hope of winning her. She liked him; she liked to talk with him—she had often told him so with a friendly frankness which, he thought, gloomily, was enough in itself to give death to a lover's hopes. And so there came morbid moments to him when he almost thought it would be well to do something which would put him once for all out of pain—as if anything could put him out of pain—on account of Mary Beaton. Why not marry for money? he sometimes thought, with grim humour. Then he could not rack his brain about Mary any more; and Mary would probably not think enough about him even to be angry with him, or to be sorry for him, or to despise him. Youth finds comfort sometimes in this queer sort of self-torture.

He did not reflect very deeply on the political situation in these days. Lady Saxon was too clever a woman to talk much to him about the Radical schemes, or to try and influence him now more directly than by adroit allusions. She gave him to understand, however, that Lord Saxon had been taken into Champion's confidence, and that the Whig section was prepared to go with the more advanced Liberals. There seemed to be a tacit agreement among them all that he was to be left alone for the present; only there was a grave cordiality and suggestion of friendly understanding in Sir Victor's manner of greeting him when they met in the lobbies of the House which pleased and conciliated the young man more than he would have liked to acknowledge even to himself.

The bells were still ringing, when a rapid hansom rattled up to Bellarmin's door, and brought that young man a letter and a messenger, who had been sent out with an instruction to bear back an answer.

This was the letter which Bellarmin, not without difficulty, contrived to puzzle out:

'Dear Bellarmin,—I want to see you at once; matter of importance. I have sent copy of this by messenger to each of the
half-dozen clubs which I find given as yours in *Dod*. The moment I hear where I can see you, I put myself into a cab and I appear.

—Yours,

T. T.'

Bellarmin did not need the help—doubtful help in any case—of the cramped and oddly intertwined initials, to know that the letter came from Tommy Tressel. He wrote a rapid line, saying, 'Appear here.' Not more than a quarter of an hour had passed when Tressel appeared. His manner, as an apparition, was in curious contrast with the eager and hurried style of his letter. He lounged into Bellarmin's room with the air of a man who has no thought on his mind but the question how he is to kill the dull and heavy time. Bellarmin only gave him a greeting, but did not ask him any question. Tressel was finishing a cigarette when he came into the room. He stopped to light another before he began.

'Well, it's this,' he said, as if he were continuing an explanation or answering some inquiry: "Lucifer" will be having a fit if he don't get into negotiations, or communication, or something with somebody. So I thought I'd come, don't you know?'

This was not precisely clear even to a mind strung to expectation.

'Come where?' Bellarmin asked.

'Well, I didn't tell him that; but I thought I'd come and see you.'

'All right,' Bellarmin said, composedly, and without showing the slightest sign of curiosity.

'The fix is this: "Lucifer" is taken with a sudden burst of public spirit and patriotism, and that sort of thing, and he still wants to give the Tories a chance of helping him in his grand scheme—making it a national scheme, he says, not the scheme of a party. All rot, of course; but that's his humour. Now, I happen to know that there are one or two of the Tory bosses who would like this well enough if they could educate their party quietly up to it. I was talking to one of them, and he wants to see you.'

'Why on earth does he want to see me?'

'Progressive Tories, and all that. He wants to know how far you would go in the way of reform, and how many you could count on bringing with you. He thinks the House of Lords is doomed unless it can be reorganised. Of course, I want it doomed and not reorganised; but I think Champion has got hold of a good idea for putting new life into our party, and so I go with him. Now, the question is, will you see Lord Twyford? and will you see him to-day—at once?'

Bellarmin was surprised, and a little perplexed.

'I meet Lord Twyford in the ordinary way pretty often,' he said.

'Exactly; but this isn't in the ordinary way; this is to be in an extraordinary way. You see, we don't want anything of this to get into the evening papers. Now, if you were to go and call on Twyford openly, somebody would see you, somebody would be there; and the story would go about that Twyford was trying to
nobble the Tory Progressives. How many of them are you—five, ain’t there?’ This was Tressel’s familiar joke about the number of Bellarmin’s host.

‘But we are on Lord Twyford’s side in politics.’

‘Nominally, yes; but you are free-lances to a certain extent, and nobody knows that better than the Tories. You may be fighting for your own hand any day; you may come, if things run very close, to hold the balance. These are ticklish times, don’t you see? Everyone feels that “Lucifer” is up to something; it’s in the wind. Now, as he is in this heroic and public-spirited mood, and wants to give the Tories a chance of showing how heroic and public-spirited they are, I suppose the best thing to do is to let men like Twyford, who have the brains and the sense, know what he wants to do, and seize the opportunity if they can. I wouldn’t give them any chance if I were “Lucifer;” but, then, I’m not “Lucifer,” and I’m not public-spirited, and there it is.’

‘Still, I can’t see why Lord Twyford wants to consult me, or, if he does, why he doesn’t write to say so.’

‘My good young Tory Democrat, it wouldn’t do at all. Twyford is very honest and straightforward, they say, and he has a conscience, he says; but all the same this is a risky business for him, and he wants to look before he leaps. The great trouble is Bosworth. Bosworth hates Champion, and hates reform and new ideas, and so on; and if he thought Twyford was negotiating in advance with you, the game would be all up. But if Twyford can tell him that you fellows are determined to support Champion unless some terms of reorganisation can be agreed on, then, perhaps, he may frighten Bosworth into compliance.’

‘Tell me, Tressel, did Lord Twyford say he wanted to see me, and about this?’

‘Of course he did. What else would make me get up so early, and send hunting about all over London to find you? Six messengers in six hansoms at once!’

‘I don’t much like that sort of thing,’ Bellarmin said.

‘Should think you wouldn’t. I didn’t like it, I can tell you. Put it even at only a shilling each way, that’s twelve shillings, and the prices of provisions rising every day,’ said Tressel, with a manner of intense simplicity.

‘Still,’ Bellarmin went on, not heading Tressel’s interruption, ‘if Lord Twyford really wishes to see me—’

‘Precisely. So I say. That’s how I put it. As it is he wishes to see you, not you who wish to see him—I daresay you wouldn’t care if you never set eyes upon him again—it’s all right then? You’ll go?’

‘I don’t know, Tressel; I really don’t know. I feel some difficulty—’

‘Naturally—I always feel some difficulty about everything. But one must act, all the same. Don’t you see what a good thing this is for you, who cherish the noble ambition to be a leader of a party, if only of a party of light horse? Don’t you see that it recognises you as a party? Twyford is a solid man—solid, that’s the word—eminently respectable, going in for conscience an.
principle, and all the good old domestic and political virtues; a
man well in the running to be a meritorious prime minister in
some quiet day to come—shouldn’t wonder a bit, as things go.
Well, when a man like Twyford recognises your party as a party,
it’s a score. Should think it would please some of your roaring
boys, Bellarmin. How many of them are there? Five, all told?'

Bellarmin had been thinking of something of the kind himself,
and he paid no attention to Tressel’s stock joke about the number
of what the Paris journals used to call the ‘fraction Bellarmin.’
Our young friend had his weaknesses; and one of them was a
certain boyish vanity about the little party he had called into
existence. The more solemn and pompous section of the great
Tory Party had hardly condescended to recognise it as a factor in
the political game. Since the days of De Carmel, Bellarmin had
never felt quite certain whether the leaders of the party understood,
or did not understand, the honest service he and his band had
rendered to what ought to be, he thought, the common cause.
Now, here was, at last, the hand of recognition held out; in an
indirect and furtive sort of way, it is true—but still held out by one
of the high Tory leaders. Would it be wise or well to stand too
much on scruples, and refuse to see the outstretched hand? The
Earl of Twyford was a man of political and personal integrity; a
man, also, of honourable ambition; a little viewy in his politics; a
curious mixture of intellectual courage and moral timidity. He
had never been in the House of Commons, his father having died
when he was very young, and he had therefore missed all the
rough training and practical discipline of the popular chamber.
In his earlier career he had bright dreams about the House of
Lords winning back its political influence, and becoming once
more a real factor in the constitutional problem. He tried to get
the Peers to sit longer, and to show themselves active and eager for
work, and he started several debates himself, chiefly on colonial
questions, for he had an idea that the House of Lords might
assume a sort of moral protectorate over the younger and weaker
colonies. But nothing came of it. Irresponsible and elderly men
do not care to take the trouble of debating when there is to be
no result or consequence of the debate. Twyford gave up his
struggle, not without a sigh, and turned his thoughts in new
directions. But it was always understood that he was one of the
few peers who would have welcomed some reasonable and pro-
mising scheme for the reorganisation of the House of Lords.

‘Made up your mind?’ Tressel asked.

‘Yes, I’ll go.’

‘That’s right. I thought you would.

‘Where?’

‘My house. Nobody minds me. It don’t matter who comes to
see me—everybody knows that everybody comes to see me. If
the Pope, the Emperor of Russia, and Prince Bismarck were to be
seen on my doorstep arm in arm, nobody would infer anything.
Nobody takes Tommy Tressel seriously. Shouldn’t wonder if
Twyford were to drop in on me at luncheon time to-day; he may,
perhaps. Won’t you drop in?’
'Yes, I'll come. Tell me—what about Lord Saxon and the old Whigs? Are they in this thing?'

'No; there's the fun of it. I have backed up "Lucifer" in his growing resolve to throw them over. I have told him that it is utterly impossible to think of getting the Whigs over to our side; and that, for my part, I think the time has come when the Radicals ought to decline having anything to do with them. This falls in very well with Champion's humour just at present. He don't quite know what to do with Saxon. Fact is, he despises Saxon intellectually, but is half afraid of him all the same.'

'I rather like Lord Saxon, as far as I know him,' Bellarmin said; 'and now is that dealing fairly with him? Is that quite in accord with the public-spirited humour you talk of?'

'I daresay it's partly my doing. I want "Lucifer" to throw Saxon overboard—show him that we don't care what the Duke of Wellington used to call one twopenny damn—not even a sixpenny or shilling damn, which would be a costly sort of thing, but one poor little twopenny damn—for himself and his Whigs. Then there's nobody else on our side to be talked with. All the rest of "Lucifer's" old colleagues are only looking round to see which way the cat jumps. They'll go in for any enterprise which they think will land them on the Treasury Bench.'

'Seems a little like a conspiracy between Champion and some of the Conservatives against Champion's own colleagues,' Bellarmin said.

'Seems like that, does it? No, I couldn't say that. You see, what most of them want is only office, and "Lucifer" will give them that—if he succeeds—and they couldn't have it without him anyhow. And as to Saxon—Saxon won't take the jump, and what's the good of talking to him?'

'There will be a row when he comes to know of all this.'

'Of course there will; but it won't matter then. It would come anyhow. I have had several letters from "Lucifer" lately; and the burden of them all is, that never, never, never will he submit to Saxon's dictatorship. I can't find out that Saxon has tried any dictatorship. He don't know or suspect anything about the real meaning of this business. But there is something uneasy about him in Champion's mind of late. Champion is getting more and more unwilling to have anything to do with him. I am very glad, for my part; but I am not so sure if it's all right with Champion. I begin to think that I hear a familiar sound—too familiar in politics, my brave leader of free-lances.'

'What sound are you talking of?'

'As if you didn't know! The rustle of the petticoat, of course. Lady Teazle behind the screen, don't you see? Champion and she were close friends once—and these old loves renew often. Don't you remember the story of Millie Moidore when she got married and went off the stage and reformed? One day her husband thought she had relapsed a little, and accused her. She owned up handsomely, and said, "You know I hadn't seen him for ever so long, and he is such an old friend."'

'Bellarmin's cheek flushed. He was turning angrily on Tressel
and then he wisely bethought himself, and said nothing on that subject.

‘Well,’ he said, making a desperate effort to conceal his vexation, ‘I shouldn’t wonder if I did look in upon you at luncheon time. If any friend of yours happens to be there, of course, I shall be delighted to see him.’

‘One has to meet all sorts of people,’ Tressel replied, laconically. ‘By the way, how does the princess get on? Our friend “Lucifer” seems very much gone there too, don’t he?’

‘I really don’t know—I haven’t seen—I know nothing about it,’ Bellarmin said, with a new flame of anger from a new source. ‘Rather absurd, wouldn’t that be? Rather a disparity of years?’

‘How young you are, Bellarmin!’ Tressel said; ‘I envy you, by Jove! I, too, can recall to memory a happy and ingenuous time when I really believed it was part of the inexorable decree of Providence that only the young and beautiful should presume to fall in love with the young and beautiful, and that elders—like “Lucifer,” for example—never thought, except in the paternal sense, of beautiful young women; and that even if they did, it wouldn’t matter, because the beautiful young women wouldn’t accept their attentions. I am a married man, Bellarmin—very much married, indeed—and you needn’t be alarmed about me. But if I were not—well, I am getting to be an oldster, and you are young; you are a good-looking fellow, and I—well, I’m not a beauty. But I have lots of money, and I presume you haven’t a great deal. If you were devoted to a girl—a London girl, at all events—and you asked her to marry you, and I went to the girl’s mamma and said I wanted the girl to marry me, how would it end, do you think?’

‘I know what you think, at anyrate,’ said Bellarmin, recovering his good-temper. ‘You think it would end in the girl’s becoming Mrs Thomas Tressel.’

‘You bet your pile on that,’ said the genial cynic; and he thereupon took his departure.

Bellarmin was sorry when Tressel had gone, for the terrible struggle between the two natures—between the two imprisoned souls—between the two men, the two creatures in one body—was racking Bellarmin’s heart again the moment he was left alone. Again he cursed himself for being in the slightest degree under the thrall of Lady Saxon; again he felt ashamed of himself; again he almost made up his mind that, merely for being in the smallest way a slave to her influence, he was unworthy to come into the presence of a woman like Mary Beaton. ‘To what avail?’ he asked himself many a time in bitterness; ‘to what avail my hanging on to this girl’s train? She does not care about me; she couldn’t care about me, even if she could really care about anyone, and the thought of her marrying me is absurd. What should I do with her if she were to marry me? What should I do with a princess-claimant at my modest breakfast-table; a Stuart heiress to be daughter-in-law to my father; and a claim to the throne of England to be brought on as a Tuesday evening motion in the
House of Commons? Anyhow, a man who has sold his soul to Lady Saxon has no business to put himself in the way of a woman like Mary Stuart Beaton. I had better stick to my politics and my speech-making, and my political conspiracies, and mix only with the women who are fit for such work, and are free to make their personal fascinations a factor in politics. That must be my sphere—the only sphere and the only people I have any right to belong to.'

In this genial mood of mind he set out for Tommy Tressel's, to meet Lord Twyford and conspire.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE TWFORD NEGOTIATIONS.

Mr Tressel lived in St James' Square, and when Bellarmin appeared at luncheon time he was seated at table with his wife and Lady Cora Mallory, Ross Bingley, the journalist, an attaché to the Chinese legation, and Colonel Towers. Tressel was eating nothing, and was drinking only iced water, while the most delicious of dishes and the finest claret and still hock were handed by the velvet-footed servants. But that, as everyone knew, was Tressel's way.

Mrs Tressel, however, did ample justice to her luncheon; so did Lady Cora Mallory; so, needless to say, did the other guests, except, perhaps, the Chinese attaché, who appeared a little bit embarrassed and uncertain how to manipulate his implements, in whose well-being kind-hearted Mrs Tressel took the deepest interest, openly deploring the absence of edible birds'-nests and sea-slugs, which lingering recollections of her 'Child's Guide' taught her to associate with China.

Mrs Tressel was a bountiful-looking and bounteous matron, not handsome, but extremely good-natured. She had a certain Malapropian reputation for always getting hold of the wrong end of a story; and a good many amusing anecdotes were told of her, few of which probably had any foundation. There were people who said that Mrs Tressel's ingenuous good-nature masked all the guile of a woman of the world, and that if she were to disclose all she knew about matters social and political, London society would be considerably disturbed by her revelations. Mrs Tressel beamed a welcome upon Bellarmin, and made room for him between herself and the Chinaman, from whom she had been inquiring how many wives his countrymen were allowed. She wanted to know all about the marital arrangements of the Celestial Empire, and asked a good many naive questions, when the Chinese gentleman explained that his countrymen usually found that more than two wives gave trouble, and required to be constantly sent back to their relatives as a punishment for insubordinate conduct. Certain great
personages sometimes had four, and the emperor had six, he added, with a gleam of national pride lighting a countenance which, in its immovable gravity, was almost equalled by that of the host.

Tressel was convulsing Lady Cora over a witty story with a fine French point which he drawled out, his eyes half-shut and scarcely a muscle of his face moving.

Presently Lord Twyford came in; and he, too, did justice to the dainty fare, though in a refined and somewhat abstracted manner. Colonel Towers greeted the Conservative chief with effusive geniality, and at once made a point of jerking political allusions and House of Commons jokes into the conversation, and launched into a discussion about the feeling in the provinces and the Tory manœuvres during the Whitsun recess, which Lord Twyford laughingly put aside as inappropriate to a Radical table. There was a good deal of light talk, and, of course, Miss Beaton's name came up, and Bellarmin was plied with questions as to the Stonehenge visit, of which all London seemed to have heard. Was it true that Lord Stonehenge was going to marry Miss Beaton? Did Sir Victor Champion mean to play the part of a Bolingbroke and espouse the Stuart claims? What were the actual claims?—a forfeited estate sounded so romantic, et cetera. And now, had not Lady Saxon taken the Pretendress up, and was she not trying to marry her off to the Duke of Nornside, in order to get her out of Champion's way—for had not all the world read in the society columns of the papers the names of the guests at Lady Saxon's dinner? Had they not even been telegraphed in the English intelligence to America?

Lady Cora Mallory made the first move, and perhaps in malice prepense insisted upon carrying off Ross Bingley and Colonel Towers, who, she had found out, were engaged, like herself, to Madame Spinola for a party on the river that afternoon. Colonel Towers had a shrewd suspicion, notwithstanding the unembarrassed air of Lord Twyford and Bellarmin, that some wire-pulling was going on; and he would fain have lingered to take such part as was possible in the performance, or at anyrate to be in a position to declare his knowledge of the whole matter. Mrs Tressel discreetly withdrew with the attaché, and the other three gentlemen were left alone.

Lord Twyford was a delicately-made and nervous man. He passed for being the intellectual and the educated man of his party; he had published translations from Pindar and a volume on 'The Science of Thought.' His friends believed that he would be a statesman one day; he was only just over forty years of age. He had intellectual courage enough to go to the edge of some political crisis; but then his physical nerves failed him, and he drew back and would not make the spring; and then he racked his brain for plausible reasons to persuade his friends and himself that he had drawn back deliberately and out of pure statesmanship. At each new venture he said to himself anew, 'I am determined upon it this time; I see my way; I will not draw back.' Then, when he did draw back after all, he said to himself, 'Of course I was quite right; I only wanted to see if it ought to be done, and I saw that
it ought not to be done.' Still his friends counted on his doing great things—some day; and there was a general impression that the policy which was to revivify the Conservative party and make it popular while yet Conservative was to come somehow from Lord Twyford.

Lord Twyford had taken early notice of Bellarmin, and had talked a good deal to the young man whenever he had an opportunity. He admired Bellarmin's talents, and especially admired his 'go'—the reckless way in which Bellarmin would fling himself into some parliamentary gap or at some political obstacle, clearing it by mere rush and dash. That was exactly what Twyford could never make up his mind to do, and he admired such a quality in Bellarmin as some very weak woman admires physical strength in a man. Of late they had not met very often, and they had a good many general subjects to talk about.

'Now if you two,' Tressel said, 'would excuse me for a few moments, and smoke your cigarettes in happiness, although for the time bereft of me, I should like to get rid of a few letters and messages which won't well bear delay.'

Tressel's meaning was quite understood. Lord Twyford and Bellarmin were left together.

'Delicious cigarettes!' said the peer.

'Everything is excellent in Tressel's house,' Bellarmin assented.

'Yes; that luncheon now! Where could you have got anything nicer?—and the wines! And Tressel cares nothing for eating or drinking. Gives perfect dinners, and eats none of them. Takes a chop and a cup of tea earlier in his study! What does our dear Tressel really enjoy?'

'Cigarettes and political excitement.'

'Yes, exactly. By the way, speaking of political excitement, ain't you expecting some of it in your House pretty soon?'

'They tell me so,' Bellarmin answered. 'But we are always expecting something or other in our House.'

'This time isn't there solid reason for the expectation?'

'Yes; I suppose so.'

'And don't it concern our House this time?'

'I am told that it does.'

Bellarmin was perfectly determined that he would not bring the talk to the point. Lord Twyford must do that for himself, or leave it undone. Bellarmin had long been a little uncertain as to the position which he held in the favour and confidence of certain peers high up in the Conservative government; and he was resolved that Lord Twyford must make the first move. There was a pause, and then Lord Twyford made the move.

'Well, Mr Bellarmin,' he said, with a little confidential cough, 'I suppose we may come to the point; we understand each other. Champion is planning a great coup, and everybody seems to know of it, except—he! he!—his own colleague, Lord Saxon. Now the one great question for us is, what are we to do?'

'Exactly,' Bellarmin said, and he thought to himself. 'So it is we, then?'

'Well, I'll tell you frankly what I think, and then I'll ask you
The Rival Princess.

what you think. I quite admit that the House of Lords wants to be reformed—modified in some way. If the change don't take that form, it will take a form less acceptable to some of us. Therefore, I say, let the reform come spontaneously and from within; let it come from the Conservative party and the House of Lords itself. That is my conviction.'

Lord Twyford's delicate face had quite an heroic look as he spoke. Bellarmin was warmed into confidence in a moment.

'Yes,' he said, earnestly, 'I have long been convinced that the House of Lords must be remodelled; that it must be made capable of development, must be popularised, or it must go. I don't see why it should not freely accept reform, and I certainly can't see why its friends should refuse to listen to a fair proposal.'

'For myself, I should be inclined to go farther. I don't see why its friends should not make the fair proposal.'

'Oh, make it? Do you think you could bring your people up to that, Lord Twyford?'

'Well, now, there is just the question. If De Carmel were alive, then, indeed—'

'Yes; but Mirabeau is dead, as the French waiter said.'

Lord Twyford smiled. 'This conversation,' he said, 'is so very interesting that I think I might venture on another cigarette. Yes, that is, of course, my difficulty; but I am not dismayed by it. We must encounter difficulties—ne cede malis, sed contra, you know. They have given up quoting from the classics in your House, I am told. A pity, I think.'

'Come, come!' Bellarmin said; 'we had an Irish attorney-general there lately who quoted Greek.'

'Did he, really? How odd! Well, I see the difficulty, but I don't mean to let it frighten me;' and Lord Twyford looked heroic again.

Still Bellarmin had not got to know exactly what Lord Twyford intended to do, and that was precisely what he wanted to know before he could become quite communicative on his own account. Bellarmin had come, as he understood, to talk over the possibility of inducing the Conservative government to go into council with Sir Victor Champion as to a scheme for the reorganisation of the House of Lords. He had come to think such a project desirable,—and even possible. But to all appearances Lord Twyford was disposed to go for a project much bolder.

'Do I quite understand, Lord Twyford? You can only go into this project with Champion or without him. Which do you propose to do? He is in the field; at least, we are assured that he is to be—and he is willing to be our ally—your ally,' said Bellarmin, hastily, but distinctly, correcting himself. 'How do you propose to deal with him?'

'Well, I'll be quite frank with you, Mr Bellarmin. What I want to do is this: I want to screw the courage of our people up to the level of undertaking this reform themselves, and adopting the earliest opportunity of making their resolve publicly known. I want them to announce it in your House and the House of Lords the same night. That would take the wind out of the sails of the
Radicals and the Revolutionists! We should gain time; we should gain everything. We could prepare a scheme at once simple and grand; I have the idea in my own mind just now—simmering, only simmering—and we should have all the reform in our hands. Well, I have not said a word yet to Bosworth about this. Of course, it's all only an idea yet. It will be terribly hard to screw him up to the proper pitch; but it will be a great thing if I can show him that the best men of our party will be with him if he will only make up his mind that way. Now I want to know about you and your friends. Will you go with us?

'First about Champion. As I understand, you propose to cut him out—that is the plain way of putting it.'

'We are in office, in the seat of authority. If we are willing to accept a scheme of reform, it is our right and our duty as a government to undertake it.'

'What would Sir Victor Champion say to all that, after his voluntary offer to co-operate with you?'

'What should he say? He can still co-operate with us. We, of course, should invite his co-operation. He declares he only wants the House of Lords reformed; he don't care by whom.'

'Yes, men say these things; and, to a certain extent, they mean them. St George goes out to rescue the lovely—I forget her name—and he asks some hero and brother saint to come along and see fair. The brother saint runs ahead or finds a short cut, and rescues the lovely creature himself. Of course, St George is very glad that she is rescued; but still, I suppose, he wanted to play the leading part in the drama himself.'

Lord Twyford smiled.

'Your illustration is amusing,' he said, 'but I don't think it quite applies in this case. No man has a right to claim a monopoly in reform. A true reformer ought to rejoice when his work is anticipated.'

'He ought to, and when men are governed by maxims he will. But that time is not yet.'

'You don't seem very encouraging. May I say that I expected a little more of the venturesome from Mr Bellarmin?'

'Oh, well now, don't let me be misunderstood. I was only thinking of the matter as between you and Champion, and the difficulty you will have in inducing your people to take the initiative. But so far as my friends and I are concerned, we will go with you heart and soul in any scheme or policy which you are at all likely to sanction. That I can safely promise you.'

Lord Twyford bowed his head in acknowledgment of the promise, but did not seem quite satisfied. He had evidently expected a warmer encouragement. 'You appear to think it will be hard to induce my people to take the initiative?'

'Hard to make them take the initiative?—impossible, I should say; but, of course, you ought to know all about that much better than I. It seemed to me that, with Champion actually in the field, your people might be induced to co-operate with him—partly to prevent him from doing too much. But as to their being prevailed on to start the thing themselves—well, I can't see it, Lord Twyford.'
'Still,' Lord Twyford said, a little peevishly, 'is it worth while taking so much trouble, and risking so much, merely to be Champion's jackal?'

'A true reformer,' Bellarmin gravely said, 'ought to rejoice when his work is anticipated.'

Lord Twyford's good-humour returned, and he smiled graciously. 'I am afraid that my people are not true reformers yet in that sense. They will want to be convinced first that the thing is inevitable; and then, perhaps, if they see that, they will like to get the credit of doing it themselves. But to prevail on Bosworth to accept such a scheme in order that he may become Champion's jackal—well, that would be difficult.'

It was clear that Lord Twyford thought the hour had come for the great deed of his lifetime. Bellarmin could not get out of his mind the idea that there was a sort of treachery to Champion in Twyford's project. That, however, seemed no affair of his. Only a few words more were spoken on the subject; each man understood the other, and each was a little disappointed. Lord Twyford had expected to find in Bellarmin more of the recklessness of a free-lance; Bellarmin had expected to find in Lord Twyford less of the craft of a politician.

'Well, I must be going,' the peer said. 'Charming interchange of ideas; strictly confidential, of course; needn't say. Oh, here's Tressel, just in time.'

CHAPTER XXVI.

'ANGELS WITHIN IT.'

It is a pleasant walk through the Green Park into Piccadilly, and thence by Berkeley Square towards Hyde Park. And somehow, about half-past four, Bellarmin found himself in the neighbourhood of South Street, Mayfair; and it was not unnatural, however inconsistent with some of his recent resolves, that he should remember the Benediction service at the Farm Street church, the Catholic church to which Mary Beaton often went. It occurred to his mind that the service would be going on now, and that the sermon would be over by this time, and that the music would have a soothing and satisfying effect upon his nerves and spirit. So he turned into the church; and he had not been seated many minutes before he recognised Lady Struthers' snow-white coiffure and nodding plumes, and beside the old lady's portly presence a slender, perfect form, and a stately little head framed in a coif-like bonnet, and rising above a full, dainty ruff, and a gracious, clear-cut face with tender lips, and deep eyes turned now in calm adoration towards the high-altar, and now bent again in extremest reverence.

The organ and the choir voices were sending forth a sweet, solemn chant, and presently the pure notes of the youthful soloist thrilled upward like the song of the lark in its ecstatic effort to
ascend to the heavenly blue. The candles of the altar were being lighted one by one, and they shone in the soft religious light like stars of a near and mellowed lustre. There came forth a procession following the crucifix, before which a grey-haired old man in gorgeous vestments walked backward, and after him a file of priests in albs and golden copes, with tapers, and banners of blue and gold. The image of the Mother and Child rising from a bank of beautiful white flowers was borne aloft, while the censers swayed rhythmically, and the incense went up in clouds, and made an atmosphere of heavy perfume. The feeling of unreality which had first oppressed Bellarmin on entering this scene, after the light social talk and the more momentous political conversation at Tressel's house, seemed to fade away and give place to the perception of a consoling spiritual actuality, underlying a certain theatrical effect, which in the Catholic ritual always jarred upon his rationalistic mind. He did not bow his head as the other worshippers did when the procession passed, but he watched it with a vague feeling of wonder and increasing interest, and then an unconsciously deepening sentiment of awe. In his ordinary mood he would have seen a garishness in the gilded images, the starry banners, the gorgeous copes, a sort of prosaic homeliness in the soiled vestments and the crumpled lace of the minor attendants. There was a want of religious enthusiasm in the faces of most of the acolytes; there was something in the whole which, in any other mood than his present, might have provoked him to a feeling of antagonism. But now, notwithstanding this impression, the ceremonial appeared to him, in a dim fashion, symbolic of that spiritual essence hidden beneath the outward pageantry and frolic of life—that Divine Voice which speaks to the listening soul through sobs and laughter, through the roar of crowds, through all worldly turmoil and clangour. There are moments of brief, sudden illumination, when the eternal truths shine out from the mere emblems, and It is there—It is with us—the Christ crucified; the martyred Ideal. For to many the command 'Take up thy cross' may not be read 'Crucify the material; live the higher life in pure aspiration and scorn of the mean and ignoble;' but rather, 'Crucify for the hour those finer and more exquisite instincts and sensibilities of your nature; surrender them to the grim, inexorable edict of circumstance, of condition; of what life and its limitations have made duty for you.

In condition of mind and soul, of which such mood as this of Bellarmin is but a pale reflection, men of old time walked with God. In these later days of worldly fret, men and women who, in rare moments of exaltation, recognise the Divine Force working within, and impelling to faith in the unseen, the noble, the unselfish, do still hold commune with God. It would not appear strange to them, then, were the heavens to open and the unseen world be revealed; and in very truth the angels of that world do sometimes pass in human guise, and, holding forth a beckoning hand, lovingly bid us draw nearer to the Holy Presence.

So it seemed to the young man, perturbed in soul and heart, for the moment irked by the world, yearning for a higher ideal and for the purer light which for him shone in the eyes of a girl. He
waited, keeling, till Mary came down the aisle. She had lingered in prayer some moments after Lady Struthers filed away with the rest of the congregation. Oh, that one little prayer for him might pass her lips! She made her reverence to the altar, and walked with eyes gazing straight before her. She came so close to his bowed form that her dress brushed his shoulder, and her little hand, clasping her missal, almost touched his head. She did not see him. Her look was rapt and earnest, as if she were not thinking of the common things of life, with which, he told himself bitterly, he must be associated in her mind. Yet in all its sweetness and earnestness her face was sad, he thought. This angel held out no beckoning hand to him; but he rose at once and followed her closely; and when she took the holy water he dipped his fingers into the font as soon as she had turned from it. He had a glancing fancy that thus some grace or virtue might be imparted to him.

It was not till they both stood outside the church that she turned suddenly and saw him near her. He felt a thrill of wonder and delight at seeing the look of glad surprise which came into her face; it was something more than mere surprise—something deeper and more personal: it seemed a tender and welcoming interest.

She held out her hand, and he took it in his almost silently. Perhaps his face told her something she had not quite known before. Her bright smile faded, and she grew grave in a moment, though not less gentle and tender, and she still looked at him in her clear, questioning way.

'I did not think you would have cared to come to our service in London,' she said.

'I have been lunching at Tressel's,' he answered, 'and I passed by here, and so I went in, and—and I saw you.'

'Mr Bellarmin,' she said, wistfully, 'you look a little worried and troubled. Tell me, is anything wrong with you?'

'Oh, yes,' he said, recklessly; 'there's a great deal wrong with me. Any sort of life like mine must seem all wrong, I suppose, when one gets under that kind of influence you and I have just come from. It is an influence, even for one who doesn't believe in it. But I am not really troubled. I am always happy when I am—'

He checked himself abruptly. He had been near saying, 'When I am with you.' She took up his words simply: 'I, too, am always happy when I am under that influence. Life would be very sad and difficult, I think, without the church to go to for strength and comfort. You couldn't have come to a better place, Mr Bellarmin, if you were disturbed or unhappy; and I think you must have felt it so in your heart, or you would not have come.'

She bade him good-bye, and was moving to her carriage, beside the door of which Lord Stonehenge and Lady Struthers stood. Bellarmin lifted his hat, but did not go near to speak to them. It smote him with a vague pain that Mary had not asked him, as she often did when they accidentally met, to come and see her at some particular time near at hand.

On an impulse he said, 'May I call upon you to-morrow?'

Mary shook her head.

'I am going to be away part of the time to-morrow; and when
I come home from—from the business I have to do, I shall be tired and stupid, and I think I shall want to be alone; but come some other day—come soon.'

He took leave of her, and Lord Stonehenge helped her into the carriage, and Rolfe went on to the Park.

The thought of her and of the chanting and the service was with him all the evening, though he dined at a house where he met Lady Saxon. The talk during dinner touched upon the wonder of life in London—its drama, its never-ceasing change and movement, its picturesqueness and its sordid misery, its vivid contrast, its solemnity and its frivolity; the strange beauty to be found even in its winter skies and fog-veiled streets, and leaden, livid river; and the subtle fascination there was in its grimness and gloom and mystery for those who had once fallen under the spell of its enchantment.

It was contended that though London possesses a magic as peculiarly her own, and in a certain sense no less potent than that of Rome and other far-famed historic capitals, no poet or romancist or painter has ever completely represented her infinite charm; that poetry, romance, and painting have left some of her most peculiar charms untouched.

Someone spoke of the extraordinary variety of feelings which might be evoked merely in the course of one day's experience among the shifting scenes of the great city. Bellarmin smiled a little sadly to himself as he joined in with the speaker.

Later on, he went to a crowded party at the magnificent studio of a noted academician—a Sunday evening semi-Bohemian party—where a celebrated French comedian and comedienne played a scene from a Palais Royal farce which had but just escaped the Lord Chamberlain's prohibition, where champagne corks flew, and empty laughter resounded, and beautiful women in art-costumes postured against tapestry backgrounds, and lovers whispered, and art critics took the opportunity to furtively examine the pictures and appraise the bric-à-brac, and where in dim corners and amid aesthetic groups there hovered that ideal which is exhibited on the walls of the Academy, and sold at Christie's and bargained for by American railway kings, but which had no place in dim churches, and but little affinity with the saints.

Bellarmin flirted and jested and applauded the mummers, with the consciousness all the time of moving and talking in a dream. He looked in towards morning at a late club, and in the grey dawn went to rest and to dream more vividly still of Mary Stuart Beaton.

He had a kind of instinct that the business to which she had alluded was one of her Southwark sister-of-mercy expeditions. He had heard her speak more than once of the particular quarter she visited; and although he would not for the world that she should imagine he wished to obtrude himself upon her, yet somehow, before the meeting of the House next day, he drifted along the purlieus of Westminster, and thence across the bridge and down into the Southwark region. It was a new locality to him, and had a curious, unaccustomed bourgeois air, very unlike that of the West End he had quitted, or the City in all its rush and roar and sugges-
tion of momentous issues and terrific responsibilities. Bellarmin got into the Borough Road, where great omnibuses rolled heavily along the tram-lines, and where carts and waggons lumbered, but where there were no private carriages to be seen, and very few cabs. Then he found himself in a tangle of lanes and alleys and dismal narrow streets, pervaded by the smell of decaying fish and vegetable refuse and mouldering rags—streets which were mostly given up to the pliers of petty trades: the cobblers who buy old boots and turn them out in a wearable condition as new; the button-holers, and fish-smokers, and fur-pickers, and rag-sorters, for whom there is no place in better-class quarters.

It seemed, on the whole, a fairly decent community, in spite of its filth and squalor. The women who hung about the doorways, most of them with babies in their arms, were not vicious or debased looking, but only grimy and unkempt, and stolid and miserable and hopeless. The men looked hopeless too, but few of them were drunken—alas, poor souls! there was not money enough for the gin-palaces to flourish! The children were pale and rickety and blotched, as, indeed, was little marvel, seeing that their lives were passed in foul courts where not a breath of pure air might ever penetrate. Here and there, in a more open space, ropes were stretched, and the ragged garments of the population hung out to dry, adding a damp and mouldy odour to the noxious smells that loaded the atmosphere.

Bellarmin wandered on, stopping now and then to give a few pence to some tattered, wistful-eyed girl, or to a group of starved street Arabs, who soon collected at his heels in goodly procession, eager to direct him anywhere that he would go. They were at last forcibly dispersed by a dealer who stood before his window, in which were displayed a variety of cheap and common goods—men's shirts of coarsest cotton at a shilling apiece, and boots roughly vamped at three-and-sixpence a pair—and who descried in Bellarmin a possible philanthropist. This man was a churchwarden, so he told Bellarmin, who stopped to talk with him, and he was, so he said with some pride, the best-to-do tradesman in the parish; but he had his distresses, and just now he hardly knew how to carry on, for his brother-in-law, who helped him in the shop, had run away with eight shillings out of the till. From him Bellarmin gained much practical information as to the ways and wants of the parish. It was a very poor parish, perhaps the poorest in all London. The vicar himself had hard work to live and feed his family, let alone keeping the church lighted and the things together, and feeding the poor people.

Things weren't quite so bad as they had been, though. Once not one of the West End charitable ladies, who went down singing at the East End, had ever heard of or thought of visiting this Godforsaken spot. But now—and here a strange thing happened, and Bellarmin's attention was strained to an extraordinary pitch of alertness—now there was a lady, a real West Ender, and as handsome as a princess; and he didn't know but what she was a princess, for the old gentleman who came with her mostly treated her as such, and old Jacobi, of the second-hand books stall in London Road,
declared she was the walking image of a print he had of Mary Queen of Scots: she had come often of late, and she gave teas to the old people, presents of clothing and prizes to the school-children, and it was all through her that the soup-kitchen and the creche had been started. The man went on to tell him that she was there that very day; that she was at the schoolhouse now with the vicar and some other gentlemen, one of whom—and the dealer looked mysterious—was uncommonly like the pictures in the Comic Illustrated of Sir Victor Champion. The dealer didn't know as he had any politics himself; he had voted for the Conservatives last election, because they'd told him as he ought to stand by the country; but if the Liberals was going to do better by that parish, why he was willing to let Sir Victor have his vote, and it wasn't much odds any way; and if Bellarmin would like to see for himself that the people were not such a bad lot, taking them all round, he had only to look into Green's Gardens, where he would see an average selection.

Just then a customer came, and Bellarmin, who really wanted to know what manner of people these were to whom his Lily Queen devoted herself, asked one of the urchins to show him the way to Green's Gardens—a row of dingy, miserable, dilapidated two-storeyed houses, looking out upon a foul, ill-smelling court, and offering melancholy satire upon the bare suggestion of flower-beds.

There was a little flutter of excitement about the place, however, amid all its wretchedness. Bellarmin was not long in discovering the cause. Had not his princess passed that way? In good truth it might well have seemed to the dwellers in that dreary street that angels were abroad upon this soft June afternoon. It was not difficult to identify the 'beautiful lady' who had come to the rescue last week, when the gaunt, hard-worked mother of seven, in No. 5, broke her mangle, her only means of earning a scant subsistence, and whom starvation threatened, till by some miracle the mangle could be repaired. The angel had performed the miracle, and the mangle was at work again. And then there was the decrepit cobbler, who had started in life afresh now that 'the lady' had provided him with tools and leather. And there was the deaf widow, who used to support herself handsomely by making bandboxes, till, as she grew deader, the shop people lost patience, and refused her orders, until 'the lady' came and went herself to a great warehouse, and somehow managed to get the poor old dame a certain weekly order for the few dozen that she was able to turn out.

And then there was the family which were to be emigrated to Australia, whose passage she had paid, and whose clothes she had taken out of pawn; the head of that family never quite knew how it was that he became the possessor of a little nest-egg which the vicar handed him before he sailed, as the gift of an anonymous friend. It must be owned that Bellarmin's impulsive liberality that day was somewhat in ratio with the blessings poured upon the beautiful lady whose name and position no one seemed to have exactly ascertained. But, anyhow, some long-hopeless hearts were gladder, and some starved bodies more content that night, because of what he had done.

When he had visited most of the dwellers in the Gardens, he
made his way as quickly as he could towards the Borough Road again. He had a nervous dread lest Mary should see him, or get to know of his presence there. By chance, however, he struck upon a little square with a church and a red-brick schoolhouse, and more lines and more clothes fluttering in the wind; and as he passed at the end of the square, the faint sound of a sweet, fresh voice that he knew fell upon his ear, with just that little imperious intonation in it which told that his princess was at that moment very earnest and intent on the carrying out of some project for the people's good.

Bellarmin could not but pause and look from behind his screen of bulging sheets. She was there, standing very straight, and looking very slender and stately, in her plain black dress and little close bonnet, and with a part of her profile only visible to him. There was quite a group of them, just outside the church door. General Falcon stood by, and Sir Victor Champion; yes, there could be no doubt about that. His face was turned towards Mary, and he had a look of deep attention, as if he were revolving her project, whatever it might be, in his mind, and taking all its practical bearings, before he flashed into enthusiastic advocacy. Bellarmin had often seen the same kind of look on his face in the House of Commons, only that then it had not the tinge of strong personal interest which warmed it now. Bellarmin felt a darting pang of jealousy. If he were on the eve of becoming prime minister, and had a great fortune, and might not only restore to the last of the Stuarts her forfeited inheritance, but take from her counsel and inspiration, and perhaps bring into practical working some of her visionary plans for the good of England— Ah, well! he was glad for Mary's sake that she had enlisted interest so powerful.

There was no doubt that if Champion, as prime minister, were to urge Mary's claims in the House, they would be carried. Liberals and Tories alike would be fired to an impulse of generosity towards one so beautiful, so winning, and so good. The act of forfeiture would be reversed in a manner becoming a magnanimous government and a wise and lofty-minded sovereign absolutely secure of the affections of her people, and able to smile at the bogy of a Stuart pretender to the throne. Then all this shadow and sham, and net of intrigue and assumption, would fall away from Mary. Her claims having been recognised and acceded to, she would stand forth in an assured position, free to live her own life, and do her good works as she pleased. Ah, yes! he was glad—very glad. But he wished that he could be the great minister, and that it might be in his power to do all this for her.

A clergyman in a long rusty coat and felt wideawake—evidently the vicar of the parish—was in the group: a man with a tired, common-place face, and stooping gait, and eyes alight now in wonder and hope, as he glanced eagerly from Miss Beaton to Champion. Probably he, like the dealer, would be quite willing to turn from Tory to Liberal, if the latter party were likely to do better than the former by that particular parish. Then there was a little woman in brown alpaca and a shabby bonnet, twinkling with jet—a school teacher, or district visitor, probably—all agape
with astonishment and delighted expectation, who would put in her modest word when Sir Victor asked the vicar a question, and he turned to her. They were all in full conclave. Bellarmin wished that he could hear what it was about, and wished, too, that he might join in it. It was only a very little reform, easy enough to a rich philanthropist, and scarcely involving a question of legislation, though Mary, in her anxiety, felt sure that an act of Parliament might be passed immediately to set everything right. It was only about the starting of free breakfasts for the hungry scholars whom a beneficent state provided with a mass of valuable knowledge, but whose empty stomachs were not equal to the task of assisting their minds in its digestion. Had Bellarmin gone boldly forward he would have been welcomed, and he might have secured for himself several opportunities which fell to Champion of enjoying Mary Beaton’s society, and benefiting his fellow-creatures at the same time. But he felt sore and sad, and he turned quietly away behind the sheets, and wandered out of the labyrinth of alleys by a different path.

CHAPTER XXVII.

‘Bosworth won’t have it.’

‘Dear Mr Bellarmin’ [Lady Cora Mallory wrote],—‘I never see you now—never. You must come and dine with me on Sunday; just one of my tiny, quiet little dinners, such as you used to say you liked. I want you particularly, for I am going out of town so very soon. Do, like a good creature, throw over everything else just for this once, and come to me.’

Then there was a little postscript:—

‘I think Lord Twyford will dine with me. He will be coming up from Lord Bosworth’s on Sunday.’

‘Come,’ Bellarmin said to himself, ‘that explains the urgency. Twyford wants to tell me the result of his dealings with Lord Bosworth. Yes; of course I shall go.’

Lady Cora Mallory was a relative by marriage of Lord Twyford. She was a widow; she was fairly rich; and she lived to please herself. She had a small house in a Mayfair Street; she kept no men-servants except her coachman and her groom, and they did not live in the house. She gave pleasant little dinners and luncheons; and she was supposed to have no political opinions, and to entertain Trojan and Tyrian alike. This was, of course, the reason why Lord Twyford selected her house as the rendezvous for Bellarmin. No suspicion would be roused in any mind by the fact that Lord Twyford had met Bellarmin at Lady Cora Mallory’s house. Lady Cora was a connection of his, and Lady Cora’s
pretty little house welcomed to its friendly bosom everybody who was worth knowing, and perhaps, indeed, some few who, in the strict sense, were not worth knowing. So Mr Bellarmin went to the little feast on the appointed day.

There were two ladies besides the hostess, and there were Lord Twyford and a brother of Lady Cora's just home from sea—he had a command in one of the squadrons—and Bellarmin himself. The dinner was excellent; the talk was bright and varied. Lady Cora talked a great deal, and was a woman of incessant movement and gesture. She was thought handsome by some people. Those who did not think her handsome were willing to admit that she was 'impressive.' Some less kindly persons hinted that she was 'oppressive.'

Presently the ladies left the room, and Lady Cora's brother found that he had to hurry off somewhere. Lord Twyford and Bellarmin were alone. Lord Twyford pushed the claret jug to Bellarmin, and there was a moment of silence which Bellarmin determined that it was not his part to break.

'I have been seeing Bosworth,' Twyford began, with a little uneasy cough; 'in fact, I went down there early on Saturday, and only came up this evening:"

'Yes,' said Bellarmin.

'Yes.' Then there came two uneasy little coughs, little clearings of the embarrassed throat, and Lord Twyford went on: 'Fact is, Mr Bellarmin, some of your friends have been acting rather indiscreetly, I think. I suppose it is very hard to keep things altogether private; but I fancy there has been some indiscretion somewhere.'

'Not with me;' Bellarmin said, firmly.

'Oh dear, no. No one could think anything of the kind about you. But, do you see, it has got out somehow that Champion has been making arrangements, sending up pilot-balloons, sending out scouts. It's got about, and it has specially got to Bosworth's ears. I must say, Bellarmin,' Twyford went on, suddenly becoming familiar—'I must say, there does appear to have been something like treachery or underhand dealing of some kind. Someone has peached—isn't that the old-fashioned slang phrase?—someone has been peaching to Bosworth. I found he had got hold of the whole thing, and he was wild about it. How he looks at it is, that Champion has been only trying to humour us, while all the while he is making serious arrangements elsewhere. He has been humbugging us, he says—Bosworth says, I mean—and he has been mystifying Saxon. He's going to play a downright Radical part, he says—I mean Bosworth says—and to appeal to the country from a regular revolutionary platform.'

'Oh, that's mere nonsense,' Bellarmin said. 'He could hardly hope to get the support of my friends if he were going to mount a revolutionary platform.'

'I know—I know; but you can understand that what Bosworth calls a revolutionary platform you and I might call a platform of reasonable reform. Anyhow, Bosworth has regularly taken fright, and all our slow fellows with him; and he shies like a horse. He
vows we were just about to be made the cat's-paw of Champion and the demagogues; and some of our men, whom I had all but persuaded to take my views, now start back and say Bosworth is right.'

'Then Lord Bosworth won't make any move?'

'My dear fellow, I shouldn't so much mind even that. I am afraid he will make a move, and that, like the crab, he will go backwards.'

'I am sorry for it,' Bellarmin said, gravely. 'There is a great chance lost to the Conservative Party—a chance of identifying themselves with a real popular reform, and at the same time keeping the real reform from degenerating into a sham revolution.'

'Yes; I am sorry for it, too,' Lord Twyford said, with a gentle sigh. 'It was an opportunity! One would have liked the grand old Conservative Party to stand in an attitude of something better than mere resistance. One might have had an ambition to have a share in some bold and generous movement forward. But there it is, you see; Bosworth won't have it.'

'I think that ought to be the motto of Conservatism since De Carmel's death,' Bellarmin said, bitterly—'Bosworth won't have it.'

'There is too much truth in that; but what can we do? We can't get on without Bosworth.'

'Are you getting on with Bosworth?'

'Well, no; it don't seem like getting on, does it? It seems more like getting off, I should say. But some of our men won't do anything except just as Bosworth tells them.'

'Against Bosworth and stupidity,' said Bellarmin, 'the gods themselves contend in vain.'

'Oh, well, Bosworth is a brilliant man in his way, and you must admit that his foreign policy is bold; but, as you say, he is somewhat narrow-minded, and very determined. Anyhow, there is the condition of things; and I was anxious to let you know, in strictest confidence, of course, at the earliest moment possible. You will have to decide as to your own course. Perhaps I ought not to have told you all this so fully; but I felt bound, especially to you; and I thought it was but right to let you know at once that the thing is at an end so far as we are concerned. Shall we go upstairs?'

'Yes; just a moment. About this treachery, Lord Twyford; can you tell me anything more clearly?'

Twyford indulged in a little embarrassed chuckle.

'Well, I don't know; I don't think I can tell you much; indeed, I don't know very much myself. But Bosworth implied it to me, if he didn't exactly say it, that he had had positive information conveyed to him about Champion's intentions.'

'Positive information? Did he say from whom he got the positive information?'

'I think (he, he!) Bosworth—rather gave me to understand that it came in the form of anonymous information.'

There did not appear to be anything more to say. They were about to leave the room when Lord Twyford suddenly stopped.

'I thought at first of resigning,' he said, in a low, confidential tone; 'indeed, I had almost made up my mind to it. But Bosworth wouldn't hear of it. And, after all, one must compromise, I suppose
Perhaps things are not exactly quite ripe with us yet—with the Conservatives of the old school, I mean. It would be impossible to bring up some of our country squires; we haven't had time to educate them.

'Will things ever be ripe,' Bellarmin asked, 'if men of higher intellect and more enlightened opinions do all the compromising, and the pig-headed dullards are allowed to have their own way in everything?'

'You put it rather sharply,' Lord Twyford said, with just a faint tinge coming on his delicate features; 'but of course there is something to be said for your view of the matter. I don't dispute that at all. But, in a practical way, what good could be done by my withdrawing from the government now? Would not that be merely to leave the—ah, well, the class of persons you describe somewhat severely—to have their own way in everything?'

'It would leave them alone with the country,' Bellarmin replied, warmly; 'face to face with the country, and alone.'

Lord Twyford remained silent for a moment. He felt within himself that there was force in what Bellarmin had been urging. Still, he thought it was hardly the moment to withdraw from Bosworth; it might create a wrong impression through England. It was not timidity or nervousness that restrained him, he told himself; oh! nothing of the kind—only statesmanship.

Bellarmin, much reflecting, walked to his club after having left Lady Cora Mallory's house. He was beginning to think that there was a good deal of the demoralising in this noble game of politics. 'Here is Lord Twyford—in private life, a man of honour and of virtue; even of piety, it is said. Yet, having worked hard in secret yesterday to induce his leader and his party to adopt a certain policy, he will now work hard in public to-morrow to frustrate and defeat that very same policy. No doubt he will get up in the House of Lords and argue against and condemn it, and denounce it. And no doubt, too, if it were to be stated in the papers that he had conferred with Bellarmin on the subject, and endeavoured to arrange a combination between Bellarmin and himself in favour of the policy he was now to oppose, Lord Twyford would get up in the House of Lords and publicly deny that there had been any such conference for any such purpose. And only the other day even, while professing a desire to co-operate with Champion, and to induce the whole party to co-operate with him, Lord Twyford's chief idea was to get beforehand with Champion and cut him out, and obtain the whole credit of the reform for the Conservatives. If this is what a man of the highest reputation for honour will do,' Bellarmin asked himself, 'what may we not expect from the men who have no special reputation that way, but are content to be only like other men? We can understand Don Quixote,' he thought, 'and we can also understand Gil Blas; but how to combine Don Quixote and Gil Blas and make them one?'

Bellarmin's suspicion of treachery had not at first turned in the right direction. It was true that, partly by assuming what she guessed but did not know, partly by adroit questioning, partly by pulling the wires which she had at her service in the different
camps, Lady Saxon had ascertained the existence of what she called to herself 'the Twyford overtures,' and had summed up in her mind, with tolerable accuracy, the substance of the interview between Lord Twyford and Bellarmin. Lady Saxon had by no means underrated her value to Champion as an ally. A beautiful woman who chooses to play the game has forces at her command far more subtle and effective than those of male statecraft. Lady Saxon might at times have made a more accurate count of heads than any of the whips on the Liberal or the Conservative side. As a minor instrument, Colonel Towers was very easily manipulated; and Ross Bingley, the journalist, who always contrived to gather loose ends together and pick up bits of information, nobody knew how, that gave the clue to more important information still, was a no less lightly wielded tool.

Bellarmin soon saw clearly that Lady Saxon knew a good deal about the business. It is easy work, of course, for people skilled in such delicate manoeuvring to reveal much without actually saying anything. And then, too, there was a temptation, only possible when a woman's good opinion was in question, to let her see that he was not considered by his party so unimportant as she might have imagined; and the more he recognised her real knowledge, her tact, and her diplomacy, the more he realised that she was no mean political counsellor, no ordinary feminine partisan, the more dangerous became the position and the greater the temptation.

Bellarmin had never mentioned Lord Twyford's name to her; he had not even suggested that the Conservatives had an idea of checkmating Champion. But Lady Saxon read the move, and she talked it over with Champion; and the two resolved that the Bosworth Conservatives should be checkmated in their turn. So a whisper pierced the ear of the Marquis of Bosworth himself. 'You are sold to the Championites,' it insinuated; 'Lucifer' has dug a pit into which you must tumble if you move forward. You had better fall back behind the lines of your Torres Vedras of ancient Toryism, and wait there until better times, as the dear old Tory duke waited until Napoleon's men had spent themselves. To try to compromise with Champion is to try to sup with "Lucifer" without a long spoon.'

If Bellarmin was variable and perturbed during these days, Mary Stuart Beaton, too, was under the influence of moods and impulses which made her seem at different times a totally different person.

Her temperament was like a lake that reflects sunbeams and clouds as the sky changes; and there blended strangely in her nature a certain French gaiety and elasticity with a Northern courage, an open-air hardihood, and a strain of religious mysticism and melancholy devoutness that seemed to give ground for the fantastic suggestion of a parallel between her own personality and that of Mary of Scotland, whom she resembled in feature.

The devotee was prominent just now. The crèche and schoolboard breakfast schemes, and a wild project for expending some of the Stuart inheritance, as soon as she should come of age, in building a Catholic church and making converts in Southwark, filled
her mind, to the exclusion, for the moment, of those unqueenly escapades which tormented General Falcon and made Lady Struthers shudder. She had not lately teased her guardian to let her mount omnibuses, and visit music halls and doubtful places of entertainment, and was, on the whole, as well behaved as the most exacting Legitimist could have desired his liege lady to be. And then, too, it was the height of the season, and somehow, notwithstanding her attitude of separateness from 'the Hanoverians,' the young princess, as people called her, had got caught in a perfect vortex of fashionable society. After her début among the Whigs at Lady Saxon's house, the Duchess of Nornside took her up and introduced her to many notable persons. Then Lady Mavis Redhouse launched her among the Tories, and she was even the lioness at a great reception given by the Marchioness of Bosworth. She did not go to Ascot, but created some sensation at the summer meeting at Sandown Park; and one night at the Amphion Club, Rolfe Bellarmin, sitting beside Lady Saxon, one of a noisy little group, with long tumblers on a table before them, was startled by the apparition of a tall, slim figure in a straight brocaded gown, with a pale, proud face and deep, wondering eyes, and dark chestnut hair bound by that old-fashioned jewelled coif which Mary was fond of wearing. She had come in with Lady Eastgrave, and the two women might have been embodied types of the old time and the new. Nothing could have been more in the nineteenth-century mode than Lady Eastgrave's low-cut, skin-like bodice, sleeveless arms, crinoleted draperies, and fashion-book yellow coiffure, ornamented with diamond frogs and beetles.

Bellarmin rose involuntarily, and a frown came over his face. He did not like to see Mary Beaton here, and with Lady Eastgrave, though the errant husband was ostentatiously to the fore. Lady Saxon noticed the gesture, and laughed scornfully.

'You are thinking that your princess looks a little out of place in this atmosphere of cigarette smoke; but Mary Stuart liked a romp sometimes, you know, and I daresay she would have appreciated this sort of thing intensely.'

Mary Beaton did seem to enjoy the comic singing which was going on, and she did not seem to mind the cigarette smoke. She laughed at the buffoonery, and every now and then glanced wistfully towards Rolfe, who, however, scarcely spoke to her, but devoted himself in a marked manner to Lady Saxon. He did not understand her, so he told himself with something like a throb of indignation. Why had he wasted sentiment and adoration upon the saint of Farm Street, who could come down so readily from her pedestal and lend herself with such apparent zest to a mundane scene like this? Another time, when he met her again at the Amphion Club, he could not help saying something of the sort to her, and remarked with a sarcastic emphasis that he knew no one who so perfectly combined the World and the Church. Mary coloured for a moment, and then became silent and stately and reserved, so that for a week or so there was a slight coolness between them.

He met her often at parties and receptions. In truth, Miss
Beaton had now become quite a famous personage. It was altogether the thing to go to her little court, and to talk about her, and laugh at her pretensions, and admire her beauty, and, in the aesthetic circles, to imitate her style of dress. She was growing accustomed now to seeing her appearance and her dresses and her ancestry described in the papers. The more serious papers even discussed her property claims, and it began to be generally understood that Sir Victor Champion would bring them forward, and that the Tories would offer no opposition, and that the sovereign would generously assent to their recognition. So that, from a worldly point of view, everything seemed to be going well with our poor princess, and there was certainly no practical cause for General Falcon's sour looks and odd, abrupt manners.

The relations between Falcon and the others of his young mistress's household were becoming more and more strained with every succeeding day. The curious thing was that the more difficult Falcon became to deal with, the more Mary made effort to bear patiently with him, and to meet him with unfailing sweetness and affection. At one time she was ready enough to reply to his rough words by imperious words of her own; she was ready enough to laugh at him, to make mockery of him and his tempers and his ways. But of late she was almost always gentle, forbearing, considerate. There was that change in her which, let us hope, would be seen in any of us who suddenly found that he or she had been taking for mere outbursts of ill-temper what were really but the symptoms of malady and of pain. But to the outer world, to all who came into association, even into close association with him, there was no appearance of any sort of malady or ill-health in Falcon. No man ever carried sixty-five years with more careless ease. His tread was as firm and as light as that of a man of thirty. He seldom troubled to put his foot into his horse's stirrup in order to mount; he vaulted into the saddle with the elastic spring of a boy. He managed all his mistress's affairs as shrewdly as ever. But his manners were becoming every day worse and worse, more imperious and more rude to all those around him. Lord Stonehenge was deeply concerned, and could only account for the change in him on Mary's own supposition, that anxiety in regard to her fortunes and cause had preyed upon him, and had shaken his nerves. It had always been understood that Falcon's old wound at times rendered him irritable and uncertain. But people wondered how Miss Beaton was able to endure him; and as she became more and more talked about in London, the most absurd stories were got up as to the origin and extent of his guardianship, and the most fantastic guesses hazarded to explain the extraordinary power he was said to have over her, and which no extravagance of ill-temper on his part seemed to lessen.

In truth, Mary was herself in a depressed and fluctuating state of mind and nerves. Amid all her gaiety and occupations and religious exercises, she often felt lonely and astray and bewildered. Life seemed to her something like a theatrical performance, in which hardly anything was real, and very little was satisfying. She was troubled and perplexed—she did not know why. She
The Rival Princess.

clung to her benevolent schemes, and to her church, and to her old friends who she believed loved her; and she thought Falcon loved her best of all, and with most of a father's love. What did it matter, then, about his humours and his contrariety and his strange wild outbursts of affection, since the affection was, and had always been, the most disinterested upon which she could rely? She believed in Lord Stonehenge, and clung to him after a fashion. She was always gentle to him and sweet, but she could not help sometimes feeling a little pang, a little doubt and dread. She could never forget that night when he had offered her his heart and his life. She believed in Sir Victor Champion, too, and admired him, and took pleasure in his company. But—there was just that faint doubt in regard to him also.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE PILOT-BALLOON.

A great many notes in Tressel's hieroglyphic writing were flying about. Tressel was in his element. He professed to be acquainted with all the political moves, to 'tap' all the secret wires, and, though a Radical, to have private, prompt, and trustworthy information as to the doings in the Tory camp. Of course he knew all about the failure of Lord Twyford's efforts to educate his party. He told Bellarmin that there would very probably be a split in the cabinet, and that Lord Twyford was trying to make up his mind that his conscience required him to resign—Lord Twyford was rather famous for breaking up cabinets by resigning at some critical juncture. 'I have written to Twyford giving various very good reasons against such a course, for it wouldn't suit our game,' wrote the genial cynic to Bellarmin. ""Lucifer" is simply wild to get in, and will certainly go mad if he is not allowed to make a move. He mustn't rush his fence; and I mean to make the preliminary move myself, by bringing forward at once my stock motion about the House of Lords, which I had intended to drop out this year in view of more definite measures. I saw "Lucifer" yesterday—in a great state at the idea of being deserted by the Whigs, and, after all, thrown over by your party. I told him that I believed in a party militant, and that he need not look after Saxon, for it was of no use. What I hold to is this: "Lucifer's" old colleagues and many of our lot are traitors, eagerly looking for some plan which will bring them back into office. They ought at once to be blooded with a resolution pledging them. The Tories cannot and will not reform the Lords. Very possibly Twyford might want to try; but he could not carry his party or the Whigs. Their game is "the integrity of the Constitution," to shilly-shally with you Progressives, and to throw you a few crumbs; but you will be a fool if you accept them.'

Tressel had for a long time taken the House of Lords into his
particular care. Regularly every year he brought forward a motion
denouncing it as an anomaly, and inviting the House of Commons
to say that the time had come when the hereditary principle in
legislation ought no longer to be permitted to prevail. Tressel
puzzled people with his motion. Everyone knew that he did not
want to be taken into an administration—and yet was it possible
to suppose that he was really in earnest about his annual motion,
or about anything else?

Tressel's motion was to come before the House of Commons on
Tuesday. Tuesday is the day set apart by parliamentary pro-
cedure for the motions of private members, as the phrase is—
members who do not belong to the Administration, or, it may be
added, to the front bench of Opposition. Many a young reputa-
tion has been made by a Tuesday motion; many an ambitious
light has been snuffed out some fatal Tuesday by the peremptory
action of a 'count.' A capable man who has convictions, and who
thinks he sees his way to securing a parliamentary position, gener-
ally ties himself to his Tuesday motion, as Sindbad tied himself to
the lump of meat, in order thereby to be lifted to some desirable
elevation. The man with convictions wants his measure to be so
lifted; the other man wants the lift for himself. The man with
convictions has gained his end when some government takes up his
motion; the other man, when some government takes up himself.
In either case, the man brings on his motion once in every session,
year after year, until something comes of it. Many a motion grows
upon the House by this familiarising yearly process of presentation.
First it is a phantom, a theory, a dream, a crotchet; then it soli-
difies, assumes shape and proportion, and is seen to be real and
practicable; then comes a day when the author of the motion joy-
fully withdraws it, having received at last the long-desired and
welcome assurance of the government that they will take charge of
it themselves; and next it is an act of Parliament. And the man
is a heretic, a heathen, a Turk, who dares from that time forth to
say that any country could be worthy of the name of civilisation
which did not enjoy the blessing of such an enactment. Some-
times the author of the annual motion is absorbed into the govern-
ment, and rolled round in Administration's diurnal course, and the
motion is bequeathed to some other aspirant, or, it may be, is
heard of no more.

These are the successes, personal and political, of the Tuesday
motions. The successes are rare, far apart, far-shining. Who
shall tell the sad story of the failures? Who shall tell of the long
speeches carefully prepared and elaborately rehearsed—rehearsed,
it may even be, before a select circle of friends invited and expected
to admire—and which were snatched away in their beauty's bloom
on the floor of the House of Commons by the abhorred shears of
a 'count'? Who shall tell of the many Tuesday motions which
were each to have made its author a lion, but which only made
him a bore? The philosophic mind ought to look with curious
and compassionate interest on each Tuesday's motion, and on him
who ventures to attach himself to its fate. That fate seems some-
times to follow mere caprice in deciding what to do with the man
—whether to make of him a political idol or only a parliamentary log of wood.

The Ladies' Gallery was always full when Tressel was going to speak; it was crowded this evening. Not that the ladies who generally frequented the Gallery were great admirers of Tressel; the majority of the women who attend the debates in the House seem somehow to be generally the wives, sisters, and daughters of Tories; but even if they detested Tressel, they found him amusing all the same. Mr Samuelson, the doorkeeper of the Ladies' Gallery, had a hard time of it now and then. Mr Samuelson was a tall, bland, somewhat melancholy man. He had an air of mild deprecation. He was civil by nature, and it was a struggle against his feelings when he was compelled to be peremptory with ladies in the interests of order and in obedience to the strict injunction of his superiors. For the dames and demoiselles in the Gallery, the dames more especially, will talk, and are often very demonstrative. Solemn warning placards exhibiting the word 'Silence' admonish the ladies to be chary even of whisper; but the ladies are not obedient. They will chatter to each other; they will allow members to hang over the backs of their chairs and talk with them—perhaps—who knows?—even flirt with them. Some of them are apt to lose their heads when an exciting division takes place, and to 'shout amid the shouting crew,' as Cleveland the pirate, in Scott's romance, tells his loved one that he shall soon have to do. Mr Samuelson remonstrates: 'Ladies, I must ask you to keep silence. Madame, you really must not make such a noise; the sergeant-at-arms has just sent up to say that it must not go on.' But of what avail such platonic remonstrance? Mr Samuelson can't drag a lady, body and bones, out of the Gallery; he can't put a gag into her mouth or a padlock on her lips; he can't inflict any manner of condign punishment on her; and the ladies do not pay much attention to his efforts at the maintenance of discipline. A momentary lull is all he can ever hope to bring about. So he goes through life with a sort of deadened, deprecatory, distressed air. On his face of benevolent appeal seem to be enscrolled the words: 'These women—what can one do?'

Bellarmin was giving a little dinner that night within the precincts of the House to Mary Beaton, Lady Saxon, Sir Victor, Falcon, and two or three other friends. The idea of the dinner had originated with Lady Saxon. She said she had never dined in the House of Commons, and people told her it was getting to be the thing now for women to dine there, and she wished someone would ask her; and Bellarmin delightedly became the someone, and asked her. Then, at a Ladies' Night of the Gala Club, in the impulse of the moment, he asked Mary, and she seemed pleased as a school-girl might be with the thought of an unfamiliar enjoyment and experience. So Bellarmin made his arrangements well in advance. The afternoon of Tressel's motion was chosen, and places were found for the ladies in the gallery. Mary had been more than once offered a place in the Speaker's own gallery; but it did not amuse her nearly so much to be there as to be in the public gallery consecrated to, and bearing the name of, the Ladies'.

There was a look of girlish expectation on her face as she got out of the carriage in the quiet little courtyard of the Ladies' Gallery and greeted Bellarmin, who was standing at the oak door to receive her. Her manner was more kind and cordial to him than it had altogether been of late, and the young man felt a sense of peace and satisfaction steal over his soul. He would not have her go to the gallery yet. Tressel would not begin for a while, and there was a little clostral garden on the side of the House of Lords which he wanted to show her; and there was the window on the great staircase, with the inscription on brass setting forth how the standard weights and measures of England were buried there; and there were some frescoes, and many other interesting things, which could only be seen properly by daylight. So they wandered under Gothic arches, through still, grey courts, where only a stray policeman lingered, or some official with his black bag passed into one of the offices, or an unsociable member taking a solitary stroll doffed his hat and cast a curious glance at Bellarmin, whom, of course, everyone knew, and his Stuart princess. These more secluded precincts of the House of Commons, which are so little known and frequented, have a strangely tranquillising effect on overwrought nerves. The very suddenness of the contrast seems to intensify the feeling of tranquillity, and it is difficult to believe that a few paces this way or that, a few stairs surmounted, a few corridors passed, and one is in all the clatter and bustle of Palace Yard, and all the life and movement of the lobbies.

Besides the ladies who were to dine with Bellarmin, Lady Mavis Redhouse was in the gallery, and Madame Spinola and Jenny Rivers had somehow managed to secure places. Mrs Rivers had heard about Bellarmin's dinner, and was wondering whether he would have the heart not to bid her to the feast, and whether she would have to be content with such mild fare as might be served her in the little sitting-room appropriated to the ladies.

There was a buzz of impatient whisper; people were saying that it was not going to be an amusing night after all; and Mr Samuelson was gliding round behind the chairs, giving polite little bits of information concerning the orator who was up, and who sat down as Mary came in, and blandly answering questions as to the probable business of the evening. One thing the ladies who were familiar with the place felt certain of was, that the House would not be counted while Tressel himself was speaking, whatever might be the fate of the motion when his speech was over. On this particular evening the House was more crowded than was usual, even for a speech of Tressel's. Serious men, who had been counted out again and again upon some motion whereon they had set their hearts, wondered sadly at the perversity and the levity of the House of Commons, but came down themselves all the same to listen to Tressel. Tressel's speech was full of humour, drollery, and odd, quaint hits. One little trick of surprise which he had, was to reach what seemed to be a climax of satire or caricature, and then, as by a sudden after-thought, cap the climax with some utterly unexpected extravagance. Long as the House was familiar with Tressel, it never yet could forecast the moment when this
rhetorical artifice was about to be played off, and it was always taken with a fresh and ingenuous surprise. Of course Tressel did not go deep into things. That was not his way; he did not care about it; he left that sort of work to others who had a taste for it. But there was no man who could touch off the superficial absurdities of an anomalous institution or system as Tressel could; it was hard not to think ridiculous in itself and in its essence anything upon which Tressel was for the moment casting ridicule. In this instance the institution was, even in the opinion of its best friends, only to be secured against ridicule by the plea, not of sanctity, but of sanctity. This time Tressel started a new view of the absurdity of the principle of hereditary legislation. He dwelt on the wrong it inflicted on some of the hereditary legislators. He painted an amusing picture of a man of genius, energy, and eloquence—a man born for political life and political power—who was making a great career for himself in the House of Commons, when suddenly his father dies, and the unfortunate heir is condemned to what Tressel called penal servitude for life in the House of Lords. His career is cut short in a moment; for what scope has he in the House of Lords? Who minds anything said by anybody in the House of Lords? Fancy a chamber of legislation about whose divisions, on the rare occasions when divisions do take place, nobody in or out of Parliament cares three rows of pins. Demosthenes himself couldn't be really eloquent in such an assembly; at the very best he could only be academical. He couldn't indulge in invective—the House of Lords of our time would be scandalised at invective—only the mildest of satirical jokes would suit the atmosphere of the place. 'I sometimes think,' Tressel declared, 'with a shudder—yes, Mr Speaker, with a positive shudder—that only the merest accident saved me—me myself—from being in succession to a seat in the House of Lords!'

Lady Mavis Redhouse found her Tory patience utterly failing her as Tressel went on. 'Oh, the wretch, the odious, vile creature!' she was heard to ejaculate at short intervals. Mr Samuelson craned over the heads and backs of rows of ladies, and implored her to be silent. She tossed her head and went on as before. As Tressel did not stop, she suddenly jumped up from her chair, turned her back upon the orator and the House, and began an animated conversation on the wickedness and vulgarity of Radicals in general with a grim dowager who had a place behind her. Mr Samuelson thought it best to be out of the way while this dialogue was going on, feeling all too keenly that he was powerless to silence it; and so he betook himself to the little ante-chamber which is set apart for him, and occupied himself in imaginary tasks. But he was not fated to have rest even there. Madame Spinola, who adored Tressel, stopped on her way as she passed wrathfully from the gallery, looked in upon him, and asked him, in angry tone,—

'I wonder, Mr Samuelson, if the wife of some Radical member from the provinces were going on in the way that Lady Mavis Redhouse is doing, would you be quite so patient as you have shown yourself to her?'

'I have remonstrated with her ladyship, I do assure you I have,
madame. I try to be perfectly impartial, madame, I do indeed; but what can one do with Lady Mavis? Now, I ask you, madame, what can one do with her?'

'I should know what to do with her,' Madame Spinola replied, with a laugh and a scornful toss of the head and a wrathful shake of the skirts, and she left the unhappy Samuelson in deepened distress. Her last declaration was not of any practical advantage to him; for she had not deigned to tell him what it was that she would have done to Lady Mavis. He was thinking sadly of this at the time. 'It is all very well,' he thought to himself, even said to himself; 'but these ladies don't help me. That lady didn't help me; she didn't even tell me what she would have done to Lady Mavis, and I am sure I don't know what to do.'

The House did not attach any importance to Tressel's motion. It was only his way; an odd, clever fellow, Tressel; pity he could never be in earnest! Therefore most persons regarded the interest of the evening as over when Tressel had made his amusing speech. Of course the Treasury Bench would not take any serious notice of it, honest Tories said. Just a few good-humoured words treating the whole thing as lightly as possible, and then a division and away to dinner. Pity De Carmel was not alive and in that House! No one was able to 'chaff' Tressel so cleverly and so pleasantly as De Carmel used to do. But the thing would be easily dealt with anyhow, and nothing could come of it.

Bellarmin did not feel so well assured. The warnings of Sir Victor Champion weighed on his mind. He leaned forward to catch every word of the reply from the Treasury Bench; and he saw that Champion had settled down in his seat on the front Opposition bench, evidently expectant of something to come.

The minister who rose to reply was Sir Rowland Chase. The sudden translation or apotheosis of De Carmel to the House of Lords, some little time before his death, had brought Sir Rowland Chase to the front—it could not be called the leadership—of the House of Commons. Sir Rowland was a country squire, still young in the political sense, and in whom Providence in its inscrutable wisdom had permitted to combine all the narrow-mindedness retained by Oxford with all the narrow-mindedness boasted by the after-dinner speakers at the annual agricultural show of his native county. It was not that Sir Rowland Chase had any deep-rooted convictions in statesmanship and political philosophy; it was only that he had but one set of ideas, and he could not see his way into any other. Sir Rowland therefore blundered along dismally, while his party seemed still uncertain about running with the hare and holding with the hounds; that is, while it was still uncertain whether it would not try to 'dish' or 'euchre' Sir Victor Champion, by going in boldly for indefinite promise of reform under the inspiration of Tory Democracy. Now, however, that the influence of the Marquis of Bosworth had prevailed, and the words 'No surrender' had been passed round as the motto of the Conservative government, Sir Rowland saw his way and was happy. No one could say 'Jamais' to any political demand with a lighter heart or clearer conscience, or an intellect more stolidly convinced. Now had come his first oppor-
tunity of saying ‘Jamais,’ and he rose to the occasion with a proud spirit; the spirit of twelve generations or so of unideaed Toryism.

‘Jamais!’ that was all about it. Never! The government would never give the slightest encouragement or countenance to any proposal for change in the constitution of the House of Lords, come the proposition from whom it might, and Sir Rowland looked sternly across the table at the front bench of Opposition. The times did not call for change; the one desire, the one determination, of the men on whom alone England could rely, was that we must hold fast to our long-cherished English institutions. These institutions had been created for us by—Sir Rowland was very near saying ‘the wisdom of our ancestors;’ but he checked himself on the edge, having a vague fear that if he used that time-honoured expression some irreverent laughter might be heard from below the gangway on the Opposition side. The times were full of warning and of danger! Look at France; look at Socialism in Germany, in Chicago! No, Mr Speaker, the government had no answer to make to a motion of this kind (ironical cries of ‘Hear, hear,’ from Tressel), no answer but the announcement of their stern and irrevocable determination to resist all further changes in the constitution of the country, and hold fast by the throne, the altar, the integrity of the Constitution and the House of Lords, all as by law established. Sir Rowland panted and looked round to his colleagues as one who would say, ‘I think I have done it now.’

Would Sir Victor Champion get up? Every eye was turned on him. Lady Saxon peered down intently from her corner through the grating as if she would have influenced him magnetically by her eyes. Mary, too, felt nervous and excited, and there was a moment’s pause in the movement of the House. Sir Victor sat still. He slightly shrugged his shoulders, and cast a look at Bellarmin, which clearly meant, ‘There, I told you so!’ No one seemed to have made up his mind to say anything, and the Speaker was actually about to put the question from the chair, when Bellarmin leaped to his feet. Sir Victor’s glance had fired him. Sir Victor was right. Lord Twyford had been right in the information he had given as to his chief’s unbending obstinacy. The government had determined on a policy of sheer, stolid, immovable Toryism; they had gone back in spirit to the days of Eldon and Wetherell; and Bellarmin and his friends had been quietly ignored, coolly left out of the reckoning. These thoughts flushed the young man’s face as he sprang to his feet, and to the surprise of all the steady and old-fashioned Tories proceeded to denounce, to satirise, to heap scorn upon the declaration of the policy of the government. The cheers of the Liberals rent the air as Bellarmin poured out his flood of angry eloquence. The cheers penetrated the distant recesses of library and dining-rooms, and tea-room and smoking-rooms. Bellarmin boldly accused the ministry of having betrayed and deceived the best men of their party, the men who alone had made Conservative administration possible, the men who had always held that the only true Conservatism was that which averted violent change by a policy of steady, well-ordered progress. Did the right honourable baronet really believe that the young and active and
educated members of his party would follow him in a policy of mere stolid negation? Did he suppose they would accept with servile acquiescence his futile profession of faith in political finality? Where had the right honourable baronet been lately staying? Was it in Sleepy Hollow? Everyone knew, by the way, that Sir Rowland Chase had been lately visiting the Marquis of Bosworth, and therefore this hit told. Did he not observe that changes had been taking place during the last twenty years or so? How long did he think the firmest institution in the country would last if every government were to announce that no proposal would be listened to which aimed at any change in its system and its organisation? The right honourable gentleman was a representative in that House of one of the great universities. Was it possible that he had really not known of, had not observed, not heard of, the changes which that university had made in its whole organisation to meet the demands of a growing and changing civilisation? Oh, yes; after what they had just heard, the House of Commons was safe in assuming that the right honourable gentleman knew nothing of all that had been going on in his own university. If the decision he announced was really the decision, the mature and deliberate decision, of the present administration, then the country could only assume that they had deliberately abdicated all the true functions of government, and the sooner they abdicated the seat of the government as well the better it would be for their own reputation, for the peace of the kingdom, and even for the safety of that very institution which they professed to guard, but which they were blindly involving in their own destruction.

Bellarmin's was a very pretty piece of invective, enlivened and ornamented by many passing touches of sarcasm, and by telling personal allusions. The young man was fiercely in earnest, and the House knew it. Lady Saxon knew it also. She beamed with a sort of patronising triumph, and she whispered to Mary, who sat next her, 'I have been working him round to this for a long time. I knew that I should succeed in the end.'

Mary's hands were clenched tightly together in her lap. She had been intensely interested, even agitated, during Bellarmin's speech. Her whole heart had gone out to him. She had grown very pale in her excitement, and she became conscious of it herself, and told herself that she had always wanted Bellarmin to be on Champion's side. Now she felt a throb of revulsion, almost of indignation. She did not answer Lady Saxon, but a wave of colour overspread her face. Why should Lady Saxon assume that it was her influence which had done the work of conversion; that it was she who had brought Bellarmin round—she, and not the righteousness of the cause?

Then quietly arose Sir Victor Champion. His manner was studiously serene and bland; his habitual impulsiveness seemed to have been reduced under complete control. He did not mean to make a speech, he said; he only rose to congratulate the Conservative party and the country on the fact that the honourable gentleman who had just sat down had proved that Conservatism was still a living germ, and not the dry husk of a withered kernel. He was
always glad—should always be glad—to co-operate with Conservatives in any well-considered scheme of needed reform; but with the present government, of course, no co-operation was possible after the announcement which had just been made. Sir Victor complimented Bellarmin on his sentiments and his speech, dismissed the government with a cool and quiet contempt, and did not say a single word which could commit himself one way or the other to any scheme of policy concerning the House of Lords. It was observed by many shrewd listeners that Sir Victor dwelt with emphasis on the importance of the part which true Conservatism could always play in the politics of a country like England, and the high consideration which he, a Radical, professed to have for Conservative co-operation. ‘Next time the Liberals come in,’ men whispered, ‘Champion will give a place in his cabinet to young Bellarmin.’ Men in the House of Commons soon get into the habit of regarding politics in this concrete sort of way. The first thing which occurs to them is, not how this or that measure or change of government will affect the public weal, but who is likely to be brought in from the outer circle and made a member of this or that administration. Then the division was taken, and Tressel, of course, was left with a small minority, and members were pleased to find that they were yet in good time to dress for dinner.

‘You have done well,’ Sir Victor said, laying his hand with a kindly, fatherly sort of touch on Bellarmin’s shoulder as they were passing out. ‘I liked your speech very much, and the country will like it. The future of England is with you young men. You have now taken your proper place.’

He did not say one single word to remind Bellarmin that his warning about the new policy of the government had come true. But Bellarmin was thinking of it all the same, and his proud and wounded heart was touched and soothed by the words of the great Liberal statesman. As he passed through one of the corridors he heard a woman’s voice, with a strong American accent, say, ‘I thought Mr Bellarmin’s speech was just splendid; but why did people tell me he was a Conservative?’ The talk of the lobbies was, in fact, that young Bellarmin had gone right over to the Radicals. Some sturdy old Tories said they always knew it would be so: ‘Told you so, sir, all along. He ought to be pitched out of the Carlton in the direction of the National Liberal.’

CHAPTER XXIX.

‘IF I CAN LOVE YOU, I WILL.’

To dine within the precincts of the House of Commons had become of late sessions the thing for ladies to do. The House of Commons is not gallant or hospitable in its dealings with ladies. It sets apart a dingy, stifling cage for them to huddle in
While debates are going on. A woman must sometimes feel that her lot is for the time a little like that of Bajazet, or the unfortunate cardinal immured by Louis the Eleventh. The House of Commons provides women with a tiny ante-chamber, wherein they can dine, as many of them as can find places there, off a bit of steak or chop fetched up from the restaurant on the lower floor. It does not permit them to enter the members' dining-room, or to have a cup of tea in the members' tea-room. For a long time the only common ground wherein members of Parliament and their wives and daughters and women friends might feed together was the Terrace; and the only refreshment obtainable there was of the afternoon-tea order. Of later years, however, a step in the way of reform was made. A small subterranean dining-room, which used to be occupied mainly by persons interested in parliamentary proceedings, but not themselves in Parliament, began to be turned to account by members who wished to entertain their women-folk at a solid and substantial dinner. It was used very infrequently at first; some knowing member found out its existence, and slyly took his wife there, and told of it to some very particular friend, in order that he, too, should give his women the benefit of an occasional feast. The news began to spread; the practice began to increase. It was a great advantage to ladies who liked to listen to a debate that they could have a dinner, a real dinner, on the premises, and then go back to their seats in the gallery. By degrees the advantages of the subterranean dining-room became widely known; and at last it grew to be the right sort of thing for members to make up little dinner-parties for their women friends. One natural result of this was that the competition for tables in the rooms—there were only two rooms in all, one public, one private—became very keen, and one had to order a table as many days in advance as if it were a box at the Lyceum. Bellarmin had engaged the private room. His dinner-party was to be made up of Lady Saxon, Mary Beaton, and Lady Struthers, Sir Victor Champion, General Falcon, Tressel, a young member of his own party, and himself. Lord Saxon was away. Not supposing that anything of real importance could come of Tressel's stock motion, he had, at his wife's instigation, taken the opportunity to run down to the country to look after some private business of his own. He had originally been included in the invitation, but his presence would not have been altogether agreeable to Lady Saxon under the conditions. She wondered within herself what he would say on the morrow when he read the leading articles.

When the debate on Tressel's motion was over, Bellarmin went up to the Ladies' Gallery to collect his guests. Nothing more of any consequence was to come on that evening; but there were two or three other motions which were certain to be discussed for some hours, and before the inevitable count of the ordinary Tuesday evening had been reached.

They were waiting in the corridor, where quite a little stream of women had emptied itself out of the gallery, and where they had already been joined by Colonel Towers and Miss Beaton's first pioneer in the House of Commons, the Scotch member, Mr Leven.
Lady Mavis Redhouse had been vehemently denouncing Champion and Radical principles in general, and Lady Saxon was standing by with an indifferent smile, while Colonel Towers was remarking, in his pompous manner,—

'The fact is, Lady Mavis, Champion ought to have lived five centuries sooner. That was the age for dialecticians. St Thomas and Duns Scotus, and the rest of them, weren't in it with our "Lucifer." It wouldn't have been St Thomas, you may be sure; it would be St Victor.'

Lady Mavis made a rush at Bellarmin, and so did Madame Spinola, and so did poor hungry Jennie Rivers, all carmine and white, and smiles and grimaces.

'You wicked young man; how could you?' cried Lady Mavis, in indignant reproach. 'What is the meaning of this? What would De Carmel have said—he who always spoke so nicely of you! It's enough to make him turn in his grave, Mr Bellarmin. No! Don't come near me! Don't speak to me! You are a traitor!'

'Remember, you young hero, that you are going to be the lion of my party to-morrow night. I shall never forgive you now if you don't turn up,' said Madame Spinola, effusively. 'And—'

'Oh, Rolfe! I felt so proud of you,' Mrs Rivers exclaimed, affectionately, stretching out her slim hand in its soiled Swedish kid tan glove, and patting him on the arm. 'It is something to be a pal of yours.'

The young man cut the congratulations and anathemas short, his eyes looking over and beyond them all. He was flushed, elated. He knew that he had spoken well and made a sensation. But he did not want the praises of a Madame Spinola or a Jennie Rivers. He wanted a sympathetic smile or glance from Mary Stuart Beaton.

He saw that Mary was looking at Mrs Rivers with a kind of gentle scorn in her eyes. She was wondering, perhaps, why this woman called him by his Christian name, and what sort of claim she had upon him. How should she—his White Queen—understand the ways and manners of women of the Jennie Rivers class? He felt an impulse of unreasoning indignation against the poor little harmless flirt.

'Miss Beaton,' he began, and paused, waiting for her to say something to congratulate him—to tell him that she had liked his speech. But she said nothing. All his impetuous warmth was checked by something strange and cold in her. She only smiled upon him in distant friendliness, and looked very tall and stately.

'Miss Beaton,' he repeated, 'I hope you were amused and interested.'

'Yes,' she answered, 'I think Mr Tressel is very amusing; and I was very much interested—and—Lady Saxon must be very pleased, Mr Bellarmin, that you are on her side now.'

An expression of annoyance passed over his face; he made an impatient gesture. 'But you,' he said; 'it is your side?'

'I am on Sir Victor's side—if I have got any side,' she answered, calmly. 'I admire Sir Victor; and you know I told you that I believe in him. There he is,' and she threw a bright, welcoming...
'If I can love You, I will.'

glance towards Sir Victor himself, who was coming towards them from one of the committee rooms which opened into the corridor.

Lady Mavis fled at the sight of her arch-enemy, and Madame Spinola and Mrs Rivers—the latter with a plaintive good-bye to Bellarmin and an audible, ‘Now I suppose we must see what they can bring us to eat up in this dreary place’—moved to the ladies’ ante-room.

Lady Saxon detained Sir Victor. Her face, which in its brightest beauty was always of the earth, and just a little hard, seemed now etherealised by the intense sympathy it expressed as she raised it to his.

‘The first blow is struck,’ she murmured, ‘and the victory will be yours.’

She made him turn with her, and they began to slowly walk down the corridor, talking earnestly the while. Bellarmin followed with Mary Beaton and Lady Struthers.

‘General Falcon was to meet us in the dining-room, and I suppose we ought to be collecting our forces, and going down there,’ he said, with simulated lightness. ‘Sir Victor, will you lead the way with Lady Saxon? you know we have to go into dark, subterranean regions. I hope you are not afraid of dining in a dungeon, Lady Struthers?’

The little room, with its oak dado and green wall, and the portrait of the late Speaker hanging over the oak sideboard, its many crimson-shaded candles, and the pair of politicians with Falcon, discussing the debate, did not look much like a dungeon, however, when, after threading the long, dim stone passages, Bellarmin and his party reached it at last. Bellarmin had taken great pains over his little banquet. He had himself superintended the arrangement of the table, and had given the order for the decorations, which, in subtle compliment to Mary Beaton, were all pure white roses displayed in form as exquisite as the art of florist could devise. The only fault about it—so Miss Beaton and Lady Saxon declared—was that it might have been a dinner anywhere instead of an especially House of Commons dinner, and that even the alarum of the division bell tingling brassily did not occasion the least flurry or excitement, because all the pairing had been carefully settled beforehand.

Lady Saxon sat on Bellarmin’s right, and Mary Beaton on his left. Sir Victor Champion had been placed on the other side of Lady Saxon, and Miss Beaton had Mr Tressel on her right. Lady Saxon was in good hope that Bellarmin would pay attention to Miss Beaton for the most part, and that she herself should have a good deal of Champion. Much as it pleased her to play at love-making with Bellarmin—and her whispered congratulations to him this evening, and thrilling pressure of his hand, could have left him nothing to desire in the matter of earnestness and sincerity—still her feelings were so terribly concentrated on Champion, and she suffered so many agonies of jealousy and doubt when he and Mary Beaton were in each other’s company, that on occasions such as this she found it almost impossible to practise her ordinary wiles, or to keep up her affectation of sovereign indifference.

So, though the conversation, from the smallness of the party, had
to be more or less general, she contrived to talk a good deal to Champion, bending close to him, and speaking in a low, earnest tone, that seemed to imply some confidential communication. Bellarmin was left a little out in the cold, for Mary's attention appeared engrossed by Tressel, who made her laugh at the amusing stories he drawled imperturbably forth of his experiences as an attaché in a grand-ducal court.

On the whole, the dinner was less satisfactory to the principal persons concerned than might have been expected, and no one was very sorry when a move was made to the Terrace, and coffee was ordered and cigarettes were produced, and by and by the party broke up into twos, who passed and repassed as they slowly promenaded up and down.

The night was very dark, warm, and moist, and a little muggy, not even starlit. There was only the yellow light from the library windows overhead, and the faint illumination of the feeble lamps at intervals along the Terrace. The river looked black and mysterious and very still close to the parapet; it scarcely rippled against the stone embankment. Farther away it was crossed by long perpendicular lines of alternate light and shadow—the reflections from the lamps on the opposite side, across which every now and then a ghostly black barge floated.

A certain spectral loneliness in the scene—the broad river, the scattered and fantastic jets of light, the feeling of separation from city movement and from any traffic that could be heard, the subdued sound from the bridges on either side, the sense of taking part in a phase of existence in the centre of, and yet completely isolated from, that of the teeming millions round—all this appealed to Mary—as, indeed, did many a curious contrast in the life of the House of Commons—from the dramatic and artistic aspect. It moved her; she enjoyed it even while it oppressed her with something of dreariness and bewilderment. She was sitting silent, sipping her coffee, with Falcon erect and watchful behind her chair, when Sir Victor deliberately left Lady Saxon, with whom he had been talking, and who had that moment turned to Bellarmin, and approached her.

'Miss Beaton,' he said, 'if you have finished your coffee, won't you take a turn with me? I have an idea about our Southwark parish that I want to talk over with you.'

She got up readily, and threw off a little wrap which Falcon had begged her to put on.

'No, my dear general, not while I am walking. 'I don't want it now.'

'Very well, madame,' he said, bowing, 'I will bring it to you if I see you sitting again.'

They strolled along the three narrow tracks which Lady Saxon had once pointed out to Sir Victor, and to which he now called Mary's attention. There were a great many people on the Terrace, but they lounged mostly towards the middle of the walk; and the light was so dim that it was impossible, except just under a lamp, to make out who was who. Sir Victor and Mary kept to the western end, which was comparatively deserted.

His manner seemed a little agitated, she thought, not so smoothly
impressive and rhetorical as it usually was, even in ordinary conversation. Perhaps he was excited at the turn events had taken that evening, at the first note of the war-clarion which had sounded. It struck her as strange that he should come calmly to discuss the question of co-operative supply for the Southwark poor, and should ignore the political development which must surely be engrossing his inmost thoughts. Her own being was in a vague tumult of expectation and anxiety. Was this caused by the debate that afternoon? What did she know or care in the abstract about English political questions? Her interest must be purely personal, and was it the thought of Sir Victor's triumph or defeat which set her nerves tingling and her bosom fluttering? After all, probably, the incident of to-day was nothing very important to Sir Victor. It was only to an outsider like herself that it seemed of consequence. To him it was but part of the game he had been playing for so many years, and to the turns of which he must have grown accustomed. And yet, he did seem excited and unlike himself.

She said nothing of what was in her mind; but listened to his suggestions, and talked out the matter of co-operative purchase, and discussed the crèche; and then there fell a silence upon them both.

Suddenly Mary exclaimed,—

'Sir Victor, did you expect that Mr Bellarmin would throw over his party like that?'

He seemed to pull himself as if from a dream.

'Yes,' he answered, 'I expected it. A conversation I had with Mr Bellarmin at Stonehenge Park, the only talk I have had with him on the subject, led me to believe that he would come with us, some way at least, in a measure of reform. I saw then that his convictions pointed in a Radical direction.'

'Ah!' Mary breathed an unconscious sigh of relief. 'I am glad of that,' she said, simply; 'I am glad that his convictions led him—and not—' She stopped.

'You thought that perhaps some influence had been brought to bear upon him?' said Champion, quickly; 'some influence apart from his own judgment?'

'I thought that Lady Saxon might have persuaded him,' she answered, still simply.

Sir Victor did not reply for a moment.

'The Tories have made a false move,' he said, then. 'Bellarmin would probably have modified his own views to any measure of reform they might have thought fit to bring in, had they treated him fairly, and shown themselves unprejudiced, and ready to sink party rancour for the good of their country. Now I hope that he will let his convictions have the rein, and that he will come with us. But I have not tried to influence him, Miss Beaton; and I shall not try to influence him now, or to turn his pique against his party, which is very natural, to the advantage of my party. I have too great a respect for independent judgment. I only wished at Stonehenge Park that he should judge me fairly, and give me credit for having offered to co-operate with the Tories. I should like to feel that I had your sympathy, madame—Miss Beaton.'

'Indeed,' she said, warmly, 'I could not help sympathising with
you, Sir Victor; for I am sure that in all you want to do you have only the good of your country at heart."

"We will not talk politics any more to-night," he said, after another short pause, and there was a note of melancholy in his voice; "a man playing the game has his moments of depression and reaction, in which he feels that it is rather an ignoble game after all."

"Oh, no," she interrupted, eagerly, "it could never be ignoble to a man like you."

"Well," he said, still sadly, "there are moments, at any rate, in which he would rather keep a woman he cared for away from the ignoble part of it—the ungenerous strife—the party passion, which is apt to carry away even the most single-minded. I suppose not one of us public men is quite ready to admit that a particular woman influences him in his political life; but I think there is often such a woman, and I think he feels her influence strongest upon him when he wants her to look aside from the manoeuvres of the game."

Mary looked at him swiftly and doubtfully; but his face was in shadow.

"But you," she began, impulsively—"you have such a great career before you. Life must be so full of interest and reality for you. There must be so many things which a woman could never understand or really enter into; never, I think, in our times, at least."

"But a woman can share a man's career and a man's cause, and his desire to make his country happy, without coming down and entering into the strife; and she can share his ambition, if you will; she can be ambitious for him and with him. I don't mean mere ignoble, personal ambition, but the ambition that makes men do great things. In all that a woman can share."

"Yes; that must be delightful," Mary said, in a dreamy way; "I have often thought of that—and I can't think of anything more splendid for a woman than to form part of the life and the career of some man whom she—" and then she stopped.

"She was going to say 'whom she loves.' But a certain shyness came over her. Was she thinking then of Victor Champion?—or of someone else? Sir Victor looked into her face; her eyes were cast down. Just at that moment they were turning in their walk.

"Some man whom she loves, you were going to say. Yes, I can quite understand that. I am sure, Miss Beaton, that you would make part of the life and the career of any man you loved—if only he were a man worthy of you. I wish that I could be that man."

She looked up surprised and a little troubled.

"You, Sir Victor? What made you think of that?" She really had not got at his meaning.

"What made me think of that? I have not for some time been thinking much of anything else. Let me come to it at once. I cannot lose this opportunity. Miss Beaton, I admire you; I sympathise with you; I love you. Come, will you be my wife?"

"Sir Victor! Oh, please don't speak in that way; don't speak
of such a thing. You know how I admire you—how could I help admiring you?—and you know how I sympathise with you; but I have never thought of anything else. Such an idea never came into my mind. I never for a moment supposed that you thought of me—in—in—that sort of way.'

'No; I think I did keep my secret well to myself. But it had to be told; and I tell it. Come—I don't ask you to love me in any romantic or passionate way. Mary, I am not young enough to be loved by a girl in that way—'

She made an impatient but not an unkindly gesture.

'No, no; it isn't that,' she said.

'I have had my day,' he went on; 'I do not ask a girl for what I must feel that a girl could not give me now; I don't ask that kind of love from you. But I love you; I have grown terribly young again in that feeling, I find; and I am sure I could do much to make your life happy, and I know that you could do everything to make mine. I am a lonely man, Mary—very lonely, in all my crowds and my movements. I don't know why it is that you alone seem to make me feel that I am not made for this loneliness, and that there is one companionship for which I would give up everything else that I prize most on earth. Think of it. I will give you that career which you said you would delight in; for you will come to love me in an affectionate and tender way—I know what your nature is; and I will do all that man can do to win you; and you will make life sweet to me; and some day, long hence, when life begins to be only a retrospect to you, you will be glad to remember all the good you did for me. Let me ask you again—Mary, will you?'

He stopped in his walk, and made her stop too. He had been speaking in subdued, earnest tone; no ordinary promenader on the Terrace would have supposed that any romantic episode of this kind was taking place. But there were two persons on the Terrace who watched every movement of Champion and Mary—two persons who at that moment would have given a world to hear the low-toned conversation which a jealous instinct told to both was something more than the ordinary after-dinner babble of a man of the world and a pretty girl.

These two were Lady Saxon and General Falcon. When Sir Victor and Mary began their walk, Lady Saxon also rose and moved uneasily, glancing at Falcon as if to bid him be on guard; and just then the editor of a great daily paper, to which Bellarmin was suspected of contributing, came up to him, and, with an apology, begged for a few words on a matter of importance. It was the question of a cue for the morrow's leader. Bellarmin and the editor moved apart, and Lady Saxon and General Falcon strolled on almost in silence. They understood each other, or at anyrate Lady Saxon understood Falcon; and each was trying to catch what Sir Victor and Mary were saying. They kept on the House side nearly abreast of the two whom they were watching, and who, engrossed by their talk, and not keen to observe in that dim light, did not pay any attention to the other couples on the Terrace. As Champion's last words, spoken with low, passionate
sincerity, thrilled Lady Saxon's strained ears, she touched Falcon, and with a swift, silent movement withdrew into the shadow of that unlighted and seldom used gateway which opens on to the more westerly end of the Terrace. As silently and swiftly Falcon did likewise.

Sir Victor and Mary had halted by an abutting projection which screened them somewhat from the lively crowd down near the strangers' smoking-room, and which, with the buttress of the archway, formed a sort of shadowy nook, more appropriate, perhaps, than any other part of the Terrace for the scene of tender confidences. Though they could not readily see or be seen by the eavesdroppers pressed close against the great iron gates swung in the recess of the archway, every word they uttered was distinctly audible.

Mary sighed. She was touched by Champion's appeal; and she could not but feel a swelling of pride in her breast at the thought of such a man's admiration. But the feeling uppermost in her mind was one of mere surprise and confusion. She had no doubt about her own decision; what she was thinking of was how to get out of the embarrassment with the least pain to him. She took her usual course—that of frank outspokenness.

'Dear Sir Victor—for you are very dear to me, I do so admire you—this can't be. Fancy how new and strange it all is to me! I never thought of you as a man to make any such offer to a girl like me; and don't you think I should have had thoughts of that kind—if—if it were possible that I could accept your offer? I should have had heart-beatings, shouldn't I?—whenever you came near me; I should have been trembling at every word you said when we began to walk here together to-night. Is not that enough—that very fact? No, Sir Victor—you are worthy of a woman who loved you with her whole soul; and there must be many women who could love you in that way if only they had the happy chance of being near you—as I have been.'

'Still,' he said, in deep tones tremulous with feeling, 'when I tell you I do not expect that kind of love—'

'Ah, but I do expect it,' she said, quickly. 'I mean that I could not marry where I did not feel like that. Don't you understand me? Oh, yes; for you have loved and been loved before this—'

'Not by such a woman as you. I have never loved any woman as I love you. Mary, this is life or death to me.'

He was passionately in earnest. None of the three who heard him could doubt that. His voice trembled with excitement, although it was so low; that exquisitely melodious voice which had once made love—in how different a fashion!—to the silent, listening woman, whose heart it pierced now as by the thrust of a dagger.

Lady Saxon was brave. She made no sign. But for a moment it seemed to her that her death-agony had come. It was as though all the blood had gone from her body, as though a cord had been snapped, and she were hurled on illimitable space. In such moments of crisis the very bonds of being are loosed. She could not breathe. All was dark. Seconds or hours might have passed—she did not know. At last she drew a long, shuddering sigh—a
strange, uncanny sound. It might have been the wail of a tortured spirit, so far off and inhuman it seemed. And then, again, all her senses were strung to alertness, as Mary answered him.

'I cannot, Sir Victor,' she said, simply.

'Is that,' he asked, 'your final answer? Is that my sentence, my sentence of death?'

'Oh, how can you speak so?' she asked, in some alarm.

'The sentence of death to my hopes?'

'If I must give an answer—yes, Sir Victor.

'Then don't give an answer now,' he said, catching eagerly at a little straw of hope. 'Take time; think it over; give me that much chance; do me that much justice. I think I am worth that, at all events, Mary. Ask counsel of your reason as well as your heart; don't decide without thought. Oh, no, I entreat of you!'

She was deeply moved.

'I don't know,' she said; 'I don't believe it would make any difference; but still, if you wish, Sir Victor, I don't think I ought to refuse you this. It makes me feel ashamed to think that so great a man, so really great a man, should care about a girl in that way, and should have to bend to ask her even for the favour of a longer consideration. But as you wish it, I don't think I ought to refuse.'

'I thank you from my whole heart.'

'But you understand what I mean; you quite understand it?' she said, in dread of some misunderstanding or complication.

'Yes; I understand, a great deal too well. If you are to give me an answer now, if I press you for an instant answer, it must be a refusal. But you are willing to put off the final answer until to­mor­row or the day after, only promising me that in the meantime you will really think it fairly out. You will not merely take the time and let the time pass; you will come to my question with an open mind—with a mind as open as you can,' he added, and he smiled a melancholy smile. There was a chivalric tenderness in his manner which touched Mary to the heart.

'Dear Sir Victor,' she said, in an outburst of sudden emotion, 'how I wish I could give you the answer you would like to have, since you would really like to have it! You deserve to be loved, and I could love you if some things were different—'

'What things?' he interrupted. 'Do you mean that you love some other man?'

'No, no,' she said, hurriedly. 'If I were different—if—but—there's no use in talking about it. I sometimes fancy that I am an unnatural sort of girl, and that is little wonder, since I was not brought up like other girls.' As she spoke, Falcon's heart beat wildly. For him, too, in his frenzy of upleaping hope, the world seemed to stand still. 'You must not be thrown away on a woman who does not fondly love you,' Mary went on. 'Oh, I wish I could be the woman who did so love you! I do, I do! Sir Victor, I will say what a moment ago, a bare moment ago, I did not think I could have said. I will look into my heart. I will come to the question with an open mind; yes, with a wish to please you. Give me a few days, and then come and see me, and you shall have your answer. And if I can love you, I will.'
A faint metallic whirr startled them—startled Mary, and awoke Champion from his lover's dream.

'Division bell, I think,' said a member, hurrying by; 'I don't suppose it is anything of importance.'

'Oh, you had better go,' said Mary, in an agitated manner, when the member had passed on. 'Don't mind me. Indeed, I would rather be alone for a minute or two; and there is General Falcon somewhere on the Terrace.'

CHAPTER XXX.

PASSION IN TATTERS.

She moved away with a quick, decided tread. Champion followed. The lattice pattern of the pavement lay all unbroken to the parapet of the Terrace. The bell whirred again, and hurrying feet sounded lower down on the walk, and the ripple of women's laughter in the little scurry and flutter that followed the summons. There was to the outsiders, who had gone to dine and flirt, something curious and dramatic in being thus reminded that making love must give place to the stern duty of making laws. The idea of being concerned, however remotely, in the destiny of her country, is always exhilarating to the mind of a woman.

Lady Saxon stood quite still—as still as if she had been carved in stone. Not a sound broke from her. Falcon turned to her in a sort of instinctive way, not thinking of her, but only of himself; not realising that what she had just heard had changed the world to her, but absorbed utterly in his own mad love, his reasonless hopes and fears. He was trembling in a transport of feeling. There was a throb of almost delirious exultation in the hoarse whisper.

'You hear!' he said. 'She would love him if she could—if she were different—if she did not love another man; that is what it means. Whom would it seem most unnatural that she should love? Mary, my queen! Was Bothwell loved by his queen? Yes—yes. But must there not have seemed to the queen something strange and unnatural in that love? Her heart spoke unconsciously then. And she uttered my name. She said that Falcon was on the Terrace. It was to me—to Falcon—that she turned in her perplexity. She is looking for me. Come.'

He touched Lady Saxon's arm 'Come,' he repeated. 'I must be near her; she is looking for me now.'

With a sudden gesture Lady Saxon shook her arm free from his touch, and drew herself up from her leaning posture. The movement—its suppressed fury, vehemence, excitement—startled Falcon, and made him look up at her in alarm. It was so dim that he could not see her face distinctly. He could only see how rigid it was, and white, and that her eyes seemed burning. All the concentrated passion in her found vent in one word which escaped her lips,—
'Fool!'
She left Falcon abruptly, and without another syllable, and walked to the end of the Terrace, and back to the other end, with rapid, unwavering tread. In that short walk she fought out a battle with herself. When she turned again the men were passing out of the building through the main archway.

'A false alarm,' someone said. 'Division challenged, but not taken.' Bellarmin was advancing in search of Mary Beaton, but Lady Saxon swiftly intercepted him.

'Will you take me to my carriage?' she said. 'I am sorry to go away so early, especially as I have enjoyed your dinner-party so much; but I have to dress for a party at the Danish Legation.'

'Well,' he said, 'there doesn't seem a likelihood of anything very exciting, and it would hardly be worth while to go up to the Ladies' Gallery. Would you like a turn in the lobby, just to see what is going on?'

'No,' she answered, 'not to-night;' and added, with seeming indifference, 'Did Sir Victor come out again?'

'I saw him take his place on the front Opposition bench.'

Lady Saxon asked indifferently who was up, and, as they paced for a few minutes, talked in her ordinary manner about the situation, the Tory comments on his speech, the excitement among the Radicals, and her sympathetic interest in his own feelings and convictions. Bellarmin felt himself to be somewhat of a hero that evening, and was a little exalted, and not in the mood to observe anything strained or artificial in her voice. Afterwards he wondered a little that she had not talked more about Sir Victor Champion.

Falcon was beside Mary. She stood alone against the parapet, just under one of the lamps, apart from Lady Struthers and Lady Mavis Redhouse, who in the slight confusion after the cry of 'Division,' had come together again.

'Mary,' said Falcon, in a manner tragic and tender, 'I have come to you.' His ecstasy of hope, which had flamed up so wildly, flickered, died, and gave place to black despair as he saw the impatient, rather annoyed look she turned upon him. His tone jarred upon her overwrought nerves. There was a note in it at which she felt instinctively frightened and irritated.

'Well—well, my dear general, I did not send for you. Lady Struthers is not ten feet off, and surely one sheep-dog at a time is enough to guard any lamb.'

She was not prepared for the wrath which blazed as he answered.

'You insult me for my care and my devotion. My heart—my instinct—something, I don't know what—told me that you needed me, and I came. And this is my reward. Ah, it was always so with those who were weak enough to love a Stuart.'

'Oh, pardon me, general,' said Mary, wearily. 'I did not mean to be cross. But indeed your instinct told you wrongly just then, for I wanted to be by myself for a minute or two to think over something quietly. See, I am a little tired of heroics, dear general; and of the Stuarts, and of everything—even of you, my dear tyrant, just now. I think I should like best to go home as if I were a child, and be put to bed. One may sleep—and one may dream, may not
one, dear Falcon?—even though one has the misfortune to be a Stuart.'

'You shall go home at once if you please, madame; and you shall sleep, and dream—dream—dream,' he repeated, wildly. 'You do not know what it is to live in a dream—to have one's heaven in a dream and one's hell in the awakening.'

He was silent a moment, but Mary remained gazing down into the darkness of the river, and made no reply.

'I will take you home, madame,' said Falcon, harshly. 'But before you go to rest, I have something important to say to you.'

Mary gave an indifferent assent. She was in no humour to indulge poor Falcon. She wondered why Bellarmin did not come to her. She had done him an injustice, she thought, and she wanted to atone somehow. She wanted to be kind and sweet again. But he did not come; he was with Lady Saxon—'Always Lady Saxon!' the girl said to herself, bitterly. So when he came back longing for that saunter with her on the Terrace which he had promised himself, it was only to hear her announce coldly that she, too, must go away, and thanked him conventionally for his charming dinner, and for the pleasant evening they had spent.

Lady Struthers babbled a good deal during the drive, but no one paid her any heed. It was not quite eleven when they reached the house in Kensington; but Mary, looking pale and quiet, bade Lady Struthers not wait for her, and turning to Falcon, said,—

'Now, general, if this important something won't keep till to-morrow, come and let us get it said as soon as possible.'

'It had better be said to-night, madame.'

'Very well. I see that you are bent at anyrate on preventing me from having pleasant dreams. Come, let us go into my room.'

She led the way into the boudoir, where Falcon usually had his audience, and threw herself languidly into an arm-chair. She waited a minute or so drawing off her gloves, and then removing her bonnet, which she laid upon her lap. Falcon remained gazing at her with mingled love and yearning in his eyes. All the time he kept saying to himself, 'She does not understand her own heart, I must be patient; the time is not yet. I must not betray myself. I must be strong. I must act my part.' At last Mary said,—

'Now, general. To the point. I am tired.'

'So—Sir Victor Champion has asked you to marry him,' Falcon said, abruptly. Mary started. She had not in the least suspected that Falcon knew what had taken place that evening on the Terrace, and she was not quite prepared to discuss the subject with him.

'My good general, you need not have kept me from my sleep for this. It would have held over till to-morrow; and if I had dreamed of Sir Victor to-night, that couldn't have done you any harm.'

'But he has asked you to marry him?'

'Yes, if you insist on an answer—he has.'

'Well, I think I have a fair right to get an answer, madame. I am still in care of you.'

'Oh, yes; you have every right,' Mary said, rather wearily. 'And of course I would have told you, even if you had not asked
the question. But one does not generally cry out such stories; they are told in low-toned confidence, are they not?'

'I am surprised,' Falcon said, 'that a man like that should think of asking you to marry him.'

'A man like that? How do you mean? He is a great man, is he not?—the foremost man in England?'

'But he is bourgeois—of that odious class of the bourgeois! To think of his lifting his eyes to a daughter of the Stuarts! It is an outrage.'

'I have not thought it so. I have felt it to be the highest compliment.'

'Even if he came of kings,' Falcon exclaimed, 'he is not fit for you. He has bad associations; he is in bad association now. Did he first come to you perhaps straight from Lady Saxon's company?'

'Indeed, I don't know. Why should he not—if he had been with Lady Saxon?' And then the girl flushed suddenly, and became as suddenly pale again, for she had remembered in a darting flash who it was that had come to her first straight from Lady Saxon—always Lady Saxon.

'Madame,' Falcon said, with angry emphasis, 'you know nothing about men—men of the world. I do; and I know something about Sir Victor Champion; I know something about Lady Saxon. She is not a good woman; at all events, she was not a good woman. That was before she got married to Lord Saxon. That was when Sir Victor Champion knew her. He knew her when she was not a good woman. They were friends—very close friends—too close, I want you to understand.'

She felt shocked and pained in a strange way; but she would not show it. Mary coloured again, but less vividly than before.

'I don't think I want to hear any more about this, my good Falcon. It does not concern me. I have nothing to do with Sir Victor Champion's former friendships.'

'Former friendships? How do we know whether it is only a thing of the past?'

'Indeed, we do not know, and we do not in the least want to know. I don't, most certainly. Content yourself, my excellent Falcon. I have not the slightest notion of marrying Sir Victor Champion. I never had. I admire him greatly; but I don't care about him at all in that way.'

'Still, it was right to put you on your guard; and I want you to understand that what I have told you, or hinted to you, is all true—positively and absolutely. I am not talking to you of mere scandal and gossip.'

'I do not doubt you in the least,' Mary said, deprecatingly. 'And I am sure that you are only trying to do good for me; but your object is gained already, General Falcon. I am not going to marry Sir Victor Champion. I would not marry him if he were another King Arthur or Sir Galahad. So you will see that his past life has no interest for me, and I don't think I have any right to learn any of its secrets.'

'Oh, but you are not a school-girl any longer.'

'Am I not? I don't always quite know what I am in your eyes,
my excellent Falcon. You tell me almost every other day that I conduct myself as if I were a school-girl, and now you want to treat me as if I were an accomplished woman of the world. Well, whatever I may be, I am not that, and I don't believe I ever shall be, or shall want to be. So don't you think we may now allow the incident to empty itself; is there not a phrase of that kind? I think I have met with it somewhere."

She rose from her chair, taking her bonnet and gloves as though she meant to go away.

'I hope you are not displeased with me,' Falcon asked, in an altered tone.

'Oh, no; not in the least. I know that all you say and do is said and done out of pure friendship for me'—she did not observe the strange light that gleamed in Falcon's eyes as she spoke the words—'and I thank you ever so much.'

There was a certain decisiveness in her tone which made it clear that the conversation was to come to an end, and Falcon did not venture to carry it any further. He bowed and was silent, merely remarking, when she bade him good-night, 'You really mean that you will not go out this evening?' for she, too, had been bidden to the Danish Legation.

'Certainly,' she answered. 'I am in no mood for parties to-night.'

Mary had put on an appearance of carelessness; but in her heart she felt pained and grieved. She was sorry to have her ideal of Sir Victor Champion lowered and degraded. She hated to think of that great man as the slave of a woman like Lady Saxon.

Lady Saxon drove straight home from the courtyard of the Ladies' Gallery; but notwithstanding what she had said to Bellarmin, she went to no party that night. She thought it possible that Sir Victor Champion might put in an appearance later on at the Legation. It was just the sort of thing he would do, she told herself. She knew his power of self-control; it was greater than her own. She dared not meet him; she dared not trust herself in his company till at least she had spent her passion, and had made up her mind what to do; whether it was to be rupture or secret treachery, or, what she dreaded most, the dog-like fidelity of a sensuous woman, who will endure anything rather than separate herself from the man with whom she is infatuated. Must this put an end to everything between them? If Mary refused him, might she not, perhaps the more readily, win him back again?

But now the present pain was more than she could bear. She sent away the carriage and servants, and went up to her own apartments. She spoke not one word while her maid was arranging her hair. Miladi, the maid afterwards said, had the air of a very bad humour. The maid, however, was accustomed to the humours of ladies, and they made but slight impression on her. She was glad when Lady Saxon dismissed her for the night. Lady Saxon was then with her hair made up for sleeping, and was wrapped in a dressing-gown. The moment the woman had left the room for good, Lady Saxon quietly locked the door, and then, in the most deliberate manner, gave herself up to a very paroxysm of passion. With the sheer physical exertion of fury she relieved her tormented
mind. She tore off her dressing-gown and flung it on the floor, and stamped on it, and kicked it into a heap as if it were some living creature whom she was determined to stamp and kick out of existence. Her maid had laid a little heap of dainty petticoats on a sofa. Lady Saxon flew at them as a wild animal flies at some odious object, and seized them and flung them hither and thither about the room. She tore down her hair and dragged it about her shoulders, and catching sight of her passion-distorted features in a mirror, she made wild-beast grimace and grin at herself. Her magnificent arms flourished madly out of the laced shoulder- straps of the garment which was her only covering; and her bare shoulders, which she clutched at, showed veins distended with fury. All the time she was careful to make no noise; early in her kicking about she had taken care to kick off her slippers, because, soft and delicate as they were, they might send some sound echoing through the house.

It seemed, indeed, as though she were, in this frenzy, proving what she herself had said of the savage strain in her nature; and some of her lovers might have had cause, perhaps, to be thankful for disenchantment could they have seen her in this maniacal mood.

By-and-by, however, the transport exhausted itself; nothing so violent could last long. The beautiful limbs ceased from their contortions. The veins of the throat and brow were no longer red and swollen, the features relaxed, the great eyes darted no more gleams of fury, but grew heavy and pathetic with gathering tears. It was over. She shivered a little, and sank in sheer prostration, all limp and huddled, upon a couch, her head buried in her arms, her mass of yellow hair covering her bare shoulders and bosom, and falling to her waist, and her frame slowly heaving like the ocean after a tempest, as she sobbed,—

'O Victor, my love, my one, one love! I'd have given up everything for you. I'd give up everything—even now.'

CHAPTER XXXI.

'WHAT OTHER REASON COULD THERE BE?'

MARY BEATON remained in her own apartments all the following day. She saw no one but Lady Struthers. On Thursday morning Sir Victor Champion came before twelve o'clock to receive his answer. This apparent lover's haste was in reality less spontaneous than it seemed. Sir Victor would and could have waited warily weeks and months, had he felt that thus his chance of winning Mary Beaton would be greater. But something told him that his time was now; and that he must not delay. He felt that his best hope lay in the reactionary mood of tender admiration of which he had seen signs on the previous evening, and he was certain in his mind that an impulse of sympathy would be more likely to incline
her heart towards him than all the reasoning, all the reflection which she might bring to bear on his suit. He knew that though her judgment might be alive to certain advantages in his proposal, which indeed he had suggested to her, the more deeply rooted instincts of her nature would make her scorn the idea of worldly calculation in such a matter, and that she would have at once too much pride and too much humility to barter herself for the sake even of her Stuart claims—far more for the sake of being the wife of a prime minister of England.

Sir Victor's own attitude in its pride and its humility was not unlike that of the girl he wooed. Notwithstanding his ambition and his intense belief in his own powers, and the ultimate greatness of his destiny, no lover could have been inwardly more diffident, or more impressed with a sense of unworthiness. But during Sir Victor's career as a statesman he had gained no little insight into the minds and hearts of men and women. He understood Mary Beaton; he knew that any lack of dignity and assurance on the part of her suitor would repel rather than enlist her sympathies, and as he made his entrance into her own particular sitting-room, where she waited for him alone, no one would have suspected the tremor of hope and uncertainty and emotion which he hid under his grave, impressive bearing.

When he came in, Mary rose from a low seat by the window, from which she had been abstractedly watching the swaying of the great beech tree, the flutter of the half-caged London birds about the high ivied wall, and the darting movements of bees and butterflies among the roses and mignonette in her tiny closed-in garden. She, too, was grave, and she looked pale, as though she had been ill. She held a book in her hand, and perhaps that was a reason why she did not hold her hand out to him; and her greeting was almost silent.

He did not obey her sign to be seated as she herself moved from the window and sat down in a straight-backed Chippendale armchair, that was like a throne, he thought; and she had the air, he fancied, of a queen granting an audience. He laid his hat upon a table, and stood near her beside the mantelpiece.

' I have come,' he said, deferentially, 'to ask if you have made up your mind. But, indeed, I fear I need not ask any such question. I think I can read your decision in your face, and it is my sentence. Tell me the worst at once.'

' I am sorry if you feel it so,' Mary said, somewhat coldly; she could not get quite into sympathy with him; 'but I have made up my mind. Sir Victor. I told you what the answer must be if I were to give an answer at once.'

'But you promised to think it over with a wish to make the answer favourable,' he said, eagerly. 'Remember—you did promise that.'

' I did promise that; and when I made the promise I meant to keep it. But it cannot be, Sir Victor. I cannot marry you.'

'Will you at least tell me why?' His flashing eyes made his appeal, deferential as it was in form, seem like an attempt to over-master her.
She did not answer for a moment, and shifted her position a little, resting her elbows on the arms of her chair, and clasping her hands tightly together, while she looked up at him with clear unflinching gaze.

'I could not love you as a woman ought to love her husband—and as a man like you ought to be loved. Besides, we are not alike in our ways; in any of our ways. You are a man of the world, and are in the world's ways; I know nothing about them—and things that others would not mind—' She paused and unclasped her hands a little nervously, and let them fall upon her lap. 'There's no use in my saying any more, Sir Victor, for indeed it could not be.'

'I cannot understand you,' he said, warmly. 'There is something you are thinking of, and are keeping back from me. Someone has told you something against me. Come, tell me what it was. Give me a chance of defending myself. The meanest criminal who ever quailed before a bar of justice is allowed that chance.'

His words, tones, and gestures were so rhetorical that Mary could not help for a moment believing him insincere—believing that he was only playing a part. The familiar gesture made by striking the clenched right hand with sudden heavy impact into the half-opened palm of the left—the gesture so well known to the occupants of the Treasury Bench—was called into action now. But Mary was wrong; Sir Victor was quite in earnest, and was not acting a part. A man cannot pass the greater part of his life declaiming to the House of Commons without finding declamation become his ordinary form of expressing strong emotion. An actor has something of the manner of the footlights always—in his love-making; in his grief; by the side of his sweetheart; by the coffin of his young wife. Sir Victor Champion was a great political actor.

Mary had recovered herself now, and had no intention of allowing herself to be betrayed into any acknowledgment of what Falcon had told her. She spoke with quiet dignity.

'Sir Victor, I have made up my mind for myself altogether—nothing that anyone could have said would have changed me in that. I cannot marry you; and the one reason is that I could not love you in that way. I admire you—oh, I could not tell you how much!—but I could not marry you. We should never be suited to each other. You are too great for me; your course is quite different from mine. Some time you will think this yourself, and you will be glad. You will be glad that I did not allow you to join yourself for life to a girl whose whole existence is but a symbol of a lost cause and a hopeless claim.'

She had looked away from him as she said these words, and was gazing dreamily out at the quivering beech-boughs and the blue sky and the flowers; and for nearly a minute there was silence. She had a nervous dread of turning and meeting his eyes, which she knew were fixed upon her. She wondered of what he was thinking—if, indeed, it was a blow to him—if he would urge her to reconsider her decision, and so make their future relations more embarrassing and painful. At last he spoke.

'If you were another woman,' he said, in deep, melancholy tones, 'I should still plead; but, with you, I know it would be useless.'
'It would, indeed; quite useless.' She turned her head now and looked at him solemnly, but with something of relief. 'I thank you ever so much—indeed I do, from the bottom of my heart—because you are generous enough to see this and not to press me. You are very kind to me, Sir Victor; and I am sorry for this.'

'So it has come to an end, my day-dream!' he said, sadly; 'I have lost all, I suppose—even your friendship?'

'Oh, no; surely not! Why should our friendship not go on?—why should the world know of this?'

'The world knows of everything in our days—'

'But let us try that it shall not know of this,' she exclaimed, earnestly; 'and if it does, what matter? I shall not care, if you don't. All this shall make no change in me to you—let it not make any change in you to me.'

Then, for the first time that day, she held out her hand to him in simple and touching kindness. He took it and bent over it, and pressed it lightly with his lips.

'Only one little difference,' he said, and there was a most melancholy cadence in his voice, 'it shall make in me as regards you.'

'What is that?' she asked, a little surprised.

'I am now free to devote all my best endeavours to obtaining the recognition of those claims of yours to your ancestral estate, which if you had accepted me as a husband—oh, utinam!—and here the front bench of Opposition came in again—'I never could have ventured to press upon the consideration of crown or of country.'

Mary drooped her eyes. She felt his generosity, and nothing could be more delicate than his way of putting his resolve. But she almost wished the words had been left unspoken.

'Any claim that is just,' she only said, 'is always sure to have an advocate in Sir Victor Champion; the less hopeful the claim the more resolute the advocate. Well, I am glad we have talked this out, Sir Victor, and that I am not to lose your friendship by it. You are magnanimous; but I knew you would be. We cannot forget this—I could never forget the honour you have done me—you, with your great career and your noble ambition! And I can't expect you all at once to forget a disappointment, if it is a disappointment—'

'If it is?' he pleaded.

'Since it is a disappointment, even though you may forgive the unreasoning woman who disappoints you. But we will not think of it any more than we can; and the memory shall not come between us and cut our friendship in two. Good-bye; I hope to see you soon.'

She held out her hand again, and he took it, and left her without another word. She felt deeply agitated; and all the while there was coming up in her heart the melancholy wish that he had never been the slave of Lady Saxon, or at least that she had never heard of the slavery. 'He is too great for that,' she said to herself; and then the thought rose—'Are all men bad? Are they all the same?'

Mary Beaton was in one of her wayward, unsatisfactory moods—moods which had been rare of late—when she joined the others of her household at the déjeuner. There was a more subtle reason
for her capricious levity than mere girlish high spirits. Perhaps never in her life had she felt more miserable. Falcon, in a strange, contradictory temper, and almost maddened by doubt and love and anger, saw at once by her reddened eyelids that she had been crying bitterly, and he had an abrupt transition from gloom and silent wrath to an adoring tenderness.

It was partly in the effort to divert attention from these signs of wretchedness, of which she was only too conscious, and which seemed to humiliate her in her own estimation, that Mary had strung herself up to a fever of artificial gaiety. Partly, too, because one of the quick moods of revulsion characteristic of her temperament had come over her, and she was reckless and determined not to yield to a feeling which she fancied was a shame to her. She resolved that she _would_ not be unhappy. She would not think of Bellarmin, or Sir Victor, or Lady Saxon. She would distract herself somehow. She would ride—dance—talk—do anything, any mad freak, so that she escaped from herself. She took Falcon aside. She seemed to have forgotten, or to wish to atone for, her ill-humour of the evening before.

' _General,_' she said, with coaxing imperiousness, 'we are going to carry out a plan that I made a little while ago, and which you agreed to, and which had almost gone out of my mind—I don't know why. I suppose that it was because of Stonehenge Park and Monsignor Valmy; and then fashionable parties and politics—and—other things. I was too much taken up with all that to pine after low-class amusements. Well, I am tired of being fashionable and political and humdrum; I've had enough of polite society. I am weary of the sort of life we lead. I am weary of myself—that's the truth, dear old friend.'

Falcon could not restrain his impatience to know what had taken place in the interview with Champion. Mary's manner alarmed him. He interrupted her.

' _Madame—Sir Victor Champion has been here this morning?_'

' _Yes—yes. I don't want to talk of Sir Victor. But it is best you should know. My good Falcon, don't excite yourself. I told you last night that I had no intention of marrying Sir Victor; and I have told him so to-day. Are you satisfied? Have I sufficiently vindicated the dignity of the Stuarts?_'

Falcon bowed low. He himself would vindicate his power of self-control.

' Though my over-anxiety may have displeased you sometimes, madame, I have always felt assured in my heart that the dignity of the Stuarts was safe with you.'

' _Oh, indeed, general! The dignity of the Stuarts! Are you sure that you will be of the same opinion to-night?_' she said, coming closer to him, and smiling in his face; ' _to-night, when we are smoking cigarettes at our East End music hall—and drinking—what do they drink?—I should like absinthe, I think, to-night—I in my boy's clothes. Do you hear, general? That is the prank I had forgotten. It is to be to-night. It is to be an adventure—something to take one's thoughts up from one's self, and make one laugh and be merry for days._' I am sure that Mary Stuart felt like that
when she dressed in the archer's uniform. Perhaps she was dis-
gusted with people—perhaps she was unhappy—she was often un-
happy, you know, though at times she seemed so gay. Perhaps
she really loved Bothwell all through, and wanted to hide it even
from herself. Do you think, Falcon, that she could have really
loved Bothwell?'

There was a wistful cadence in Mary's voice, and though her eyes
were turned on Falcon as she asked the question, she did not seem
to notice the strange expression which came over his face. In truth,
her mind was not on Falcon. His eyes devoured her. He could
hardly restrain the impulse to throw himself at her feet.

'I know it,' he said, hoarsely. 'A brave woman could not hate
the man who dared to risk his very love—his world, his heaven—
think of it, Mary!—in the hope of winning her. And if not hate,
than surely it must be love, and surrender, the sweetest, the most
passionate and complete. Yes; it was a bold stroke; but he won.
And what if it were paid for by disaster, ruin, death? Through all
eternity that memory must be Bothwell's.'

'Well, Falcon, never mind Bothwell. That's a long time ago.
We are to forget all about everything for an hour or two, do you
understand?—lords and ladies, and the House of Commons, and the
Stuart claims. We shall be so merry to-night—you and I, Falcon!' She
leaned towards him and touched his arm, and looked at him in
perfectly unconscious allurement. 'We are going to get out of this
fashionable, wearisome, revolting world, where everybody is double-
faced and bad—yes, bad—all the worse because they try to seem
fine and noble and heroic—let one have honest, vulgar badness if
one must have it at all. We will get out of it just for an hour, into
a new world of common people, who laugh heartily and are what
they seem. No, don't argue and protest; we have had all that be-
fore. I must do something wild and extraordinary to-night. Don't
you see that I am not myself quite? I—I want to be amused.'

She broke into hysterical laughter, which was on the verge of
tears. Her mood, her words, wrought upon Falcon's excited
nerves, so that he had neither will nor force to oppose any fan-
tastic scheme she might have suggested. He had an insane long-
ing to seize upon no matter what wild project which might throw
down existing barriers, and drive her and him into strange uncon-
ventional conditions that would justify the most melodramatic
extravagance. He saw her slim, girlish form in its masquerade
dress. He fancied her leaning upon him—all sorts of tumultuous
thoughts surged in his brain. He echoed her strained laugh.
'We shall be merry to-night, Mary,' he said. 'I will arrange every-
thing. Yes, we will be merry to-night.'

Mary seemed to be lost in thought.

'Remember,' she said, suddenly, 'you are not to speak to me
any more—or to anyone—of the Sir Victor Champion affair.'

'I fear,' said Falcon, on his guard again, 'that it will have a
bad effect as regards the bringing forward of your claims in the
House of Commons.'

'No!' she exclaimed, warmly. 'He is generous, magnanimous
—more so than you could have believed. He has told me in the
most delicate, the kindest way, that it will make no difference
between us. I could almost have wished it might be otherwise,
Falcon, only that I am glad to know that he is great enough not to
bear resentment. He has told me that he will advocate my cause
all the more warmly because of that—that he will do what he
could not have done had he—had I accepted him.' Mary spoke in
much agitation. It was evident that though she had no love for
Champion, she had been deeply moved by his conduct towards
her. She looked pathetically at Falcon. 'Oh, why did you tell
me that about him? Did you do it to hurt me?' she asked,
appealingly. 'No, I am not blaming you. I know that you love
me; and that if you sometimes seem unkind, you have my good
at heart. You needn't have been afraid, though. Oh, no!' as he
made a passionate gesture; 'I know you mean always kindly and
tenderly to me, and you must be kind to me, Falcon, for in truth I
am lonely enough.'

'Oh, Mary,' cried Falcon, transported by her gentle words, 'if
you but knew how I love you!'

'Then prove it, general, by humouring me, and being nice to
me to-night.' She was all gaiety again. 'Now go away. I want to
think—to soliloquise on the situation, as they do in plays, you know.'

Falcon had that morning received a telegram from Lady Saxon
—a somewhat enigmatic telegram, which he understood to mean
that she wished to learn from him at once the answer Mary had
given to Sir Victor Champion. He went to her house immediately
after his interview with Miss Beaton. He was like a drunken
man whom some sudden shock brings partially back to his sober
sense. On his own account he was anxious to see Lady Saxon,
towards whom he involuntarily turned as the one person in the
world in whom he could confide the workings of his morbid mind.

Lady Saxon knew that she had made a hit in her way of deal­
ing with Falcon. She had got at his secret, and she knew he was
the sort of man who, having once confessed, would feel a morbid
relief in going over the confession again and again. Lady Saxon
had not been for nothing the wife and the confidential agent of a
quack doctor who lived on human weaknesses. She loved to make
pathological study of natures that were in any way morally dis­
eased. Poor Falcon's mind had long been oppressed by the weight
of his secret, and it was a strange, shamefaced, humiliating, cruel,
sweet relief to him to be able to pour out his confession. It would
have amused her in any case thus to make the shamed and suffer­
ing man unfold himself, and lay bare at her bidding the innermost
workings of his heart. To-day, suffering as she was still, even
though that paroxysm of passion had been a relief, and hardened
as she was already to her own pain, she took a cruel and sympa­
thetic delight in the thought of another's tortures. Lady Saxon,
besides, had a practical object in her sport. She hoped to be able,
sooner or later, to make some good use of his revelations. It was
highly satisfactory to her to get absolutely into her power the man
who alone out of all those now surrounding her could tell some­
thing definite of her past career, and, moreover, the man who
might be her best instrument of revenge against Mary Beaton.
She had passed a terrible night; a weary day; another terrible night: but Lady Saxon’s was a robust physique, a superabundant vitality, which perhaps required the outlet of occasional mental disturbance. The flood of emotion, which had drained itself away for the time by its very violence, had gathered again, and broken in renewed outburst of fury. She might have been dangerous but for these debauches of passion. She had them frequently in a minor degree, and she came forth from them always saner and better prepared to face the world. She had the cleverness to conceal them as an intermittent drunkard may have the craft to conceal his attacks. Under other circumstances, she would have gone down perhaps to Petrel’s Rest; but it would have been impossible for her now to leave London, and she found it easier to school herself to impenetrability, and to the idea of meeting Champion as though nothing had happened. She had decided that it would be folly and absolute ruin to her hopes to throw her cards on the table. She would play her own game, and she calculated upon winning in the end, if not by accomplishing her present aims, through becoming indifferent, or, as she had once tried to do, turning her love into hatred.

She looked ten years older than she had looked two days before; but her dress was as studied as usual, and her manner was cool, hard, and defiant.

‘Well,’ she asked at once, turning as Koto ushered Falcon into the boudoir, where she was sitting at her writing-table dashing off notes, ‘is your princess going to be prime minister of England?’

‘Well,’ he repeated, ‘she has refused him.’

Lady Saxon’s eyes ‘ flashed hell-fire one instant,’ as Carlyle would put it. She had refused him! The man at whose feet Josephine Saxon would have flung herself had offered his love to a girl, a school-girl, and had been refused? Josephine was glad that he had been refused. What else had she been praying for? Of course she was glad; but the very refusal itself was a new pang of humiliation to her.

But she showed no more of this. She made Falcon sit by her, and soon she had drawn from him all that he could tell—all, indeed, except the revelation he had made to Mary concerning herself and Champion. She learned the particulars of Sir Victor’s visit that morning, of Mary’s hysterical mood, of her feverish longing for distraction, and the poor foolish escapade into which Falcon was about to enter. Lady Saxon laughed with contemptuous amusement. She led the old man on to talk of his wild hopes and insane heartburnings. He told her of Mary’s gentle manner to him, and almost tender words, and of the maddening suggestions she had so unconsciously seemed to encourage. He repeated Mary’s own injunction. The Victor Champion episode was to be buried, never again alluded to.

‘Are you satisfied?’ Lady Saxon asked, coldly.

‘So far, yes. Don’t you think it satisfactory?’

‘No,’ she answered, sharply, ‘I don’t; and I don’t see why you should, any more than I.’

‘But you would not have wished her to accept him?’
'Have you taken the trouble, General Falcon, to ask yourself why she has refused him?'

Falcon became uneasy.

'She told me herself,' he said.

'Oh, she told you herself, did she?'

'Yes, Lady Saxon.'

'Truly? And what did she say?'

'She said she could not love him.'

'And you believed that?'

'Believed that she could not love him?'

'No, no; I don't mean that. How dull you are to-day, General Falcon! You believed that that was her only reason for refusing him?'

'It seems to me reason enough for a woman of Miss Beaton's high tone of mind.'

'High tone of mind! Miss Beaton and the thought of her make you quite eloquent, my poor friend. Do you really mean to tell me that you never fancied she might have had some other reason for refusing Sir Victor Champion than the mere fact that she didn't actually love him; that she wasn't in love with him?'

'What other reason could there be?' he asked, in a low voice growing hoarse with anxiety.

Lady Saxon gave a disagreeable little laugh.

'Why, of course, because she does love someone else.'

Falcon groaned audibly. This was what his prophetic soul had been telling him; this was what he had been trying to keep out of his thoughts; and now it was only too plain that Lady Saxon knew it as well as he did. He had a morbid terror of hearing it from her. She did not mean to spare him.

'And so you really didn't know this, my poor Falcon!' she said, with contemptuous pity, feeling a certain satisfaction that she was rubbing salt into his wounds. 'You never suspected this? I didn't think even a man could be so dull. Your fair princess refused Sir Victor Champion because she is in love with young Rolfe Bellarmin. There is the whole story.'

'Why do you think that?' he asked, fiercely.

'I don't think anything about it; I have eyes and senses, and I know it. Why, it is all as clear as light. She is in love with him; I knew she would be in love with him, and she has a will of her own, as you know pretty well, and she will marry him if you don't do something to prevent her.'

'She sha'n't marry him!' Falcon exclaimed, with an oath. 'She shall never marry him.'

'She will marry him if you don't do something to prevent it. But I don't suppose you will do anything.' She shrugged her shoulders contemptuously.

'Oh! what can I do?'

'Make her marry you. Make her see that you are her master—the master of her destiny. If I were a man and in your place, I would make her see that easily enough. A woman likes a man all the better because he shows her that he is her master. I never cared long for any man'—and Lady Saxon felt her lips quivering.
as she spoke out this falsehood—'because I never found the man who could be my master. Well, when is this East End escapade coming off?' she asked, suddenly changing her tone and manner, and rising from her chair.

'She wants it to-night; she wants something to distract her thoughts, she says.'

'And it is to be to-night?'

'I have yielded,' Falcon said; 'I yielded reluctantly, but I can refuse for some reason, and put it off.'

'You fool, why should you put it off? It gives you a splendid chance if you only have the spirit.'

'Lady Saxon, I am a soldier; I have seen some rough days; I have not been accused of want of spirit.'

'Piff-paff; I have known many a hero in the battle who hadn't the courage of a mouse when it came to be a question of getting any mastery over a woman. Well, if you have any spirit, take your chance to-night.'

'But what is to be done?' the perplexed Falcon asked.

'Make up some story between this and then; tell her of some danger or plot or something; invent any fable that will account for taking her out of town. I'll invent you half-a-dozen if you give me a few minutes' time. Take her to Petrel's Rest, and then tell her that she is not to stir from the place until she consents to marry you. I declare to you that if I were she, I would marry the man who had the courage to capture me.'

She threw herself into a low chair, and remained silent, as if she had said her say and dismissed the subject. In reality, she was thinking it out with a freakish, malign exultation. She wanted to set some manner of mischief afoot, something which would injure and degrade her rival. Of course she had no faith in the possibility of a Bothwell-like carrying off of Mary Beaton. She wanted a scene, a scandal—something which would have to come out in a police court, and get into the newspapers, and be the talk of London. Falcon's mad temper was a heaven-sent chance to her, and she laughed exultingly over it and over him when he had gone. If things would only turn out so that the Stuart princess must have to go into a police court, and explain how it came about that she was found at a low-class East End music hall, masquerading in the dress of a boy! Would not that be enough to finish her London career? Would it not disillusionise Victor Champion? Would it not of a certainty open the eyes of the romantic and chivalrous Bellarmin? Come, a bright idea! Bellarmin must be got to appear on the spot somehow; he must be compelled to see his ideal princess, his Gloriana, in her romping-jacket, her tomboy masquerade. In spite of her real misery, Lady Saxon's eyes sparkled with a kind of impish delight at this idea. She thought of all that would be said in the society papers, and she gloated in advance over the humiliation of Mary Beaton.

Falcon stood meanwhile erect and speechless as a graven image. His rigid attitude was strangely out of keeping with the wild disturbance of his heart. All around seemed for the time as if it were curtained in blackness. At last he started like one starting out of
sleep, and he clenched his hands and said, in a tone of passionate resolution,—

'Yes; I'll try it; it is the last chance.'

'I am glad you see it in that light,' Lady Saxon said, composedly; 'it is, indeed, the last chance of rescuing her from the consequences of a foolish love for a showy young political adventurer. If you only keep true to your purpose, and don't let your resolution ooze out, you will save her; and she will thank you for it some day before long. Now, my good Falcon, you had better go. This is a thing to be done, not talked about, you understand.'

'I suppose I ought to thank you,' he said, hoarsely; 'but I can't. I don't know whether I owe you gratitude or hatred; I don't know whether you are inspired by God or by the devil.'

'What does it matter, my good Falcon, so far as you are concerned, where the source of my inspiration is found? I don't really know myself; I have heard casuists say that the most trying of all temptations is the difficulty of knowing sometimes whether a certain inward prompting comes from God or from the devil. I only know that I am trying to serve my friend after my fashion.'

'Friend? friend?' he repeated, hesitatingly. 'I do not know, Lady Saxon. Are we friends—can we be friends?'

'Do you think we ought to be enemies?' she blandly asked.

'Oh, no; not enemies.'

'Well, we can't, under all the circumstances, be quite indifferent to each other; and so, my best Falcon, I see nothing for it but that we should be friends. Good-bye, and *glück auf*, as the miners used to say in my merry German days.'


CHAPTER XXXII.

THE EAST END EXPEDITION.

There was a great deal of jubilation among all the old-fashioned Tories that and the previous day. The government had put their foot down, stout old warriors said in the Carlton Club and the Conservative, and they had brought the whole revolutionary scheme to an end. 'We shall hear no more of it, sir; hear no more of it.' But among other members of the party there was much doubt and misgiving. Numbers of the younger men, who did not by any means go with Bellarmin and his little band of Progressive Democrats, yet felt the strongest doubt as to whether the position Lord Bosworth had taken up could possibly be maintained. 'They are only playing into Champion's hands,' many shrewd and sound Conservatives said; and there were those who maintained that in the cabinet itself there were sinking hearts and dissatisfied consciences. Reports were everywhere that Champion had a great democratic move fully schemed out and ready. Such reports were naturally contradicted in authoritative quarters, but 'everything is contra-
dicted now,' sceptical persons said; and many would persist in regarding the reports themselves as, at the least, only pilot-balloons thrown up into the air by Champion and his closer circle of friends. In the meantime, Lord Saxon, whose word no one ever thought of questioning, and who had only come to town that morning, was at the club, telling everybody who chose to ask him that he knew nothing of any definite scheme, and did not believe any such scheme was in existence. The air of Clubland and editorial and political regions was thickened with rumours and reports and denials and protests, and conjectures of all kinds. Bellarmin avoided his clubs, and kept out of the way as much as possible—more particularly out of the way of Tressel, who had let fly a sheaf of telegrams, and who, always sleepy-looking, imperturbable, and smoking endless cigarettes, was rushing about in hansom in various directions. Yet when he went down to the House, Bellarmin felt that something was coming, and very speedily coming.

It came in this way: Sir Victor Champion made his appearance early in the House of Commons that evening; earlier, that is to say, than was usual for him when he was not in office. When out of office he seldom came into the House until the greater number of the questions to ministers had been put and answered.

It was characteristic of the man that he should go straight from the failure of a cherished enterprise to the starting of a totally different one. It so happened that he found Lord Saxon next to him when he took his seat. They exchanged a few words of commonplace talk, and then those who were near them heard Champion say, 'I am going to do something which will probably surprise you, but I hope I shall be able to make my position quite clear and satisfactory to you.' Lord Saxon looked astonished; he flushed up and said nothing.

The weary questions were brought to an end, and then Sir Victor rose and came forward to the table, and there were loud cries of 'Order, order!' intended to drown in advance any possible interruption, and everyone knew that something momentous was going to happen. Then Champion, in a clear, commanding, but not aggressive tone, announced that, in consequence of the positive declaration made the other evening by Her Majesty's ministers, against any reform in the organisation and procedure of the House of Lords, he had thought it his duty to prepare a resolution on the subject, which he proposed, at the earliest possible moment, to submit to the judgment of the House of Commons. The resolution which Champion read merely called forth an humble address to Her Majesty, praying that Her Majesty would be graciously pleased not to make any further addition to the peerage of the United Kingdom until Parliament should have been afforded an opportunity of expressing its opinion on the constitution and working of the House of Lords, and of declaring whether or not the hereditary principle of legislation was suited to the conditions of the present day. A positive outburst of cheering from the Radical benches below the gangway followed the reading of the resolution, and the cheers were followed by groans and by shouts of defiance from the Tories, who were at first too stupefied to give forth any expression
of feeling. Then Sir Victor quietly gave notice that on the day following he should ask the leader of the government whether the government would afford him facilities for an early discussion of that important subject. The leader of the House, Sir Rowland Chase, only nodded his head in mere acceptance of Sir Victor’s notice, and engaged in a hasty consultation with one of his colleagues. Sir Victor sat for a moment and looked at Lord Saxon, evidently expecting that Saxon would say something to him, whether in the way of approval or of remonstrance. But Lord Saxon sat in silence for a moment or two, and then got up and walked slowly out of the House, without having exchanged a word with Champion or anyone else.

Whatever may have been his reason, there was one point on which Champion was inexorable. He would not take Lord Saxon into his confidence yet. Josephine had been doing her very best to bring Saxon round to a recognition of what might be called the general infallibility of Champion, and had begun to be of good hope that, if Champion would only be open with him at once, he might secure Saxon’s alliance. But Champion would not move. Perhaps he still was convinced that the best way to secure Saxon’s concurrence was to approach him with a completed scheme, a roll of allies, and a plan of action. Perhaps he was jealous of the influence which Saxon’s family and position gave him over the Liberal Party. Perhaps he was determined this time to be the unmistakable leader of the party; determined that, if Saxon were to come in at all, he must come distinctly as a follower and subordinate. Perhaps he thought it would be a good thing if, by securing the alliance of the Progressive Tories, he could feel himself once for all independent of Saxon; could be able to say, ‘Let Saxon come in if he prefers it.’

No one who really knew Victor Champion could doubt that, in the depths of his heart, there was a patriotic and an impassioned desire for the good of his country. But no one who knew him well could fail to know that in the depths of his heart also there was a settled conviction that his own intellect and his own will were the heaven-appointed instruments for the accomplishment of that end. Lord Saxon, devoted to Champion as he had hitherto been, was always a drag on his leader; and the leader wanted to feel himself free.

Thus the first trumpet was sounded for the great struggle. The long-expected, vague apparition had taken shape, and stood out clear against the horizon. All London had one topic for the next twelve hours or so, and the name of Victor Champion was on every lip. It was accompanied with praise and plaudits, with denunciation and with curses; the banning, as is the way of such things, louder and deeper than the blessing.

Bellarmin had made up his mind to dine in the House of Commons that evening. He was passing out into the lobby, intending to smoke a cigar on the Terrace before dinner, when one of the door-keepers stopped him, and, taking a letter from the sheaf of tan-coloured, white, and blue envelopes which lined the sides of the sedan-chair sentry-box in which he sat, put it into Bellarmin’s hand. Before he even looked at it, some strange, sweet association was brought upon Bellarmin with a light wave of scent. The letter was
in an ordinary square envelope, and the address was written in a very commonplace, unsuggestive sort of hand. When he opened it he saw that the handwriting inside was different, and he read, in much surprise, the following singular epistle, which had at least the merit of going straight to the subject:

‘If you are really a friend of Miss Mary Beaton’s you ought to know that she is putting herself in a position of danger. Go down this night to the Rule Britannia Theatre, Alexandria Street, Shoreditch, at nine o’clock, use your eyes, and you will know what I mean.’

The regular old-fashioned anonymous letter of conventional romance! It was written, of course, in a woman’s hand, carefully disguised, the letters all sloping elaborately from left to right. It was perfumed, and it was the breath of that perfume which attracted him at once, for it was a perfume that Mary Beaton always used. Was the letter sent by any of those around Mary Beaton—by Lady Struthers, for example? by Mary Beaton’s maid? No; he could not think that likely. Anyone might use the perfume. It was probably a mere chance that it was used; or its use might have been deliberate, with the view of making him believe that the letter came from Miss Beaton’s own household. If so, that artifice was not much needed. Of course he would go to the place. Perhaps when he got there he should find nothing of any interest to him. Perhaps he should find himself merely the victim of some silly and meaningless practical joke. No matter, he would go all the same. If there was the slightest, faintest ghost of a chance that Mary might be in any danger from which he could shelter her, that was enough for him. Why any danger to her should have an East End theatre for its scene, and how it was to reveal itself to him when he got there, it passed the power of his wits to conjecture. The only thing was for him to go and see. ‘After all,’ he said to himself, ‘there is a great deal of nonsense talked about anonymous letters, and the folly and weakness of paying any attention to them. Many an honest and friendly warning is given in an anonymous letter by a writer who would give no warning if he had to sign his name. Not quite an heroic personage such a letter-writer; but one has to take a hint sometimes from other than heroic personages.’

While he was thus reasoning to himself a member of the Liberal Party, a fashionable young man about town, seized Bellarmin’s arm, and insisted upon his there and then joining a little dinner which the Liberal member was giving to some ladies of his acquaintance in the subterranean dining-room.

Bellarmin allowed himself to be led thither, having no excuse ready, and having yet an hour and a half to wait before the time named by his mysterious correspondent. It was not the scene of his last night’s dinner, but the public room, which was full of little tables and groups, more or less animated and more or less smart-looking, according to the social sphere they represented. It is a solemn and serious obligation upon the county member to entertain at dinner in the House of Commons the wives and daughters of his bucolic or manufacturing constituents. A party of constituents is
to be recognised at a glance. The constituent and the 'local man' can never be mistaken by one who has ever tasted the sweets and sours of public life; the constituent's wife and the wife of the local man are of a less definite type upon these festive occasions; the member's wife is usually absent. Bellarmin felt sorry for a man he knew—celebrated as a barrister and a wit, and also a member of the Tory government—who was sadly ministering to the appetite of an excellent lady in an ulster, with blinking eyes, which she never took off her plate except when she extended a pudgy hand protestingly over her champagne, and smiled and blinked at her host in a feeble remonstrance. There was a good deal of laughter at Bellarmin's table about the number of constituents' wives who were in the dining-room that night; a probable dissolution was augured therefrom, and a sort of plébiscite was taken as to whether they abounded most at Tory tables. The minister cast mock-melancholy glances at Bellarmin's more brilliant party, which numbered two clever members' wives, well-dressed and distinguished, and a very pretty girl, in a tailor-made gown and a red hat, whom Bellarmin knew slightly. The girl was very lively and amusing, and quizzed him about his dinner two nights before, of which Mr Tressel had told her, and about the princess, who, Bellarmin thought, savagely, seemed now common property. The conversation was not political, but was all about people and London gossip, and he would have enjoyed both his dinner and his company had he been in a less preoccupied mood.

A Tory whip came in when dinner was nearly over, and stood looking as though he were counting heads; and presently the division bell rang, which gave Bellarmin an excuse for rushing off and not returning. He hurried from the dining-room and across the lobby, shaking off, with an assumption of careless ease, some dozen or so of colleagues and acquaintances on the way, who were eager to get to talk with him; one in particular was a renowned and remorseless bore, who lived and bored on the one great theme—imperial federation. He flung himself across the young Tory Democrat's way.

'Hullo, Bellarmin! what's going on?' he asked.

'I am,' replied Bellarmin, with a laugh, repeating Douglas Jerrold's old joke; and he left the bewildered bore, who never made or understood a joke in his life.

'So Apollo has saved me!' Bellarmin murmured to himself, thinking of Horace and his bore as he passed down the members' private entrance and so into Palace Yard, and thence by the covered way into Bridge Street and on to the Thames Embankment. A few paces down the Embankment he hailed a hansom. In Palace Yard every cabman knew him, and he did not want to be known just then. A little way down the Embankment no one would be likely to know him. It had often amused him to notice how a few yards of street in London convert a somebody into a nobody. In and around Palace Yard a member of Parliament is a great personage. Policemen rush to protect him from the quick-darting hansom; lines of omnibuses are compelled to halt to let him pass. The whole traffic of the outer world has to acknowledge his presence and make
The Rival Princess.

way for him. Yet a few yards farther on and his person is unknown his perils are unheeded; he is only one of the crowd; the cabs may drive at him or over him and welcome. So Bellarmin walked on a few paces, got outside the charmed parliamentary circle of police protection, hailed the first cab he met, and drove on his unrecognised way.

It was a long drive from Blackfriars Bridge and the Embankment, through monotonous miles of the dreariest streets, hideous and heart-sickening in their dreadful similarity. The cabman drove rapidly, at Bellarmin’s express desire; and yet nine o’clock had struck before they reached the place they sought. There was no trouble in finding it; the cabman knew it well, and had driven young swells from the West End there many a time before. They stopped at last before a sort of miniature Alhambra, built at the angle of a small open square, which was made light almost as day by the flaring gas-jets that ran along the front of the building. It was a gay and busy little square. There was a stand of dingy cabs in the centre, and there were several stalls with cheap fruit, confectionery, and buckets of mussels and periwinkles, and two or three public-houses, which did not seem, however, to have anything to do with the business of the bar that occupied one side of the entrance to the music hall. Each public-house seemed to have its own peculiar group of rouges and gamins, who did not join the little stream of people passing in and out of the illuminated door. The people were workmen and their wives, shop-girls and factory hands with their sweethearts, and as they pushed by each other there was a sound of Cockney jokes and laughter.

Bellarmin stepped from his cab and made his way into the vestibule, where he talked with the box-keeper and a policeman, who apparently acted as check-taker. He told them he wanted to see the performance, and especially the look of the house, and that he did not particularly want to be seen. So for a few—a very few—shillings he got a small well-curtained box near the stage all to himself, and found that from thence he could survey the whole audience, with little risk of being himself seen by anyone, except, indeed, the performers on the stage. These, when Bellarmin ensconced himself in his nook, were three men dressed like bookmakers, in white hats and checked trousers and brilliant waistcoats. They were singing a comic song, which seemed a favourite, to judge by the enthusiastic manner in which the audience joined in the chorus, of which the burden ran:

’Sister Johanna whacked the donkey,
But the old moke wouldn’t go!’

or something to that effect, and then there was dancing and kicking up of legs and somersaults, and the usual comic song business.

It was a garish place, with gilt mirrors on the walls, which reflected back the clusters of gas-lamps. The air was thick with smoke, and the hall was crammed with people sitting in rows on benches, which, at the upper end, were baize-covered, and had little stands before them for the glasses and the cigars. On a high chair, just below the orchestra, sat the master of the ceremonies, who called out the number of the pieces, and smoked and exchanged jokes with the audience, and was every now and then treated to a drink.
Sometimes champagne—or what looked like champagne—in tin-foiled bottles, was handed up to the front benches; sometimes there was a call for 'Two and two of Scotch, to keep the spirits up;' but beer in pewter mugs seemed the general beverage. The young men of the audience wore dirty pot-hats and wonderful neckties; and the young women sported much cheap finery, gaudy feathers, and smart jackets, and had tousled hair, after the approved fashion in factory circles. The young men leaned back, most of them with one arm round a young woman's shoulders; and they gazed into their sweethearts' faces and nudged them when anything exquisitely funny or suggestive of some past personal episode tickled their fancy. But the nudging was not confined to the young people: it was extensively indulged in by the husbands and wives; and the hard-working, gaunt mothers of families seemed to get as much enjoyment out of the performance as their younger and less-burdened sisters.

Bellarmin cast his eyes round the house in bewildered search for some indication of the danger which threatened Mary Beaton—some sign of the foretold conspiracy against her. He had quick eyes, but as they swept the place—pit, gallery, and boxes—he could see no face that he knew. Was he, then, the victim of some practical joke? No, he could not believe that; or, at all events, if there were any joke, the point of it was yet to come. No creature in his or her senses would take the trouble of writing a letter in a disguised hand just for the sake of inducing a young man to pay a visit to an East End music hall. If he were a grave and responsible statesman like Sir Victor Champion, then indeed one might understand a practical joker's motive in trying to get him to show himself in such a place; but there would be no fun whatever in prevailing upon a careless young man about town like Bellarmin to show himself there. Nobody would be surprised if he were seen there; nobody would care. No; he would have to wait for the joke, if joke it were.

At last, when he was getting fairly tired of waiting and watching, he saw a little movement among some of the occupants of the pit—a movement caused by the entrance of two newcomers who were trying to make their way to convenient seats. The newcomers were a tall grey-haired man, and apparently a slender boy. The man was dressed in rusty black clothes, and so far as his garb was concerned might have been taken for one of the poorer class of shopkeepers; the boy might have been his son. But the walk, the bold, straight stride of the man, did not seem to Bellarmin's acute eye quite like that of a poor shopkeeper of the East End; it was unmistakably the stride of a soldier, of a cavalryman. Now the pair had settled down; Bellarmin had not yet been able to get a look at their faces. Some persons were still passing between them and him. Now the path of sight is clear—and, yes, of course, the tall man was General Falcon himself, apparently under the impression that he was admirably disguised. Who, then, was his companion? Bellarmin strained his sight to get a good look at the features of the supposed boy, and he could hardly keep his emotions down—his surprise, alarm, horror—when he saw that the face was the face of Mary Beaton.

Here, in this low, noisy, vulgar East End music hall, was Mary
Stuart Beaton, dressed as a boy! For a moment he refused to believe the evidence of his senses. It could not be. Had Miss Beaton any boy-cousin, or other such relative, who resembled her? That surely was more likely than that she herself could be sitting there in such absurd masquerade.

But no; it was impossible that he could be mistaken. There were the features; there were the eyes—the eyes that now were queenlike and now saintlike; that now, it must be owned, were saucy; the eyes that sometimes seemed melting with pathetic emotion, with compassion, with tender pity, and that sometimes, too, flashed out an almost insolent anger. It just struck Bellarmin at the moment, and it sent a cruel pang through him, that he had never seen in these wonderful eyes any gleam that spoke of love. All the emotions a woman could show through eloquent eyes, these speaking eyes had told him of again and again, save only love. He studied her face, and he felt satisfied that he was right. But he now surveyed her figure as well, and he wondered within himself how, even in that dull and commonplace crowd, she could have escaped suspicion, so charmingly feminine were her movements, so feminine her outlines. He became afraid for her; he longed to go near her and warn her that some wandering eye would surely pierce through the screen of her disguise. Yet he did not dare to approach her then and there. All he could do was to remain where he was, ready to come to her assistance if assistance should be needed.

No question had he in his mind as to General Falcon's courage, and he noted with satisfaction that, for all General Falcon's sixty-five years, he did not appear by any means the sort of man with whom a personage of ordinary strength would care to get into a quarrel. But Bellarmin was by no means assured of Falcon's discretion. He feared that Falcon's adoration for his princess might lead him to fancy an affront in every curious look, the crime of lèse-majesté in every whisper. All Bellarmin could do was to keep himself unseen, while watching carefully the surroundings and the movements of the strange pair of spectators who took all his interest and all his eyes and ears away from the stage and the performances. There they sat—the soldier and the princess—conforming themselves evidently as much as possible to the ways of the place. General Falcon had a huge tankard of beer before him, to which he occasionally applied his lips with an expression of utterly overdone gratification. His companion had a lemon-squash. General Falcon bought a cigar from one of the peripatetic waiters; but Bellarmin's keen eye soon observed that he quietly dropped that cigar under the seat, and substituted for it one which he stole from his own coat-pocket. His companion presently touched him on the arm, and Bellarmin could distinctly hear the imperious words, 'Cigarette, please.' General Falcon tried a look of remonstrance, but his companion was inexorable; and presently Bellarmin saw the daughter of the Stuarts smoking a cigarette with the most perfect complacency and apparent comfort. He felt his forehead growing hot with anxiety and alarm. Sometimes one of the company near Mary Beaton and her companion got up and passed the girl with some word of apology for disturbing her; and Bellarmin was in perfect agony lest some of
her movements might betray her sex. 'If she would only put her hands in her pockets,' he thought to himself, 'that would look school-boyish, at all events.' He trembled at the very graciously, the almost Oriental elaborateness of courtesy with which Mary replied to each passing apology from this or that 'Arry or 'Arriet. She bent her graceful head to a stout, elderly personage who squeezed by her, and who made some jocular remark upon his own fatness, and the mere movement of Mary's head frightened Bellarmin, it was so intensely feminine. Surely, he was thinking in agony, that old personage, who is likely to be the father of at least half a dozen daughters, will see that it is a girl and not a boy who is good-naturedly making way for him, and politely acknowledging his apologies. But the worthy citizen went his unsuspicous way, and Bellarmin breathed freely again, for the moment at least. What especially kept Bellarmin in alarm was not the dread of anything anybody might guess at, or the dread of what somebody might say to Miss Beaton, but a very reasonable fear concerning the demeanour of General Falcon. If that warrior could only be relied upon to restrain himself so far as to behave with coolness and discretion, and not to take offence where it was anyhow possible to avoid it, then things would go right enough; for even if an elderly gentleman did choose to bring his daughter dressed in boy's clothes to such a place, or were suspected of having done so, no great harm could come of that. But suppose there were a quarrel; suppose there were a row; suppose Falcon were to knock someone down; suppose the police were called in, and a general removal were made to the police station, would it be possible for Mary's secret to be kept then?

'Will they never go away?' he kept asking himself. 'Will they remain seated there until the end? What can there be in this business to interest her? Surely she ought to have had enough of it by this time. When does she mean to go?'

At last, at last, they were going. Miss Beaton apparently had had enough of it. She touched Falcon and said something to him, and Falcon got up and prepared to lead the way. The stage was empty at the time, which made Bellarmin anxious, because eyes that would otherwise have been occupied with the mummers were free to amuse themselves by scanning the faces of departing guests. He drew into the shelter of his box until they had passed beneath him, and then he hastened after them. They had to make their way through long, dingy passages, lighted by flaring and naked jets of gas. These passages were obstructed here and there by little groups of loungers and smokers, and progress was not to be made with anything like quickness. Bellarmin kept well behind, but did not lose sight of the pair for a second. Suddenly he became aware somehow that another man as well as he was following and watching them. He had not yet had time to see what this man was like; but he had come out of the theatre at the moment that Bellarmin left it, and he was almost keeping step with Bellarmin in following Miss Beaton and Falcon. Perhaps this observer had made a guess as to the real sex of the supposed boy, and was only following from motives of mere curiosity. Still it would be well, Bellarmin thought, to keep a close watch on him. So he fell back just a little more;
and then the other observer, who looked like a mechanic out of employment and down on his luck, pushed suddenly forward, and made an attempt to hustle past Miss Beaton. He hustled past her so roughly that she looked round in surprise; and then he hustled back again, jostling her a second time. He was drunk, perhaps, and he probably did not mean any rudeness; and it would not matter much if only General Falcon did not lose his temper. Falcon was hurrying Mary on as quickly as he could. Either he had not seen the man jostle her, or he was wisely determined to take no notice. Bellarmin felt as if he could have embraced him for his self-control and prudence. But the jostling one was evidently resolved to make his presence felt and inconvenient; he was preparing for a forward movement again. He had the staggery walk of a man who had been drinking, and yet Bellarmin was convinced somehow that the drunkenness was a sham, and that there was some deliberate purpose in all these movements. This would never do, he thought; if there were any more jostling, Falcon would be sure to lose his self-control. Just at this moment there was a sharp turn in the passage, and for an instant Miss Beaton and Falcon were out of sight. The man whom Bellarmin was watching was about to make a rush after them. Bellarmin had got his chance, and he made prompt use of it. He caught the man by the collar and drew him back firmly, steadily, not roughly, but with a quiet and decidedly persuasive force.

'Tell me,' Bellarmin asked, in the calmest voice, but with the manner of one who puts a question to which he has authority to enforce an answer, 'who sent you here?'

The manner in which the question was put had its effect; the man, who was at first about to return some rough reply, became embarrassed, and merely stammered out; 'Who sent me here?'

'Yes, I want to know. Don't attempt to make any noise, or I will hand you over to a policeman at once. You were sent here to make some disturbance. Who sent you?'

This was all the purest conjecture on Bellarmin's part, but he could see in a moment that his shot had told. The appearance of drunkenness had already vanished; the man he was talking to had become perfectly sober. In any case, Bellarmin was carrying his point by merely keeping him in talk.

'Who the devil are you, and what right have you to ask me any question? Are you the owner of this show?'

'All that it concerns you to know,' said Bellarmin, 'is that I am able to have you in the lock-up within the next five minutes unless you give me your name and address, so that I may have you looked after, if there should be need. What were you sent here to do? Tell me at once.'

The man smiled a sort of apologetic smile.

'Well, not much harm, after all, governor. I was sent here to have a look after an old bloke and a boy.'

Bellarmin's mind was relieved. The man was evidently speaking sincerely, and had no notion that the supposed boy was not a boy.

'And you were sent to get up a row?'

'Well, yes, I was.'
'For what reason?'

'Don't know, governor. A German chap, who looked like a footman out of livery, came here two hours ago, and saw me at the door of the drinking-place here, and he got into talk with me, and asked me if I'd seen a helderly bloke and a boy, and I said, "No; I hadn't." And he said, would I watch them and follow them, and get up a row, if he gev' me a quid. And I said, "Yes; I would," and I got the quid; and I did my best to get up the row—now, didn't I?'

At this moment a policeman was passing out whose face Bellarmin knew, and who recognised him. He was an officer who at one time used to attend in the House of Commons, and he made a most deferential semi-military salute as he passed Bellarmin. Bellarmin's present companion was deeply impressed, and began to think he was very lucky in getting out of the whole business, seeing that there were evidently important personages on the other side.

'Yes; you did your best,' Bellarmin said; 'and you were near doing too much. You would have got yourself into terrible trouble, I can tell you. Now I would recommend you to go quietly home. I believe your story; I believe you don't know who it was that wanted to get you into mischief.'

'Don't know from Adam, governor, s'help me.'

'Well, here is another sovereign for you—to get out of this at once. Give your name and address to this officer. You will take this man's name and address for me, officer, please.'

'Certainly, sir;' another semi-military salute.

A large dirty hand opened and closed on Bellarmin's shining coin. That incident was happily over. Bellarmin, somewhat relieved, hurried after Falcon and Mary. He stood in the comparative darkness of the door, and he looked out. He saw, to his surprise, that Falcon was putting Miss Beaton into a heavy carriage, on the box of which he could see by the flashing lamps that a man was sitting who seemed to him remarkably like a German servant of Lady Saxon's whom he sometimes, but rarely, saw at her London house. At once there came into his mind the thought of what he had just heard from the bribed disturber of order—about the 'German chap who looked like a footman.' Mary appeared to be offering some remonstrance.

'Why are we to go in this thing?' he distinctly heard her say in her clear voice, which now had a note of petulance in it; 'I would rather go in a hansom, as we came. Where did we get this thing?'

'I tell you there is danger,' Falcon said; 'we can't go back the way we came.' He was looking fearfully around him as if afraid of listeners. 'Do get in; I will tell you all.'

Mary got in. There were very few loungers about just now, for the entertainment inside was in full blast, and the hall had reclaimed all its audience. Bellarmin saw his bribed friend near; he was evidently going back to his seat. Bellarmin touched him.

'Will you tell that gentleman—the elderly gentleman there at the carriage door, you know—that someone here wishes to speak to him for a moment before he goes.'
Then Bellarmin retreated far back into the hall, quite out of sight of the carriage and its occupant.

In a moment Falcon came striding in, with an air of mingled impatience and alarm.

"Mr Bellarmin!" he exclaimed, in anything but a tone of welcome. "I didn't know you were here!"

"I happened to be here—at least, I came here; I was told to come here, I don't quite know by whom or why; but anyhow I am here; and I don't want Miss Beaton to know it. I couldn't help just now hearing you say there was danger to her."

Falcon contracted his brows.

"I didn't know there was anyone listening," he said.

"Well, I didn't mean to listen; but I had pretty good reason to believe that some trap or other was laid for you by somebody; and I thought I might be of some service."

"Oh?" Falcon's grim look relaxed a little. "You, too"—he laid stress on the "too"—"you, too, thought there was some danger?"

"I don't know about danger, but there are tricks of some kind going on. Well, this is all I want to say; we haven't time to say much now. Go home with Miss Beaton; I'll take a hansom and drive after you. She need never know—"

"Sir!" Falcon said, sternly, his looks recovering all their former harshness, "Miss Beaton needs no protection but that which her friends—her friends can give. I shall take care of her."

"Come, come," Bellarmin said, good-humouredly; "you can't offend me, General Falcon; and I hope I may count myself among Miss Beaton's friends. You will allow me to do this much; I dare say nothing will happen; but if anything should happen—why, I shall be there; and I am pretty well known to the police, as we say here, and I know I can be of some service to you. But, of course, Miss Beaton is not to know."

Before he had finished the words, Falcon broke away with what sounded very like a muttered imprecation. When Bellarmin went to the door again the carriage was driving off. Bellarmin jumped into the only hansom that was near the door—very likely the hansom which had brought Mary and Falcon, and which was to have taken them back; and he bade the driver follow the carriage, and keep it well in view.

Then he began to think over things. There was the anonymous letter which had sped him to the East End. There was the attempt to get up a row—an attempt promoted by a 'German chap;' there was the carriage with a 'German chap' on the box, in whom Bellarmin fully believed that he recognised one of Lady Saxon's servants; there was Falcon's sudden change of purpose and his declaration about danger. What did all this mean if fairly put together? Was there danger?—and what could it be? Was there no danger greater than that of some spiteful device to get up a scandal and bring Mary into ridicule? Could Lady Saxon be malign enough to have any part in such a scheme? Was Falcon's alarm about real danger merely a sort of monomania with him? All this Bellarmin could not settle for himself with any amount of cogitation. The one thing certain was that somebody or other had
got to know in advance of the East End expedition, and had tried to turn it to the advantage of some malignant purpose. Was it not possible that Lady Saxon might have come to know of some trick—some malicious sort of practical joke, and might have sent the anonymous letter with the sincere and kindly purpose of giving him an opportunity of sheltering and serving Mary Beaton? Yes; that was possible, to be sure; but was it likely? What, then, about the German servant, and the effort to get up a quarrel? Bellarmin felt much disturbed and distressed. To him the only satisfactory thought about the whole affair was the thought that he was there; that he was following close behind her; that if anything unpleasant or alarming should happen, he would be much better able to take counsel for her, and to take care of her, than her devoted but rather eccentric adherent, General Falcon.

Bellarmin followed the carriage through miles and miles of street. At last he had the satisfaction of seeing it stop at Mary's own door in Kensington. His cab drove slowly by. He saw Falcon get out and open the door with a latch-key; then he saw Mary get out—at least, he was left to assume that it was Mary, for she was wrapped from head to foot in a great cloak, which completely concealed her boy's dress. He saw her enter the house; he heard the door close behind them; he saw the carriage drive away; and then he bade his cabman take him to St James' Place.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

'I THINK I SHALL SAY YES.'

MARY BEATON had a troubled time of it for several days after her unlucky expedition to the East End. General Falcon was stranger than ever. He seemed rather to avoid her; but when they met, his eyes were wild and full of fear and foreboding. He hinted at dark possibilities—at scandal, even at personal danger to herself; and bade her keep closely the secret of their foolish escapade. He seemed completely shaken and nervous, and to be afraid of phantoms. He did all he could to prevent her from going out, and made her send excuses to several of the houses to which they were engaged. In truth, he did not wish her to run the chance of meeting Bellarmin. He felt angry, baffled, defeated. His clumsy plot had failed; and failed through Bellarmin. He saw no present opening for a fresh melodramatic scheme. He was in terror lest Mary should discover that such a scheme had existed. And in spite of Lady Saxon's professions of good faith, he was beginning to feel a keen distrust of her. He did not understand why Bellarmin had been at the music hall that evening—why his plot had so completely miscarried. Mary made merry with his tragic dejection. She still, by a determined effort, kept up an appearance of light-heartedness. She would not let even Falcon see that she was ashamed and un-
happy; she would try to seem exactly as she had always been to everyone—to Bellarmin, if he should come to see her; it was some time since he had been to see her. She laughed at Falcon, and then, when they came near to a quarrel, she peremptorily silenced him.

He had, during the last week or two, been giving her warnings of various undefined and terrible dangers menacing her; conspiracies, treasons, stratagems, and spoils. She made up her mind at last that she would take the opinion of some other counsellor whom she could trust; not, of course, making any confession of the East End escapade—Mary was herself quite of opinion that the undignified freak should be buried in oblivion—but on the general subject of Falcon’s continued alarms. She was delighted, therefore, when in the very midst of a scene with Falcon, Lord Stonehenge was announced. She went up to him with both hands outstretched, and she made approach to her subject at once.

‘Lord Stonehenge,’ she said, abruptly, looking at him, her face all softened by girlish agitation, ‘you never scold me. I really believe that you are the only one of my close friends who never has scolded me. I am never afraid of you; I know you will always judge things at the best. No; everyone else scolds me; but only you—you alone—’

Stonehenge looked at her with an expression of undefinable emotion—pain and pity mingled; pain and pity, not for her, but for himself. True, he never scolded her; he never ventured to scold; he never felt in the mood for scolding. All that she did seemed well done to him. At least, he would not have allowed in his innermost heart an acknowledgment that anything she did could be aught but well done; at all events, well meant, nobly meant. And what did he get by all this? Evidently it was only now, for the first time, that she had taken any very serious account of his unvarying tenderness for her, his patience in bearing with her; and she always showed more interest in others than in him. He could not help admiring Bellarmin sometimes for the courage with which he told the beautiful woman that she ought to have done this thing, or ought not to have done that. He admired this courage, recognised its truthfulness and its worth; but he could not imitate it; and he felt in his secret soul that Mary would have thought more of him if he could; and that the rebukes of others had more interest for her than all his submissive reverence and duty.

‘I ought to be more thankful and grateful to you than I am,’ she said, ruefully; ‘but indeed, dear Lord Stonehenge, I am very, very grateful to you—when I give myself time to think about it.’

Lord Stonehenge smiled a rather wan smile. She had put it quite truly, as he well knew; she was grateful to him when she gave herself time to think about it—to think about him. She did not very often give herself such time; that was clear. He might as well have been as old as General Falcon; indeed General Falcon evidently occupied much more of Mary’s thoughts than he did.

There was a lack of polarity, as between Mary and Lord Stonehenge; he had not even for her the polarity of refrigeration, the quality of coldness which can be made under certain conditions to do the work of the loadstone. One might have thought that English
society and English public life could not furnish forth a more picturesqu e figure than that of Lord Stonehenge. He was young; he was remarkably handsome; he was the living head of a great and powerful family, which had never changed its English homestead since the Conquest; he was a devotee of Mary's own political faith, and a full believer in all her claims and the traditions of her household; and the earnest daily prayer of most of her relatives and friends at home and abroad, who took a really rational interest in her, was that she might fall in love with Lord Stonehenge and marry him. Despite all this, despite what had passed between them, she was never able to feel much real interest in him. She liked him very much; she trusted to him implicitly in all matters where friendship could serve her; she had almost unlimited confidence in his judgment; but his coming or his going never set one of her pulses stirring or flushed her cheek.

'And I am so glad you have come to-day, Lord Stonehenge. General Falcon has been trying to frighten me out of all my present plans and projects by assuring me that I am the victim—or at least that I am the object—of a fearful conspiracy.'

'Conspiracy of whom and about what?' asked Lord Stonehenge, in alarm.

'About me; nothing less. Is it not sweetly romantic? I almost wish it were true.'

'But who are the conspirators, and what are they conspiring to do?

'That you had better ask Falcon. He can tell you all the story. If he is as ready to tell it to you as he has lately been ready to tell it to me, you will have no difficulty in learning everything that is to be known.'

General Falcon looked much vexed, and made no effort to conceal his vexation.

'I told madame,' he said, in a harsh, low voice, 'what I believed it good for her to know, and right for her to know. I did not intend to tell it to every stranger.'

'Madame does not look on me as a stranger,' Lord Stonehenge said firmly, almost sternly.

'Certainly not, Lord Stonehenge. I look on you as one of my very best and nearest friends.'

'As madame pleases,' Falcon said. 'Then madame had better tell for herself to Lord Stonehenge what she wishes Lord Stonehenge to know. May I take my leave, madame?'

Mary nodded assent, and Falcon left the room.

'I don't know what is coming over my trusty Falcon,' Mary said, and she looked distressed as she said it. 'He has become so changed and odd in manner. I am sure he must be ill.'

'He has very much changed to me,' Lord Stonehenge said. 'We used to be great friends once; now he seems to dislike me or distrust me. I haven't the least notion why. But tell me, what are these conspiracies of which he has been talking?'

'Oh, folly—absurdity—I am sure of it. I am almost ashamed to talk about such things. I wish I hadn't said anything, Lord Stonehenge. I think my poor Falcon was right enough to be displeased with me for saying anything about what he told me.'
'Still, as he did tell you something, apparently to put you on your guard, I think some of your friends ought to be allowed to know. Some of us could judge, perhaps, better than he—we know London better, at all events.'

Mary laughed a joyous little laugh.

'General Falcon has taken it into his head,' she said, 'that I have some powerful and unscrupulous enemies who want to harm me, and who are scheming and planning for such work.'

'To harm you? How?'

'Well, he insists that my life is in danger.'

'Your life in danger?—here in London? Oh, come—'

'That is his story. For a long time he only tried to make me believe that the house was in danger of being attacked by robbers, burglars; that it had got abroad somehow that I used to keep a lot of jewellery and gold and so forth here, and that he had actually found out a plan for the robbing of the house some evening or night when he and I should both be absent.'

'Well, there is nothing very unlikely in that. I should say he was about right there. What did you do?'

'I believe he gave some information to the police, and I think he had most of the jewels put into the care of the bank; but I wouldn't have them all stowed away, for I am very fond of some of my jewels, and like to wear them, and to look at them. You know what children we women always remain, Lord Stonehenge; and I could not live if I had not some of my pretty things to play with, and so I wouldn't quite give in to my faithful Falcon. Now he has dropped the burglar plots, and tells me of a dark conspiracy to carry me off and bury me in a dungeon somewhere—like the Man with the Iron Mask, I suppose—or even to kill me. That certainly was what he hinted at pretty broadly just now, when I lost patience and made my appeal to you.'

Lord Stonehenge was silent for a moment or two. This was an amazing story; but, after all, it was not absolutely outside the range of possibility. At all events, Miss Beaton's friends must not dismiss it without some examination.

'Does he know who the enemies are?'

'“Great people,” he says,' Mary answered, composedly; 'people with all manner of influence.'

'Why are they your enemies?'

'Some, because they consider my claim a danger and an insult to this reigning family; and others, Falcon says, because they don't like me personally—women, I suppose,' Mary added, with a smile, and a glance of pardonable satisfaction at the looking-glass.

'The first idea,' Lord Stonehenge said, gravely, 'is altogether absurd and out of the question. Dismiss it from your mind at once, madame. It does not belong to our English life or to our English ways at all. There is a social atmosphere, you know, as well as a physical atmosphere, surrounding us all, out of which we can't live; and that social atmosphere makes Falcon's conspiracies absolutely impossible among people like us in England. Falcon has lived too long out of this country; he has lost touch of its realities. The second—the private and personal enmities—well, I
should at first be inclined to put that, too, out of the question; but, after all, it is possible, just possible, there might be some foundation for such a fear; anyhow, I should like to ask Falcon something about it, if he would tell me. Does he know who the enemies are?"

'I didn't ask him; I didn't care much about the whole thing—I don't get frightened easily.'

Just at this moment a card was handed to Miss Beaton. She blushed slightly as she saw the name; and there was a certain expression of timidity very unusual with her in the look which she turned on Lord Stonehenge.

'Mr Bellarmin,' she said. 'Should we talk to him about all this? I don't know. It is better not. He would not care.'

He was surprised at her nervousness, and looked at her with melancholy eagerness. The explanation came to him with a darting pang. If she were merely indifferent to Bellarmin's opinion, would she show this hesitation about consulting him, this doubt of his interest, of which surely, at Stonehenge Park, he had given sufficient proof? His manner was constrained as he answered,—

'I think you do Mr Bellarmin injustice. I am sure that he would care very much about anything concerning you. And then, we look to him as one of our political allies. It would be better that he should know.'

'Very well,' she said. 'Tell him what I have just told you.'

Her manner of greeting Bellarmin was very different from the way in which she had welcomed Lord Stonehenge. There was in it none of that frank friendliness. It seemed to Lord Stonehenge that her face, which had been so soft and gentle a minute ago, became suddenly troubled and a little defiant. The young man, too, was not so frank and friendly and outspoken as was usual with him. He looked grave and somewhat embarrassed, and unlike himself. Lord Stonehenge felt certain that he would have been different had he found Mary alone. In a kind of grim generosity he tried to put Bellarmin at his ease, and told him at once of Mary's perplexities and Falcon's forebodings.

There was a curious eagerness in Bellarmin's manner of receiving the story. He took it in a very different way from Lord Stonehenge's. Mary was quite surprised. She had expected that he would merely laugh at the whole thing as a vain imagining of General Falcon's. But he did not.

'There may be much more in this than you think,' he said. 'There may be a great deal in it. I should be very sorry, indeed, to disregard it, or treat it as utterly unfounded. Tell me—you have not seen any indication of sudden lack of intelligence, anything of an alarmist kind about General Falcon of late; anything that would make you believe or suppose that his intellect was less clear, less firmly poised than before?'

Mary gave him a quick, anxious, almost angry look. The same thought, the same fear, had been in her own mind—had entered it some time ago; but she would not confess her fear. With an odd feminine contradictoriness she resented Bellarmin's suggesting it.

'Mr Bellarmin! How can you ask such a question? Why, you are ten times worse of an alarmist than my poor old Falcon. I
had rather the whole air I breathe were flavoured with conspiracies against me than fancy for a moment that Falcon was losing his senses. This is dreadful. I'll not call any more counsellors to advise me. The next question would probably be, whether I can observe any growing signs of insanity in myself.'

'Still I would ask,' Bellarmin persisted, 'whether you have seen any symptom, ever so slight, of a change of this kind in General Falcon?' Bellarmin looked keenly at her as he asked.

'None whatever; not the slightest. He is always distressing himself about me, one way or another. He is very fond of me, of course, and I daresay London hours don't agree with him. He is an old man, you know. We didn't keep such hours at Schwalbenstadt. Sitting up late at night, and rushing about—and—and all that, must upset an old man's nerves and temper. It upsets mine.'

He was satisfied with her answer.

'That is just what I expected,' she said, 'and what I am glad to hear. No; this is no monomaniac idea on Falcon's part. We may be sure there is something which he knows and which we do not know. One other question, madame. This recent disclosure—or hint, or whatever we may call it—about the personal enemies, was never made before?'

'Before when, Mr Bellarmin?'

'Well, let me see; was not made, for example, before the latter part of last week?'

She paused for a moment and collected her thoughts, remembering that it was just before they started on their masquerading expedition that Falcon had spoken most wildly and incoherently of a plot against her, and of unscrupulous and dangerous enemies.

'Yes; that is quite true,' she said, a little surprised.

'Not made before last Thursday?'

'No. How did you know?'

He did not answer her question. 'I am trying to fix a time,' he said. 'I am trying to connect things.'

'I don't see the connection,' Mary said, rather scornfully.

'Madame,' Bellarmin said, after a moment of silence, 'so far as my advice is worth anything, it is given entirely in support of General Falcon's remonstrance.'

'Remonstrance!' Mary exclaimed, in a sudden outburst of temper. 'Remonstrance, Mr Bellarmin? What do you mean? Remonstrance with whom—against what?'

'Remonstrance,' Bellarmin said, gravely, 'with one who is placed in a conspicuous and perhaps a very dangerous position, and is too fearless or careless always to take proper precautions.'

'Ridiculous!' she exclaimed. 'You are just as bad as he. Do you think I am going to immure myself like a girl in a nunnery? Am I a bird to be kept in a cage? Do you suppose I can spend all my life in the exclusive companionship of General Falcon and Lady Struthers? Lord Stonehenge, you don't want me to make a prisoner of myself because of Falcon's nonsense about plots and conspirators—masks, I suppose, and daggers, and bowls of poison?'

Lord Stonehenge was much surprised at Bellarmin's way of
treated Falcon's supposed revelations. He had never expected
that a careless young man of the world would see anything sub-
stantial in such stories. He was full sure that Bellarmin would
join with Mary in pronouncing them utterly ridiculous. What sur-
prised him, too, was that there seemed to be something of a
common understanding, or a common misunderstanding, between
Mary Beaton and Bellarmin. There were allusions glancing from
one to the other which had evidently some sort of meaning for each
of the two, but no meaning whatever for him. Why was Miss
Beaton suddenly angry with Bellarmin? Why did she blush and
turn away?

Meanwhile Bellarmin, turning towards the angry girl, saw her
make an impatient movement of her head in Lord Stonehenge's
direction. It said, as clearly as any words could have put it, 'Get
him out of the way.'

'I would suggest,' said Bellarmin, 'that Lord Stonehenge should
see General Falcon at once and talk to him. I would offer to go
myself, but I know Falcon wouldn't on any conditions admit me to
his fullest confidence.'

'I'll go and find him,' Lord Stonehenge said, in a rather de-
pressed tone. He was in a mood of doubt and dissatisfaction. He
could not understand how things were going; he was puzzled by
Miss Beaton and by Bellarmin, as well as by General Falcon.

The moment he had left the room Mary broke out,—

'I don't understand you, Mr Bellarmin. Don't tell me that you
believe in all this stuff about conspiracies and gunpowder plots.
Don't tell me that you believe in the story about some wicked
woman of rank wanting to kill me because she thinks me younger
and better looking than she is. You don't believe anything of the
kind. Yet you back up Falcon, and I know you have some mean-
ing in it. I am only thankful that you didn't make your meaning
known to Lord Stonehenge.'

'You are angry with me,' Bellarmin began, in a voice very
different from that which he had used when Lord Stonehenge was
in the room.

'Yes, I am indeed; very angry. You seemed as if you had
a right to cross-question me like a prisoner.'

'Prisoners are not cross-questioned,' he said, with a supplicating
smile; 'at least, in this country.'

'Well, I don't care—like somebody who is suspected of having
done wrong, and having an account to render.'

'I think you have done wrong,' he said.

'How? Why? When? You were speaking of something that
happened last week, the latter part of last week. What happened
the latter part of last week?'

'Can't you guess what I was thinking of?'

'I can't; I don't want to guess; and there is nothing to guess
at, and you couldn't possibly have known—'

'I do know; I saw—'

'Oh, no, no; you didn't; you couldn't! You were not there—
you were not; you were not!'

'I was there, and I did see.'
'Oh!' She put her hand over her eyes, and then, recovering herself in a moment, she calmly confronted him and asked, 'What did you see? What are we speaking of? Do we understand each other?'

'Madame, we do—perfectly. What did I see? I saw the daughter of the Stuarts in the public room of an East End music hall; I saw the woman on whom the eyes of all London society are fixed, and on whom the eyes of at least half of London society are fixed in hard, unfavourable, unpitying criticism—I saw this lady in an East End music hall, and in the dress of a boy!'

Bellarmin had intended this climax for an utterly overpowering effect. He had meant it for the friendly cruelty which wounds to the very quick, in order that it may all the more surely heal. The result was not exactly what he had anticipated. Whether Mary's volatile feelings underwent a change through pure nervous reaction, or whether his manner was rather too portentously solemn, or whether something in her memory brought humorous association with it, the effect was that Miss Beaton flung herself into a long, low chair, and covering, indeed, her face with her kerchief, burst into a silvery peal of the most genuine and unaffected laughter.

'Oh, then you were there?' she asked, when she was able to find words; 'you really were there in that dreadful place, and you did see me, and you recognised me, although I thought I was wearing my boy's clothes so well that the keenest eye could not make me out? Well, now, tell me, how did I look? Come, no malice; did the dress become me? How did I look?'

'I am afraid I was not thinking of how you looked just at that moment,' he began, solemnly.

'Were you not? How strange! But when your astonishment had cleared off a little, surely you must have thought of it then. Oh, yes; I am sure you did. I did make a pretty boy, now didn't I? I did look well?'

'I can admire in a burlesque actress what I am unable to admire in a Stuart princess.'

'Mr Bellarmin, you are as solemn as Lady Struthers; and just now you look to me quite as old. You tell me of the awful dignity that should surround a Stuart princess. Don't you remember that Mary Stuart more than once dressed herself up in the costume of a soldier of the guard? She was not merely a princess, but a reigning queen, and I am only a sort of embryo claimant, at the best. Come, don't take it all too solemnly.'

Bellarmin could not help feeling vexed at Miss Beaton's way of taking the matter, and no doubt his face told plainly what he felt. He remained silent. She turned and looked at him.

'You are angry with my mirthful mood,' Mary said to him, quietly. 'But take comfort, Mr Bellarmin—the mood of mirth is not likely to last a very long time.'

Indeed, it had passed away already. Mary got up abruptly from her seat and went to the window, and stood there, looking vacantly out on the trees. She was silent. He feared he had offended her, and his heart was pained at the thought.

'Are you angry with me?' he asked, imploringly.
"I think I shall say Yes."

She turned to him, and he saw that her eyes were full of tears. He hated himself for the moment.

'No, I am not angry,' she said, very gently—'at least, I am not angry with you. But I am distressed. I should like you of all men to think well of me, Mr Bellarmin, and I don't see how you can think well of me now.'

There was almost childlike simplicity in her words and her tone, which went to his very heart.

'Miss Beaton—oh, I beg of you!' he began; 'who could know anything of you and not think well of you? And I know so much about you—about your goodness—more than you think—why, there is not a woman on earth I hold fit to be named in the same breath with you! Why, it is for just that reason—only that—that I ventured—'

He was becoming confused; he was afraid of saying too much—was afraid he had already said too much. But she did not seem to notice his words.

'I am always doing wrong things,' she said, in a plaintive voice. 'I turn my best friends against me.'

'No friend you have who is not devoted to you in heart and soul!' he exclaimed; 'you never could lose a friend.'

'Think,' she spoke passionately and not heeding his words, 'how much alone I am in all this, and how like a prisoner I feel sometimes! I may not do this thing and that and the other; I must let no one come near me—must have no particular liking for anyone; I have nothing to look out to. If one were a queen one might have some motive for enduring it all; but what motive have I?—and what hope have I? To live on in this way alone—or, much worse than being alone, to marry someone for whom I care nothing, but whom my advisers, and the people in Schwalbenstadt, think I ought to marry!'

'But why obey these people?' Bellarmin said, in hot impatience. 'Why sacrifice your youth, your life, to their ideas? There are those who love you—love you—love you—there must be someone whom you will love.'

She looked up at him quite startled; he saw that in her eyes which he had never yet seen, and a sudden blush came over her, and she drooped her eye-lids; and then she turned to the window again.

'Oh, do not let us speak any more about this,' she said.

But the wild hope that had flashed in Bellarmin's heart could not die down so soon—the fire that her tell-tale blush and look had lighted there could not so easily be extinguished. Never for a moment had he ventured to dream of the hope which that sudden glance had now made real.

'No—no; I can't stop now!' he exclaimed. 'Madame—Mary—you know what I am going to say; it must be said—I love you. Oh, forgive me—it is no fault of yours! You can't help it; you didn't mean it; you didn't encourage it; but all the same, I love you.'

He took her hand; she did not attempt to withdraw it, but she kept her eyes away from his. Her passiveness disarmed him; he made no attempt to draw nearer to her; he only held her hand in
his. There was a moment of silence—a silence to him almost appalling.

Then she said quietly, and there was a pathos in her tone which almost soothed him,—

'Mr Bellarmin, you know that this is impossible.'

'I suppose it is,' he answered, in a subdued voice; 'I could not expect you, of course—I am only a struggling beginner in politics; I have no money—'

'It is not that,' she said, decisively.

'No? Then it is simply that you don't care for me?'

There was another silence; then she said, in the lowest of tones, the one word,—

'No.'

He was confused and puzzled.

'Do you mean,' he asked, imploringly, 'that you don't care for me, or that that is not the reason?'

She drew her hand away now, very gently though.

'You are not the reason,' she said.

'Then you do care for me?' All his veins seemed filled with running fire.

'I think I do—yes, I know I do,' she answered, simply and sweetly. 'You are more to me than anyone else. I am not sorry that you have told me this—that you love me. Are you sure that you really do love me?'

'Oh! am I sure!' he exclaimed; and he could not get any further.

His voice had passionate sincerity enough in it to convince the most sceptical woman.

'I am glad,' she said, 'although it is selfish of me; for nothing can come of this, I suppose. It is impossible—is it not?'

'I am not thinking of that now; I am not thinking of anything possible or impossible, but just of this—that you know I love you, and you are not angry with me, and you tell me that you do in some sort of way care for me,'

'It's not in any sort of way,' she said; 'I do care for you; I do admire you—I don't like to say any more, since nothing can come of it; but'—she was turning now to him and looking straight into his eyes, and standing like one who felt herself a queen—'I would marry you, Mr Bellarmin, if I could. There—think when I have said that whether I care for you or not.'

Bellarmin felt for the moment positively humbled by the very pride of his discovery. To think that this glorious creature, all youth and loveliness, with her illustrious past and bewildering present, should turn to him with love, should single him out—oh, what had he done or what was he to deserve one moment of such happiness? He looked up to her, and there were tears glittering in his eyes. She saw them, and she put her kerchief to her own eyes.

'Come,' she said, 'we must not say any more about this just now. Lord Stonehenge will be coming in. Come to me to-morrow, will you? and we will talk over this like a rational man and woman.'

He went away almost without a word. He felt so strangely humbled in his wonderful happiness. Was he treading on air when...
he left the house? Were angels walking with him and buoying his steps? And what was all the commonplace noise of the street but a mighty and beautiful chorus of joy and thanksgiving?

Mary stood quite still by the window when he had left her, and she too felt that the whole earth was changed, and that Heaven was kind. Tears which were not of sadness made her eyes large and soft and sweet. Her heart was filled with sacred and tender emotion. She thought of her mother. The benignant face of the Holy Mother above the altar seemed to smile upon her. All that was pure and womanly and reverent within her swelled and moved her to gentle ecstasy. The singing of the birds, the bees' hum, the rustling of the beech branches, all seemed to say, 'He loves you,' and to unite in a joyous cry of 'To-morrow.' She did not know that Falcon had come back till he stood beside her, and his harsh voice broke the spell.

'Lord Stonehenge has gone,' he said.

Mary started, and her full, sweet eyes met his.

'General, I have something to tell you. Mr Bellarmin has asked me to marry him, and I—I have not told him yet; but I think I shall say yes.'

CHAPTER XXXIV.

'A STROKE OF HATE AND TREASON.'

LADY SAXON'S carriage stopped at Mary Beaton's door on the following morning. She sent in one of her prettily-worded, imperious little notes, begging that Mary would see her on a matter of some importance, and she was admitted to the young Pretendress.

Lady Saxon's manner when she came in was full of frank, smiling audacity. This was her way when she had a point to gain and a blow to strike. She preferred, when she could, to strike her blows in the open; and the defiant gleam in her eyes, the almost insolent carriage of her superb head, with its gold coronal of hair showing beneath her bonnet, the glittering hardness of her smile, made the girl recoil instinctively as she rose to greet her visitor, and gave her the feeling that she was facing an enemy.

Mary had been sitting wrapped in her dream of love—tremulous, a little excited, and restless and uneasy too. Falcon's strange, grim manner of receiving the news she told him perplexed her; his silence, which was like the silence of desperation, troubled and grieved her. This was not from any definite fear that he might forbid and prevent her marriage with Bellarmin. She knew that his powers as her guardian were limited, and that in a few months, when she was twenty-one, they would come to an end. But she believed in his real affection for her; and to cause him pain, to wound him in his dearest devotion, was grievous to her. She would rather that he had hurled violent reproaches upon her, would rather almost that he had ill-treated her in his anger. She had a feeling
that she had given the old man his death-blow. She told herself remorsefully that it must be like sentence of death to him to learn that the last of the Stuarts had resolved to link her great name with that of a mere modern politician of no solid reputation—a hanger-on of the Hanoverian dynasty, a man of no historic lineage, no fortune, no real claim to distinction—except, Mary said proudly to herself, the claim of having made her love him. Oh, there was more! She could not have loved him had he not been brave, loyal, and noble in heart and conduct—like one of the old knights she liked to think of. This was his claim. And our poor, proud princess felt a certain glory of renunciation and surrender, a glow of sweet exultation at the thought of what she was giving to him; of what he had had the courage to win, at the thought that his knighthood of nature would balance all her own shadowy claims to royalty, all her historic greatness, her ancestral inheritance; that she was giving all this to him, and that he was giving to her what was of far greater worth—so she told herself now—modern practical energy and talent, the career of a nineteenth-century Englishman, and all the old virtues as well—truth, stainless loyalty, perfect devotion.

Lady Saxon seated herself at Mary's invitation. She fixed her large eyes, which were naturally bright, on the girl's face, and began in an odd, abrupt manner, without any prelude,—

' Miss Beaton, I am going to do a rather unconventional thing; but I am a woman, people say, who is given to doing unconventional things. I am going to make a confidence to you. I am going to tell you something about myself. Do you mind?'

Mary hesitated. She had never liked Lady Saxon. She did not wish to be taken into her confidence. Something told her that the confidence would not be of a kind with which she could sympathise.

' I don't see, Lady Saxon, how it could be of any use. We are so different, you and I; and we should be sure to see things differently. I think it would be far wiser to tell it to some other woman who would understand you and your world better than I do.'

' No,' said Lady Saxon; ' that is the very reason why I have come to you. Yes, you and I are women of two opposite types; we each represent a different order of things. You are of the old type. I am of the new. You represent the "noblesse oblige" idea; and I—she gave her shoulders an expressive shrug—' I do not. Frank, is it not? But I never pretended that I was of noble birth. I haven't any chivalric traditions. Of course we see things differently. That is just the reason why we should meet—as woman to woman.'

Mary looked at Lady Saxon with a kind of wondering dignity. She was at once moved and repelled by the woman's curious appeal, and by a certain ring of suppressed feeling in Lady Saxon's voice. ' Still,' she said, ' I don't understand why you should come to me.'

' I am going to make you a confidence—as from woman to woman,' said Lady Saxon, slowly. ' We will talk about the why afterwards. There is a man who, a few weeks ago, was wildly, madly in love with me—is still, I have every reason to believe. One hears a great deal about the fickleness of men; but a man doesn't change his whole nature in six weeks. Since he cannot be my
lover, he will not be my friend—it is women of your type, not of mine, who inspire the pale, mediaeval, thin-blooded kind of attachment. In a fit of pique—or let us say of stained-glass sentiment—he is on the point of proposing to a girl of higher rank and fortune than his own, whom he admires, but does not love as he loves me. I am very fond of him,' said Lady Saxon, looking straight at Mary with her bright, fixed gaze, so that the girl's eyes drooped, 'though I cannot love him in the way that he wishes.'

A deep, painful blush came over Mary Beaton's face. As she looked up her brows were puckered with pain, and she still kept her eyes away from Lady Saxon.

'But you are married,' she said, in a low voice.

'Yes, I am married,' repeated Lady Saxon. She rose from her chair as she spoke and moved a little back from Mary. 'Do you think because I am married I am above all womanly weakness?' she said. Again there was that peculiar intensity in her voice. Mary rose as well, and the two women stood fronting each other. An icy hand seemed to have been laid upon Mary's bosom, though her mind had not yet grasped directly the bearing of Lady Saxon's words. She had only a vague, chill feeling that they boded ill to her. Lady Saxon deliberately unfolded a letter she had in her hand, and held it out to Mary. 'If you read this,' she said, 'you will understand everything, and you will be able to advise me what to do.'

Mary shrank involuntarily; but she took the letter in a bewildered way, and looked at the first page. She knew the stiff, rather large note-paper which bore the stamp of the House of Commons. She seemed to know the writing, too, though she did not identify it at all, or connect it with herself. She had only received one or two notes of a very formal kind from Bellarmin; and this—the fateful letter of which the young man had repented sorely since—had been dashed off at night under the influence of excitement and impulsive feeling, and was in a freer, bolder, more reckless hand than that he usually wrote. The wording was plain—unmistakably plain. The ardent expressions of love stood out before Mary's eyes like letters of fire. She read a sentence or two. There was no mistaking their tenor. A sudden, horrible dread seized her. She flushed a still deeper crimson, and thrust the letter hastily back.

'I don't want to read it!' she exclaimed. 'It is not fit that I should. I have no advice to give about such a thing as that.'

'As you please,' Lady Saxon replied, coolly. 'It would be to your advantage all the same to read that letter, Miss Beaton, for it was written only six weeks ago by, as you see, Rolfe Bellarmin.'

She had dexterously turned the paper, and held it before Mary's eyes in such a manner that, however much she might have wished to avoid looking at it, the girl was forced to see the clear, bold signature, 'Rolfe Bellarmin.' And above the signature more passionate lover's words, which in the quick glance, almost instantly averted, burned themselves upon Mary's brain. She turned white as death, and stood very still and straight, with eyes that seemed as though they had seen a ghost. But it was only for a few seconds
that Lady Saxon had the triumph of feeling that her own sufferings were in part avenged. If Lady Saxon possessed the courage of temperament, Mary Beaton had the courage of race. She braced herself to the effort, and met Lady Saxon's malign smile with a look of unflinching steadiness.

'The fact that the letter was written by Mr Bellarmin does not make it a concern of mine, Lady Saxon,' she said very quietly, with lips that did not tremble, 'except that, since he is a friend of mine, I am sorry he should be unhappy. We will not talk about the letter any more. I am sorry that you should have had the trouble of bringing it here, and that I should be so unable to give you the sympathy and advice you did me the honour to ask for.'

And then she turned to a table near and took from it a large and beautiful panel photograph of herself which lay there.

'This came from Arndt's to-day,' she said. 'I hope that you will think it good, and that you will accept it from me. I remember that you asked me to give you a photograph of myself not long ago, and I had none which you liked. Shall I write my name on it?'

She went to the writing-table, and with an unfaltering hand wrote 'Mary Stuart Beaton' in the space at the bottom of the picture. Lady Saxon thanked her, and admired the photograph, and then bade her good-bye. She paused a moment just as she was leaving the room, and looked back with a curious expression on her face at the stately girl in her clinging draperies, standing very erect, with her head a little raised.

'You are a brave woman, madame,' she said, 'and I admire you, and perhaps I understand you better than you imagine. When next Rolfe Bellarmin talks Radicalism and Progressive Toryism to me, I shall tell him that there is something in the "noblesse oblige" idea after all.'

As Lady Saxon drove away she saw a hansom dash up, and Rolfe Bellarmin descend from it. There was a look of eager hope and boyish happiness on his face, which scarcely faded as he raised his hat to her, though in truth, at the sight of her, a curious little shudder passed over him. It was not a good omen to see Lady Saxon at his princess's door.

Mary had given orders earlier in the day that Bellarmin was to be admitted at once to her presence, and she had not countermanded them. So he was taken straight to the boudoir.

He did not know the room well; it was not Mary's habit to receive ordinary callers there. It was broken up with screens and draperies, and the blinds were partially drawn, giving the impression that the daylight had been purposely excluded as from a chamber of mourning. At first he did not think that she could be in the room, for there was no sign or sound of greeting when the footman announced his name.

He stood in an uncertain way in the middle of the floor, and laid his hat down; and then he became aware somehow that Mary was on a couch near the fireplace, and that she had her face turned away. It seemed almost as though she were in grief and perplexity, and did not want him to see that she had been crying, or to speak to him till she was composed again. He went towards her with
both hands outstretched in eager anxiety. 'Madame!' he exclaimed, 'oh! is anything wrong?'

Mary stood up and came towards him, but she did not put her hands in his as he had fondly fancied that she would do. He had lain awake half the night picturing to himself the glad emotion of that meeting. And now the hour he had so longed for had come, and she had no gladness or sweetness for him. She was pale, strange, constrained; struggling, he could see, to keep down what she was feeling—was it sorrow, or was it anger and scorn? Oh, surely not that! What had he done to deserve that? Yet the look she turned on him had in it a kind of outraged majesty. He grew very pale, and drew back a little.

'Tell me, what have I done?' he asked, in a low, pained tone. 'Is everything changed since yesterday? Did it all mean nothing? And I was so happy and so proud,' he added, with deep, poignant reproach; 'for you had said that you cared for me. Was it all a mistake? I had no right, then, to dream of such happiness.'

'You had no right,' she said, slowly, with her eyes down; and then she suddenly looked up at him, and her eyes—indignant, large, and smarting with gathered tears—burned into Bellarmin's very heart, 'Why did you come to me?'

'Were there not others, that you should come to me?'

The bewildered young man could only stare at her, a horrible suspicion breaking in upon him. Mary made a rapid step or two, and stood with her face to the darkened window, evidently fighting against the storm of feeling within her. Presently she turned to him, and said, in an altered tone, and with a certain proud frankness,—

'Mr Bellarmin, you told me yesterday that you loved me, and you asked me to be your wife. I was weak and foolish enough to think for a little while that it might be, and that I could love you and give myself to you. I made a great mistake. You are not the man whom I could love, or to whom I would give myself. I told you to come to me for my answer, and that is my answer.'

She made a gesture as if she would have dismissed him there and then. She wanted him to go. She could not be dignified and gently determined with him, as she had been with Sir Victor Champion. There seemed a kind of mockery in the similarity between the two cases. Both had been bidden to come to her for an answer, and of both, before the answer could be given, had the same story been told. Was it to be her fate always to play a humiliating second to Lady Saxon? Must every suitor of hers have been Lady Saxon's victim? But, in her fine scorn, Mary drew a subtle distinction between that early episode—the amour at which Falcon had hinted—commonplace, horrible, contemptible, yet not so contemptible, she fancied, as this. Oh, if it had been any other man, and not Bellarmin, who had so loyal a face! Why did he not go? Why did he stand there silent, dazed-looking? If he stayed and questioned her, and went on gazing at her with that manly appeal in his eyes, she knew that she must break down, and betray herself past recall. And of what use were explanations and recriminations now? Had she not lowered herself enough? Had he not humiliated her enough in leading her on to confess her love? Oh, no, no! This
man, who six weeks ago would have been Lady Saxon's lover, was no mate for her. This was not the man to whom she, Mary Stuart Beaton, would have proudly given herself. He did not surely understand what it was that he dared to ask for. Did he think that she was to be bought with a six weeks' lukewarm devotion, and a heart with which Lady Saxon had played battledore and shuttlecock?

The fierce contempt which swelled up in her bosom seemed to gather in an hysterical lump in her throat and almost to strangle her.

"It will be better for you to leave me now," she said, very low. "I have nothing more to say—no other answer."

But Bellarmin would not submit so tamely. He went close up to her, his face very white and set, and his eyes brave and earnest.

"I don't question your right to make that decision, madame," he said; "I never dared to hope, till yesterday, that there could be any other. I knew very well that I wasn't good enough for you. But I think I have a right too, after yesterday, to know why you tell it to me like this. If things really were as you let me think they were yesterday'—and his voice faltered and softened with infinite tenderness—'then, I think, you should do me and yourself the justice to tell me why they have changed so suddenly."

"I cannot tell you," said Mary. "If you do not know—you must know why you should not have come to me."

"Yes," he said, after a moment's silence, "I do know." For at that moment the face of Lady Saxon seemed somehow to come up before his eyes; he saw her as he had just seen her when he was at Mary's door, and there was a smile of malign satisfaction on her lips, and he knew all. A whole flood of light was poured in upon him. Many things of which he had only vaguely thought before were clear to him now. He knew that he had an enemy, and that Mary had the same enemy; and he knew that his soul had been prophetic when it warned him of evil to come from the wild letter he had written to Lady Saxon.

"Oh! you do know?" Mary said, and a new blush came over her face, and there was a ring of pain and scorn in her voice.

"Yes; Lady Saxon has been with you?"

Mary nodded assent without speaking.

"And she has told you something about me which has changed you to me?"

In the faintest voice, and with her head partly turned away, Mary answered, "Yes."

"She has shown you a letter from me?"

"She has. I didn't read it all; I didn't want to read any of it; but she insisted on showing me part of it. Oh, and it was enough, enough, enough! and I didn't know who had written it at first, or why she wanted me to see it; and she told me who it was, and she made me see your name—and that is all, Mr Bellarmin, and it is enough for you and for me. There; we need not speak of it any more. She is a wicked and cruel woman; she is a traitress to you, and an unprovoked enemy to me. I am sorry for you, Mr Bellarmin, from my very heart; but there, it is all over."

"And can you really cast me off in this unpitying way because of one act of folly—because I allowed myself to be made for one
moment the victim of a woman like that? Can you make no allowances? oh! have you no pity?

'Pity? Oh, yes, my friend; I have, indeed. I feel for you, and do you think I don't feel for myself? But all the pity in the world wouldn't make you—what I so fondly believed you were—'

'What did you fondly believe I was that I am not now?' he asked, with something like anger in his voice.

'My lover,' she said, sweetly and simply; 'my own true lover; not the confessed lover of a woman who has had—oh, so many, such odious loves! No, it is a cruel disappointment, Mr Bellarmin; and a cruel calamity—yes, to you, I admit it, as well as to me. But there it is; and we must meet it. The man I would have loved—oh, let me speak it out plainly now, for this once—the man I loved, doesn't exist now. He is gone, and you stand in his place; and you are not my Rolfe Bellarmin, my hero, my lover.'

She let her arms fall as with the gesture of one who would signify that all is over. He felt stabbed to the heart.

'I submit,' he said, after a moment of deep silence; 'I don't complain; I don't make any appeal to you, Mary. I accept my sentence; I have deserved it; it is right I should bear it. No, I am not the man who should be your lover; you are right. I am not worthy of you; I seem to myself only like something impure as I stand near you. Well, I will go.'

Yet he did not move. He stood looking at her, perhaps in some faint hope even still that she would take pity and bid him stay. She looked suddenly up, and saw his appealing eyes fixed on her. She shook her head sadly.

'Yes; you must go,' she said. She turned away like one physically tired, and sat on a sofa a little distance from him. He moved towards her some steps; he took her hand; he seemed about to press it to his lips; but she suddenly withdrew it, and covered her eyes with it. He gave a low cry of pain. 'Good God!' he exclaimed. 'Do you believe me unworthy even to touch your hand?'

'Oh, no,' Mary said, earnestly. 'Forgive me. I hardly knew at the time.' She gave him her hand again. 'Good-bye.'

'For ever?' he asked, despairingly.

'For ever; yes. We may have to meet, of course; but—'

'Yes, I understand; I am heavily punished; but I am not disputing the justice of the punishment. Still, only think of it, Mary; think of what I might have had and what I have lost! And, listen, I have not been so bad as you think, perhaps. It was only that one absurd letter; it was nothing more than that. Oh, you must understand me; you must understand what I mean! It was only a moment of folly, nothing more—nothing.'

'I had thought of you as such a hero,' she said, with a strange, pathetic smile; 'and now you are—only like other men. Oh! why did you ever make love to me?' She broke down at last; she burst into a passion of tears. Perhaps if he had seized her hand then and kissed it, and poured out his penitence to her, and told her of his unalterable love for her and her alone, she might have relented even then, and taken him to her heart. But he would not; he had his own pride and his own sensitiveness, and while he admitted his
wrong-doing, he had yet a sense of wrong done to him—of a punish-
ment meted out to him far beyond the measure of his fault; and he
would not ask for pardon; he would not plead any more for pity.

'Oh, I am so much ashamed!' she said, and she writhed in the
mere pain of her humiliation; 'but I couldn't help it; I did love
you so much, and I thought so much of you; and it was all only an
illusion and a disappointment, and I should like to be alone, please.
There, let us shake hands—this once more.'

He took her hand and pressed it lightly, and then she drew it
away. It was very cold and tremulous, as he held it for that one short
half-moment. He moved towards the door; he paused a moment,
thinking, perhaps, that she might say something; but she did not
speak, and he left her without a word. She heard him go down-
stairs; then she ran to the window like an uncontrollable girl, and
looked out to see him depart. 'Will he look back?' she was think-
ing. No, he did not look back; he went doggedly on his way.
She returned to her sofa, and she buried her head in its pillows,
and sobbed as if her heart would break.

Bellarmin hurried away from the house. He did not quite know
where to turn to. He had a vague longing to be alone somewhere,
to let his feelings have their full sway.

Piercing through all the pangs of his rejection by Mary, there
came every now and then the thought of Lady Saxon's treachery.
So, then, she had betrayed him; she had come between his love
and him. Mary would have given herself to him but for Lady
Saxon. She had lured him and led him on to write that fatal letter
which she had used as a spell to blight his life. Little he thought
in that moment of the House of Commons, and of his parliamentary
career, and of the crisis that had come, and the rising political flood
which might be expected to float him up to success. He was
thinking only that he had lost Mary Beaton, and had lost her
through Lady Saxon. In the bitterness of his heart he was inclined
to curse Lady Saxon; and yet the manly truthfulness of his nature
broke out, and made him say to that embittered heart that he ought
rather to curse himself. He looked back with contempt upon him-
self, and upon the moments when he had yielded to his unworthy
passion for the woman who had now betrayed him in such ignoble
sort. He did not want to see her again. He did not want to write
to her or to reproach her. There came back upon his mind, in a
curious, grimly humorous way, a recollection of the scene in the
once famed, now forgotten 'Beggar's Opera,' where Macheath,
betrayed by his false true-love, and suddenly confronting her for
one moment before his captors have power to seize him—he, strong,
well-armed, and desperate, standing face to face with the traitress
—drops his hands, and only looks into her eyes and asks, 'Was
this well done, Jenny?' and Jenny shrinks away from his mild
remonstrance, more abashed than threat or violence would have
made her.
CHAPTER XXXV.

CHAMPION'S MOTION.

The thunder-cloud at last had broken. The long-expected flash had come. At least, it had long been believed that something was coming, and now it had come, and the political world knew what it was like. Sir Victor Champion had announced his intention to go in for the reorganisation of the House of Lords, and the two great parties in Parliament were already broken up.

So people said, so everybody kept saying, in London. The Liberal Party was broken up, for Lord Saxon positively would not go with Champion, and was telling his friends loudly in his clubs and wherever he went that he would not go with Champion. On the other hand, the Conservative Party was broken up, for it had been publicly declared in the House of Commons by Bellarmin that he and his Progressive Democrats would go with Champion. The great question was, which secession would carry along with it the larger number of seceders? So far as mere influence was concerned, the influence of Lord Saxon was by far the greatest which the expected break-up involved; but then, after all, mere family and territorial influence counts for less and less in our days, when compared with the direct and practical power of the vote. Men who professed to be impartial shook their heads over the prospects of the government. Yes; they have got Saxon, it was admitted; but how many will Saxon carry with him? Will he take as many, half as many, quarter as many, as Bellarmin's Progressive Tories? ‘Champion is tremendous with the country,’ such men said; ‘he'll make half a dozen speeches, and then you'll see.’

Lord Saxon left the House of Commons on the evening when Champion gave his notice in a mood of mind that bordered on the phantom-haunted confines of mania. He had been deeply wounded. He believed himself the victim of the darkest and most wanton treachery. That very day he had come up to town and had gone early to his club, and there again had insisted to several men he knew that Victor Champion had no immediate intention of making any important movement. Then he went home and was met—rather was rushed at—by Lady Saxon, who, with flashing eyes and voice of passion, assured him that she had found out the whole plot: that Champion had been a traitor to him; that Champion had taken half the world into his confidence, and deliberately left Saxon out; that Champion had negotiated with Bellarmin, with the Ministry, with Tressel even—yes, yes; Tressel had been in the whole thing—and that he had purposely kept him, Lord Saxon, deceived and in the dark.

Still Saxon refused to believe her story; he sometimes grew almost angry with her. But she pressed her proofs on him.

‘Was I not always urging you to go with Champion?’ she asked him, ‘until I found out that he was acting treacherously to you? Why should I try to turn you against him now, if I had not good reason?’
Saxon had to acknowledge that there was reason in what she said. She had been Champion's most ardent eulogist; she had done her very best to persuade Saxon to go with him—up to a certain time; now she was suddenly turned against him, and she admonished Saxon to beware of treason.

Saxon little suspected what the nature of that treason was that fired his wife's heart with the longing to thwart and destroy Sir Victor Champion. He little guessed what the offence was that had brought on Champion all the hatred of a scorned and maddened woman. He only feared that she had reason too good for her warnings and her prophecies; and yet he shrank from the thought; he could not believe that his old friend had acted unfairly with him. It was only when he sat by Champion and heard him give his notice, that he first learned what seemed to him the full truth.

Let us do Saxon justice. He was not actuated merely by the emotion of disappointed friendship and wounded self-love. Such emotions influenced him deeply; but they were not all. He was cruelly hurt, indeed, for he had a secret conviction that one reason why Champion kept his counsels from him was because Champion did not think it necessary to trouble himself by taking any such counsel. 'I have just to tell Saxon what he has got to do and he'll do it;' that, no doubt, was the spirit in which he had been dealt with. Lady Saxon had said as much to him again and again, and was she not right? But Saxon also was honestly of opinion that Champion, in his motion, was going much too far and too fast. It was a mine sprung upon him, and upon the country, and Saxon thought that every man who loved order and peace was bound to resist and resent such a policy. The deeper his former admiration and reverence for his old leader, the keener was his disappointment, and the more glowing his anger. Whole fountains of wrath, perturbed and smoky geysers of passion, seemed to be bubbling and boiling up in Lord Saxon's breast. Even Josephine, much as she was gratified for the moment by the sight of his anger against Sir Victor, felt alarmed now and then as she saw how his nature, usually so stolid and settled, could be shaken and torn by passion.

The whole outlook was full of alarm and of menace. 'Is the country to be convulsed for the sake of one man's mad ambition?' some people asked. 'Will the country fail to recognise its leader and its saviour?' was the demand of others.

'Madame,' said Lord Stonehenge to Mary Beaton, as they sat alone together one day, 'I am distressed by the change in you. I don't think this London life agrees with you, for indeed you look very ill.'

They had been talking about business matters; the probable restoration of the Stuart property, and certain legal lights, which an eminent counsel, interested in Mary's romantic position, had been throwing upon the case; the present political situation, and Champion's implied promise—of which Lord Stonehenge had been informed—to advocate Mary's claims.

Mary was playing with her chatelaine, and putting in a word or two in a listless, preoccupied manner. She had thrown herself in a large arm-chair, and it was when a side-gleam of light played upon
Champion's Motion.

her face and seemed to throw up the sharpened outline of her cheek, and to bring into greater evidence the depression and violet circles beneath her eyes, that Lord Stonehenge had broken off and abruptly remarked upon her altered appearance.

' I am not ill,' she answered. 'I am only tired—tired of the whole thing.' She lifted her arms with a sigh, and clasped them behind her head, while she looked at him mournfully. 'I should like to give it all up,' she said—'the Stuart claims, the London life—everything. Do you think it would be possible for me to give it all up, Lord Stonehenge, and go back to Schwalbenstadt again?'

'You don't really mean that, madame?'

'Indeed, I do. My life here is a failure.'

'Come, now, do not say that,' he exclaimed. 'If you knew what joy you had brought—'

'It is true. And I hate all this wire-pulling—this personal interest—nothing for the righteousness of the cause; all because I am young and not ill-looking; and my lord here, and my lord there, are good enough to throw their handkerchiefs to me—I will not have it. I cannot have it. I thought once that I should like the part. Can it be, Lord Stonehenge, that I am too honest for the people I have to do with here, or is that only my self-conceit?'

She laughed a little, dreary laugh. Lord Stonehenge was silent for a moment or two.

'No, madame; it would not be possible for you to go back to Schwalbenstadt; and even if it were, you would be doing a great injustice to yourself, to your cause, and to those who have devoted themselves to it.'

'What good does it do me?' she cried, impulsively. 'And what is the forfeited inheritance, after all? It is not the real Stuart inheritance, or the real Stuart claim. All that is in the shadowy past and the shadowy future, though now they try to bring it down to the vulgar practical present. I loved it when it meant a dream-world of my own, which could not be invaded by the common crowd. But now—now—it seems to me, Lord Stonehenge, that only one remains in my world with the poetry of the past in him; and that is yourself. Falcon is so strange, so grim, so unlike himself. Every one is changed; and people I trusted don't seem quite worth trusting, and I am lonely—that is the truth—and sick at heart.'

'Is there nothing I can do,' Lord Stonehenge said, earnestly, 'to make you feel less lonely? It is for you to speak—to speak, or to forbid me silently; but it is more than I can bear to hear you say such things, to see you looking ill and sad, when I would give my life gladly to save you from trouble. That is very little,' he added, with a melancholy smile; 'for life is not so valuable a thing at best. I would give more than my life to make you happy.'

The tears came to Mary's eyes. She bent forward, and gently touched his hand with hers.

'I believe you,' she said, simply. 'Yes, I do think you care for me—better than anyone in the world.'

'Ah, madame,' he replied, in a trembling voice, 'since I ask for nothing in return, I may, indeed, tell you that I love you with my whole heart and soul. I wanted you to understand that long ago.'
Mary gazed at him for a moment in a solemn way.

‘Why did you want me to understand that?’ she said. ‘Did you think, Lord Stonehenge, that perhaps some day I might marry you? Did you wish that?’

A slight flush came over Lord Stonehenge’s sensitive face.

‘I have loved you, madame, with no hope of winning you for my own, for I have seen too clearly that I am not the man whom you could love. My love for you is of the old time, and of the lost cause, I think; I did not put anything else in the balance with it. But—oh, I do wish that you could love me!’

By some strange and sudden thrill of association his words and tone awakened in Mary’s heart the echo of Bellarmin’s passionate cry, ‘Am I sure that I love you?’ Her breast was pierced by a vivid bolt of remembrance that was like the stab of a dagger; she seemed to see Bellarmin again before her, his eyes all alight, and his face white with fervour. She did not speak, but stooped forward and covered her face with her hands. Lord Stonehenge watched her in mingled dread and hope. Presently she let her hands fall, and said in a curious, strained voice,—

‘Lord Stonehenge, I was going to say to you that I will marry you if you wish it—if you think I can give you enough. There is no one in the world I honour and admire as I do you; no one in the world with whom I should feel so safe; no one who loves me so well. It must make a girl happy to be so loved by a man like you,’ Mary added, impetuously, looking at him with pathetic questioning. But she would not let him answer. ‘No; I have something to tell you first—something which you will think it strange for me to tell—for a girl who is proud of herself. I did think, only a little while ago, that I cared for someone; I almost told him so—yes, I did tell him so! And then I learned quite suddenly that just six weeks before he had been in love with another woman—a married woman. And that kind of love wasn’t good enough for me, Lord Stonehenge. I was too proud to be content with that. So I sent him away.’

Mary spoke hurriedly, and with eyes that were bent down as she nervously fingered Queen Mary’s pomander on her chatelaine. Stonehenge did not reply to the confession which it had cost her much to make. He was so long before making any sign or movement that Mary looked up at him, and was smitten to the heart at seeing the deep dejection, the despair on his face. It was something more than mere personal regret.

‘Oh,’ she exclaimed, in compunction, ‘I always bring trouble on the people who care for me! I know what you feel. This is not what ought to be for the last of the Stuarts; it should have been different from this. But all that would not have mattered if he had been worthy. I should have been proud and glad. That is enough, Lord Stonehenge. We won’t speak of it any more; it is over. Will you help me to forget?’

‘I will do my best, madame,’ he answered, in a mechanical manner.

‘But—’ She stopped short, and the crimson rose again in her cheek. ‘I want you to understand—’
I do understand, only too well,' he said, with melancholy gravity, though there was the ring of strong emotion in his voice. 'I do understand the feeling that makes you turn to me, and I am deeply touched and honoured and grateful, madame. But I couldn't take advantage of the kindly, tender impulse. I couldn't commit you on the moment to something that you might be sorry for by-and-by, when the mood is past. I love you too well for that.'

'Then I am to lose you too,' she said, mournfully. 'Soon I shall have no one left.'

'Oh, no!' He took her hand, which was lying close to him on the arm of her chair, suddenly in his own, and pressed it to his lips. 'I am here beside you always,' he said; 'your devoted servant, your faithful friend, your lover, your very lover, if it would not pain you to think of me so; but not your accepted husband—not with any, the faintest claim upon you—unless after six months had gone, and you had the time to think and to know yourself, you were to come to me and say that you wished it still, and that I had really helped you to forget. Then, oh then, Mary—'

There was a short pause. She let him keep her hand in his. Her mind and heart were full of conflicting thoughts and feelings.

'You are very loyal,' she said, at length. 'There is nobody like you. It's best in this way, and we won't speak of it now any more. Forget what I said to you—for the present, at least. By-and-by, when the time comes, we will talk of it again—if everything remains the same.'

She withdrew her hand, and sighed that dreary little sound which made his heart ache; but he said nothing. Presently Mary went on in a composed tone,—

'Since I can't go back to Schwalbenstadt—and I daresay I should be sorry if I went, when this mood is past, as you say—since I can't do that, I should like to go somewhere out of London for a little while, to get away from people and politics and everything, and to be alone with myself, in some pretty country where there were green glades and forest trees. I should like to go just with General Falcon and Struthers. Indeed, if I could be without poor, old, grim, ill-tempered Falcon, and kind, stupid Lady Struthers, I should be better pleased still; but I suppose I couldn't, and I think it would do Falcon good to be out of the turmoil and excitement of this debate. I am uneasy about poor old Falcon, Lord Stonehenge. I am sure he is not well. He is too anxious about all this.'

'That is natural enough,' said Stonehenge, quietly; 'we are all anxious. This debate on Sir Victor's motion will probably determine the fate of the ministry. His speech had a tremendous effect on the House of Commons, everyone says. If there is an appeal to the country, it is almost a certainty that Champion will come in; and then, madame, it is almost equally certain that your claims will be settled. But I agree with you. It does Falcon no good to be hanging about the House of Commons, and racking his brain over possibilities and probabilities. Now here is a suggestion. Why shouldn't you go down and take possession of Stonehenge Park? It is lonely enough to please you, for there is no one there, not even Dr Amblaine, and big enough to lose Falcon and Lady Struthers
in if you wanted to. You would not have even me to trouble you, for I must stop in London for the present.'

'Thank you,' said Mary, simply. 'Yes; I should like that. I should like to be at Stonehenge again. It must be very lovely now; but the roses are almost over—and the lilies, too.'

'There are plenty of other flowers, and there is your pine wood which you were so fond of. So it is decided, madame, and you have only to name your own day.'

'I should like to go soon,' said Mary; 'very soon, if I can get General Falcon to consent. I don't want to hear any of this debate. I didn't go even to hear Sir Victor's speech. They have got seats in the Ladies' Gallery for me for the closing day, but I could not—I don't want to be there.'

'It will be an historical day,' said Stonehenge. 'Champion will reply.'

'I think I want Sir Victor to carry his motion,' said Mary. 'I am sure that he is sincere and enthusiastic in his love for his country, and I could not believe that he is only seeking power. You remember the talk that day at Stonehenge between him and Monsignor Valmy; the true reformer, who seems to be destroying, is, in reality, building up a better system of things. I hope it is so with Sir Victor in this. But, Lord Stonehenge,' she added, impulsively, 'I feel that there is something behind unworthy of a great man and a great question. I believe that there has been treachery, and that Lord Saxon has not been dealt with fairly. I believe that Lady Saxon is a false woman, and that she has turned her husband against his old colleague.'

'That is Mr Tressel's idea,' said Stonehenge, 'and he rejoices, for it was always his game that Sir Victor should throw over the Whigs.'

It was to draw Mary out of her mood of dejection, and away from morbid thought, that Lord Stonehenge encouraged her to talk of the political situation. He had noticed that she seemed to dislike mentioning Lady Saxon's name, or talking of politics at all; and he hailed this voluntary allusion to them as a healthier sign. He himself was not deeply concerned in the great question, though in a sense it touched upon his own prerogative; he lived too much in the past for that.

They wandered back to the Stonehenge scheme, which seemed to have raised Mary's spirits, and to bring light to her eyes.

'There is nothing to keep us in London,' she said; 'nothing of importance, except these interviews with Sir Hector Sloane.' She named the eminent counsel, who, in pure friendliness, was interesting himself in the legal aspects of her claim. 'I have to go to his chambers one day with Falcon to show him some papers I have of my mother's, and to answer a few questions he wants to ask me. That is all.'

Contrary to Mary's expectation, Falcon took kindly to the plan, and showed no unwillingness to leave London at this critical period. He appeared to fall in with his young mistress's fancy for retirement and solitude, and for the diminishing of her personal retinue. He set himself at once to make the necessary arrangements, of which, after a certain preliminary show of deference to Miss Beaton's
wishes, he in all cases took the entire management. Their de­
parture was fixed two days thence, and Falcon went immediately
to Seamore Place and held a short consultation with Lady Saxon.

The days went by, and the great debate was going on—was
drawing to its close. This was the Thursday evening, and the
understanding on all sides was that Friday should bring it to an
division should be taken some time on Saturday
end, and that division should be taken some time on Saturday
morning. Friday, the closing day, was to have a debate fitted to
close so spirited a controversy. Lord Saxon was expected to make
a tremendous attack on his late leader. Bellarmin had not yet
spoken—perhaps he, too, was reserving himself for the closing day,
people said. Sir Victor Champion would have the right of final
reply on the whole debate, and he would be sure to make splendid
use of it. On the whole, the Friday discussion was likely to be
brilliant and memorable.

Bellarmin was in his place shortly before the dinner hour on
Thursday. The House was well filled even yet, for one of Lord
Saxon's followers was making a rattling attack on Champion, and
would finish his speech before long.

'Bellarmin,' a low, tuneful, insinuating voice whispered in our
young friend's ear, 'Champion particularly wishes you to move the
adjournment.'

'All right,' Bellarmin answered. 'You'll arrange about it?'

'Of course, yes.' Bellarmin's interlocutor was one of the Opposi­
tion whips entrusted with the arrangement of the debate on Sir
Victor Champion's side.

'I'm told,' said somebody sitting near Bellarmin, 'that Lord
Saxon wants to move the adjournment.'

'Oh, but he can't,' the whip sharply replied. 'We couldn't have
that. He is out of the question. Why, one of your government
fellows is to close the debate to-night, and Saxon would only be
following on the same side.'

'Well, he wants to do it, I hear, all the same.'

'He can't do it, then—all the same. He may make up his mind
to that.'

'He is dreadfully angry with Champion, you know.'

'He'll have to control his anger, then. Bellarmin, you'll be
here at the right time?'

'Yes, certainly.'

The man who moves the adjournment at the close of a night's
debate has the right to open the debate next evening. It is always
arranged beforehand by the whips that this or that man shall move
the adjournment—it is arranged by common agreement between
the whips of the parties, and the agreement is made known to Mr
Speaker. Every night in a great debate the question begins to be
asked early, 'Who has got the adjournment?' To have got the
adjournment is to show that one is a person of some mark in his
party. An obscure or insignificant man never thinks of asking for
it. If he did ask for it, the whip of his party would be about as
much surprised as Tommy Atkins' colonel would be if Tommy were
to express to him a wish to be invited to dinner by the Duke of
Cambridge.
This particular night there was great excitement about the adjournment. The curious condition of things had broken the House for a time into four parties—the Ministerialists, the Liberal Opposition, the Liberal Secessionists, and Bellarmin’s Progressive Tories. The number of the parties did not, however, constitute the peculiarity of the situation. The peculiarity was in the curious cross-fire which the debate must bring about. Lord Saxon and his followers sat on the Liberal side, still claimed to be Liberals, would not admit that they were anything but Liberals, and yet on this subject they were going to support the Conservative Government and to oppose the men who sat with Champion on their own benches beside them. Then, on the other hand, Bellarmin and his little party, who sat on the Government side below the gangway, and were, of course, habitual supporters of the Government, were going on this occasion to give their support to Champion, and to join in the attack on the Ministerial policy. Things were, indeed, in American phrase, a little mixed. Now, in the ordinary course of affairs, it is understood that in a great debate the Speaker shall call a man from either side of the House in turn. That seems real debate—attack by this side, defence by that. In ordinary cases the two sides of the House represent the two sides of the debate, the two sides of the question. But it was not so in this debate, where on either side the men below the gangway were to fire on the men above the gangway—above their own gangway.

Bellarmin did not personally like the idea of moving the adjournment. It meant the opening of the debate next day in the crude discouraging daylight, and with all the steam of the evening’s controversy still to be got up. It meant the replying to arguments which were already getting cold and out of date—the arguments of the evening before. There was nothing inspiring to him in such a performance; it seemed to him too much of a mere performance. His desire always was to get up in the later and glowing hours of a great debate—the Memnon-fountain hours that only glow when midnight is drawing near—to get up at such a time and answer some powerful speech in the best way he could on the spur of the moment. But he understood that Sir Victor Champion wished to pay him a compliment and to recognise his position, and he undertook to move the adjournment. He was all the more determined when it presently got whispered about that Lord Saxon had really set his heart on moving the adjournment. Saxon had got into one of his obstinate moods, it was said. He had taken it into his head that Champion’s motive in trying to prevent him from moving the adjournment after a Conservative had spoken was to proclaim to the world that he, Saxon, was no longer a Liberal but a Tory. What right had Champion to assume that? And if he did not assume it, why should not Liberal follow Conservative, and vice versa, according to the regular order of debate? What was to be done if neither would give way? The Speaker was quite impartial, would call either according as they could agree among themselves. There was incessant coming and going between the whips and the leaders and the Speaker. Curiosity in the House became greatly aroused. The question was assuming portentous dimensions. Up
to midnight the negotiations were still going forward. Lord Saxon was known to be a man of great strength of will and self-sufficiency, when he had made up his mind to do anything. Bellarmin was known to be a man who, when once he had made up his mind, could not easily be induced to unmake it. The question was not one of real importance in any sense, but it was very exciting, all the same. A little before midnight, Bellarmin came in and took his place on the first seat of the third row of benches below the gangway on the Government side. 'Oh, it's all settled!' people said; 'he has got the adjournment evidently.'

Five minutes after, Lord Saxon, in evening dress, his heavy, handsome face flushed and sullen, entered and took his place on the bench exactly opposite. All men's calculations were disturbed again. 'What is going to happen?' people asked. 'Is there going to be a public struggle for the right to move the adjournment?'

Could there be? Yes, indeed, there could. For if both men rose together, and the Speaker called on one, the moment that one put into words his motion 'That this debate be now adjourned,' there was nothing to prevent the other man or anyone else from getting up and opposing the motion, and starting a debate on the proposal for adjournment; and then, if the resistance to the adjournment were pressed to a division and were successful, the member who had moved the adjournment would have thereby lost his right to speak at that stage of the debate. His formal motion for the adjournment would have acquired technically the value of a speech, and his turn would be over for the present.

'We'll fight this,' Bellarmin said to his merry men, and the merry men were delighted.

'Send across to Champion; find out what he thinks,' some impartial and colourless person suggested to Bellarmin.

'No, no; we had better make this stroke off our own bat,' he replied.

In another moment there came across the floor from Champion the unsolicited advice, 'Don't give way.'

All this got known, and the excitement was intense. The ministerialist orator, who was slapping the table in front of the Treasury bench in accompaniment of his own eloquence, was bewildered and dismayed to see that on neither side of the House were members even looking towards him. They were looking away from him; they were looking eagerly below the gangway on either side. He saw that something was going on; he saw that there were hurried consultations taking place between the Speaker and the whips; between the whips and the leaders on both sides; on the bench beside him, under his own very eyes and ears. He became confused; he lost himself in his speech, and could not find himself again; he would have to bring his harangue to a close. Then suddenly he became a subject of interest to the House, and members hung upon his words not for the sake of anything in the words themselves, but that they were evidently the closing words, and the moment he sat down the struggle would begin, the rare, unwonted, almost scandalous struggle. The hurry and scurry of the whips grew wilder; the heads of all the men on the front benches were bent down in con-
The Rival Princess.

sultation; several eager friends of Lord Saxon's were behind him, and below him, and at his side, urging, arguing, entreating. Bellarmin sat quiet and resolute. In another second or two the orator must be down.

Just as the orator was glancing behind him to see that he did not come plump down upon his hat, the attention of the House wholly deserted him again. For now Lord Saxon rose slowly and deliberately from his place, and with a look of sullen self-control passed down the floor and out of the House. Then everyone knew that the struggle was over; and when Bellarmin, two seconds after, rose and uttered the simple words, 'Mr Speaker, I move that this debate be now adjourned,' he was cheered by his friends as enthusiastically as if he had delivered a Demosthenic oration.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

'YOU ARE MY PRISONER.'

MARY BEATON and General Falcon were getting into their carriage, which was waiting for them near the Temple Gardens. It was about five o'clock in the afternoon, and they had been for some time at the chambers of the great counsel, Sir Hector Sloane.

There was a slight shade of impatience on Mary's face. She had been kept waiting in Sir Hector's ante-room, and our princess, though she was very sweetly forgiving about trifles, did not like to be kept waiting even by an eminent barrister when she made a visit. True, the whole thing had been an accident—a mistake about the hour; some wrong wording of a telegram, a misunderstanding with Falcon; but it had caused them to miss the train by which they were going that afternoon to Stonehenge Park; and they were to have met Lady Struthers with the servants and luggage at Charing Cross station. Mary was annoyed by what she supposed to be Falcon's bad management.

' I must say, general,' she said, almost peevishly, as Falcon gave the order 'Home' to the coachman, and followed her into the brougham, 'that you, who are usually so exact in your arrangements, for once have not distinguished yourself. It really seems to me that the interview with Sir Hector might have been appointed for an earlier time in the day, not just for the hour before we were to start.'

'Sir Hector's time is not his own, madame, and the appointment, even though it was with you, had to be made to suit his other business,' said Falcon, with a certain grim composure. 'But for the mistake in the telegram, which I explained to you, there would have been more than enough of time for everything, and you would have been spared a tiresome drive back to Kensington, and again to Charing Cross. I am sorry, madame; but accidents of this kind cannot always be avoided, and you admit that my plans, as a rule, fit in well.'
Like a Chinese puzzle, general,' said Mary, recovering herself.

'Well, never mind. I am sorry for poor Lady Struthers, who, I suppose, is waiting resignedly on the platform.'

'No, madame. Lady Struthers and the servants are well on their way to Stonehenge by this time. I took the precaution, when I saw that delay was unavoidable, to send a messenger from Sir Hector's chambers to bid her go on without us, and have a carriage sent to meet the next train, which will get us down there between ten and eleven.'

Mary looked at him surprised. 'You did that, Falcon? Why? It would have been better for Lady Struthers to wait for me.'

'I have to beg your pardon, madame, for not consulting you. The special saloon had been ordered, and the Stonehenge carriages were to meet us; that arrangement seemed to me the least complicated. I thought that I might consider myself a sufficient escort.'

'Oh, certainly; it is no matter. I am sure you always understand that sort of thing best;' and Mary did not argue the question.

Eight o'clock was striking when the brougham, returning, stopped in the Charing Cross yard. Falcon piloted Mary through the booking office to the platform. Their train left a little after eight. He put her at once into a compartment which he had secured, and which the guard immediately locked. Mary sank into the angle of the cushions, and leaned her head back, taking no notice of the few passengers who walked to and fro on the platform. She seemed heavy and tired, and a little confused. By-and-by, when the train had been a short while in motion, she roused herself by an evident effort, threw back her cloak, took off her gloves, and, pulling down the window, gazed in a bewildered way upon the fields and hedges through which they were passing.

It was still light, but the sky was muggy and clouded, and a sort of drizzling rain had set in, so that the dusk seemed to have fallen earlier than usual. Presently Mary drew back her head and made an impatient gesture, as if she were trying to collect herself.

'I feel like a person in a dream,' she said, with a laugh; 'everything seems out of proportion, and hazy and odd. It's the thunder in the air, I suppose. How silently you sit there, general! I wish you wouldn't keep your eyes fixed on me like that; it makes me think—'

'I thought you seemed tired, madame.'

'I am not tired—at least, I oughtn't to be; but I can't understand what makes me so dazed and drowsy. Is it Sir Hector's long table of genealogy, do you suppose, Falcon? If I had been dining anywhere but in my own house, and so modestly, too, I might have imagined that some evil-disposed person had drugged my one glass of claret with the idea of robbing me on my journey.'

Falcon laughed in an odd, harsh manner.

'That might well have been possible, if you had trusted yourself to anyone but your faithful Falcon, madame. You are safe with me. Close your eyes and sleep, Mary,' he said, his tone taking a sudden tenderness. 'My eyes will not grow weary of watching you.'

The girl shook her head and drew herself upright; but gradually, and in spite of her will, her form relaxed, and the drowsy, fantasie-
like feeling intensified. She was not asleep, but her brain was in that curiously excited condition which is sometimes produced by opium, when everything seems unreal, and the sense of continuity and of the relations of things is lost; but when the imagination seems to be working at express speed, and mental images stand out with startling clearness, and succeed each other with a marvellous rapidity. Every now and then the rattle of the carriage or the shriek of the engine would recall Mary for a moment from some wild flight of thought to the consciousness of Falcon sitting opposite her, his eyes fixed upon her with a mesmeric intensity; and then her fancies would wander again, sometimes back into her remote past, and she would see vividly scenes and companions of her childhood that in her normal condition she had completely forgotten.

'We must get out here,' she heard Falcon's voice say at last, and she jumped up in an uncertain manner, startled into the partial recovery of her faculties by the sensation that the train had stopped, and by the touch of Falcon's cold fingers on her bare hand. Their coldness gave her a shock, and she felt that they were trembling, and vaguely wondered what ailed the old man. He picked up her wraps and small belongings, and gave them to a servant, muffled up in a waterproof, standing at the carriage door. Then he helped her to get out, and, he putting her arm in his, they followed the servant past the ticket receiver, through a gate, and down a cutting into the road. Except for the feeble light of the railway lamps placed at long intervals down the platform, it was gru­esomely dark, almost pitch dark out in the road, for there was no moon, and none of the stars were visible. It was raining heavily now. Falcon hurried Mary into a close barouche that was waiting, and stepped forward to exchange a few words with the coachman. He came back and got in; the footman shut the carriage door, and they were driven rapidly away through the plashing puddles and the beating rain.

It was a long drive, as Mary knew, to Stonehenge Park, and somehow it seemed longer than ever this evening. The carriage was shut up and dark, and they drove for some distance without talking. The cloud of bewilderment was gradually lifting itself from Mary's mind. She began to wonder vaguely what had caused it, and if it were possible that she could by accident have taken some narcotic, and, if that were so, whether Falcon had done the same thing and was affected by it. Perhaps that might account for his being so silent. She was scarcely able to reason or to think back collectedly, and sat still, rather enjoying the dreary sound of the rain and the rapid motion of the carriage. Once or twice she let the window down a little, and tried to see; but all the outlines of the landscape were hidden, and it was impossible for her to make out anything familiar.

Falcon made hardly any answer to her fitful efforts at conversation, and at length so long a silence came that she thought he must be asleep. She wondered when they were going to reach the lodge­gates; and by-and-by she told herself that they must have done so, for the carriage stopped, and there was a drawing of iron bolts and a clanking to again after they had passed through. Then there came another and a prolonged stoppage, and Mary uttered a cry of sur-
prise as a sudden shaft of light, piercing the darkness from an opening door, showed her only high grey walls on both sides of her.

‘Where are we?’ she said. ‘This is not Stonehenge Park.’

The muffled man-servant threw back the carriage door, and a breath of fresh salt air blew with the raindrops on to Mary’s face. Falcon got out and gave her his hand, and all in wonder she stepped from the carriage on to the pavement of a courtyard. She looked round full of astonishment, half excited by what she supposed to be some mishap or adventure, and far from suspecting any plot to entrap her. She saw the castellated outline of a fortress-like building, with an arch of stone-work and massive entrance door partially open in front of her, and a buttressed wall to her right, over which the salt wind came in gusts, while below it she fancied that she could hear the sound of waves roaring.

‘Have they lost their way and brought us to the wrong place, General Falcon?’ she asked, imperiously. ‘This is by the sea. Explain, please, unless you are as much in the dark as I am.’

‘I can explain, madame, but not here in the rain,’ Falcon answered; and he hurried her to the entrance, where a respectable and well-dressed elderly German woman stood, holding a lamp in her hand. The woman made a silent salutation, which Mary courteously returned, and preceded them into a dimly lighted, stone-paved hall that was already familiar to Falcon.

‘It appears, madame,’ he said to Mary, ‘that in the darkness we got into the wrong carriage, and have been brought to Lady Saxon’s house, Petrel’s Rest.’

‘To Petrel’s Rest!’ echoed Mary. She gave a start, and seemed to shrink involuntarily, as though the idea of being Lady Saxon’s guest were hateful to her. ‘Is Lady Saxon here?’ she asked, turning to the housekeeper.

The woman replied in German that her ladyship was not at Petrel’s Rest.

‘How, then, came the carriage to be at the station?’ asked Mary, quickly.

The woman shook her head. Her ladyship came or did not come, as it pleased her. She was always uncertain. The carriage had been very often ordered to meet her ladyship, and she had changed her mind at the last moment, and not arrived.

‘You see,’ put in Falcon, hastily, ‘it is only a blunder. I will go and make inquiries. In the meantime, madame,’ he added in German, ‘the housekeeper will perhaps have the goodness to show you to a room where you can wait in comfort.’

‘I can wait here,’ replied Mary. ‘Truly, misfortune seems to pursue us to-day, general; and this is a more serious blunder than the loss of our train.’

Just then there appeared Lady Saxon’s German butler, the attendant of the late Baron Langenwelt, with whom Falcon was acquainted. This person bowed deferentially to Mary, and, politely drawing Falcon a little distance aside, talked with him for a few moments in so low a tone that the conversation was lost on Mary.

‘Well?’ she asked, when Falcon returned.

‘It may be a short time before we can get off; it might, indeed,
be better for us to remain here for the night. I will find out. There are some rooms here always kept in readiness, and a fire lighted. You must be cold and tired and damp, madame, and I advise you to take this opportunity of rest and refreshment. I will come to you presently.'

Mary nodded acquiescence, and followed the housekeeper, who, her lamp in her hand, led the way up a long and irregular flight of stone stairs. The staircase might have figured in a mediaeval romance, Mary thought, it was so old and so strange and silent. There was something ominous in the silence, and something oppressive in the solitude and ghostliness of the place. The staircase did not go far, but stopped at a corridor, at the end of which was one massive door. The woman unlocked the door, and Mary found herself in a curious-looking sitting-room, almost semi-circular in shape, lined with tapestry, and with a curtained archway in the straight side of the wall, evidently leading to a similar—probably a sleeping—apartment. It was as though these two rooms formed one storey of a tower projecting from the rest of the building, and Mary conjectured that its foundation must be lapped by the sea, for she fancied that she could hear the beating of the waves. The place had a chilly feeling, notwithstanding that a wood fire burned on the open hearth. It was lighted by candles in tall sconces, and there were some stiff oak chairs and tables and a straight-backed couch; but there were no books or knick-knacks or anything that betokened recent occupation. Mary seated herself before the fire and warmed her feet, and shook the raindrops from her light travelling-cloak. The housekeeper departed, and after a few minutes another and younger German woman entered, first with a tray on which were biscuits and wine, and then with a can of hot water that she carried into the bedroom, drawing aside the curtains, so that Mary now saw it was a room smaller and of the same shape as that she was in, lined also with tapestry, and having tall, black furniture and a canopied bed. It had apparently no outlet except through the room in which she was sitting and by that one door into the corridor.

'What an odd, romantic place!' the girl said, half aloud, and she began to wish almost that she might have to pass the night in these fairly comfortable quarters, and be spared the dreary, dark drive to Stonehenge Park. She was still sitting by the fire, taking a dreamy pleasure in its warmth and brightness—for, though it seemed muggy and close when they left London, the rain or the sea air had brought a feeling of chill—when the heavy door creaked on its hinges, and, without preliminary knock or announcement, Falcon walked in.

To Mary's astonishment and alarm, he bolted the door behind him, and came towards her with a masterful, determined air, and a strange, excited look on his face.

'What is the meaning of this, General Falcon?' she exclaimed, rising.

Falcon paused at the oak table in the centre of the room, and stood a few paces from her, one hand resting upon the table, the other at his hip, as if he were touching the hilt of an imaginary sword. His warrior-like attitude, the lean head, with ruffled, silvery hair, thrown back, and with the scar slanting across the forehead,
and the wild gleam of exultation in his eyes, frightened Mary, and deepened the fantastic impression that Falcon and she were playing parts in some drama of the Middle Ages.

'Madame,' said Falcon, in a deep, solemn tone, 'you are for the present—don't be alarmed or shocked—you are my prisoner.'

Mary started, very naturally. One who, in ordinary life, is told that he is somebody's prisoner, has generally had some reason to know in advance that such an announcement was likely to be made. He knows that he has done, or is doing, or is supposed to have done or to be doing, something which puts it in the power of someone else to take him into custody. But Mary had as little reason to expect such an announcement from Falcon as to expect that he would tell her he was about to put her to death. Her sensation could not be analysed; it was mere shock; the sudden suspension for the moment of the power to feel anything.

'General Falcon,' she exclaimed, at last, 'I will leave this place at once.'

'You cannot, madame, without my consent.'

'You are bound to obey me when I command you; and I do command you—'

'Ah!' he answered, with a wild smile; 'there are times when the truest and most devoted allegiance shows itself best in brave refusal to obey, refusal to let one's idol sacrifice herself. Were there not brave and faithful counsellors of Mary Stuart, who strove to save her from the consequences of her own caprices and of her own mistakes?

'There was one pretended devotee of Mary Stuart who brought destruction on her because he would not restrain his wild passion for her; is that the wise counsellor you speak of, General Falcon? Is it the example of Bothwell that you have in your mind when you try to compel me to bend to your wishes? But you, my dear old friend—her manner suddenly softened to him, because she saw that a shade of pain passed over his face when she spoke of Bothwell—'you are not a Bothwell any more than I am a Mary Stuart of that kind.'

The pang that went to Falcon's heart was only a pang of wounded conscience. He knew that his purpose had been to play in some sort the part of Bothwell.

'Princess,' he said, 'it is idle our talking in this way; you cannot change my purpose by any words of yours, and if you cannot, who could? I will not allow you to sacrifice yourself. You shall not marry any of these men. Stonehenge is the best of them, but he is not fit for you. You shall not marry him.'

'Then must I die an old maid, good Falcon?'

'Don't smile,' he exclaimed, fiercely; 'this is no matter to smile about—'

'No, truly,' Mary quietly interposed; 'though it is ridiculous enough, surely, to excuse a little levity.'

'You are not to die an old maid.'

'Come, that is gracious.' She could not, in all her danger, keep from indulging a little her sense of the absurdity of the whole situation. Falcon's eyes flashed ominously.
‘No, you are not to die an old maid—there is one man who loves you for yourself; who adores you—who will protect you against the world. I am your lover, Mary—your true and devoted lover; I have brooded over all this for years: it has sometimes well-nigh driven me mad; but now at last I see my way and yours. I see our way. It is decreed by fate; it is ordained by Heaven—you are to be my wife! This is God’s will, and that will shall be done,’

Mary now began to understand that she had to do not with a wild, eccentric lover, but with an actual madman. She felt a chill pass suddenly over her, and her hands trembled. But she came of a brave race—a race in which not even the women yielded much to fear; and she knew that now all depended on her nerves, her judgment, and her courage.

‘Dear General Falcon,’ she said, gently—and she put one hand on his arm with an appealing touch, while she looked into his wild eyes—‘why do you say such things? You must know that this cannot be. I am very fond of you—indeed, I love you dearly—in one way; but not in that way. You could not really want a girl of my age to marry you; you are too kind and good and self-sacrificing for that—it was not for that my father left his daughter in your care, was it? Dear old friend, let us say no more of this. I shall do my best to forget all you have said, and it shall make no difference between us; we shall be in the future just the same to each other as we were in the past.’

‘No, no, Mary; that can never be; I have broken the ice—I have passed my Rubicon; things can never again be as they were for you and me. I have thought of your father; I have dreamed of him again and again—if I were credulous, I should say I have seen him and spoken with him lately.’ Mary shuddered, and gave a slight groan. ‘No, I suppose it was a mere imagining; but I have seemed to see him, and to hear his words approving my purpose and urging it.’

‘O God!’ Mary exclaimed, stricken with horror at this terrible suggestion.

‘I have loved you so long, Mary; ever since you ceased to be a child. But I hardly quite knew it myself until lately; and I thought I should be glad and happy to see you married to some man worthy of you—some man who would love you, whom’—his voice fell to a low, reluctant tone—‘some man whom you—loved. But no, no, no!’ he exclaimed, loudly; ‘I couldn’t, couldn’t, couldn’t! I love you too much; and they are not worthy of you, these men here. Lord Stonehenge, what love has he in him? He couldn’t love you as you ought to be loved; and Champion, what does he care for, but his ambition and his politics and his career? And Bellarmin—Mary, you couldn’t love an idle, hare-brained young adventurer like that?’

There was something unspeakably pitiful and ludicrous in the single-minded, naked self-conceit of the unhappy Falcon. It touched Mary to the very heart. She felt ashamed to be thus made a spectator of his weakness and his self-degradation.

‘General Falcon,’ she said, with quiet dignity, ‘we must put a stop to all this. We need not go into the merits of all my various
'You are My Prisoner.'

friends. I shall not marry anyone I do not love, you may depend upon that—love with all my heart. I was near giving myself in marriage to one man whom I did not love, and never could love, in that way; and the prospect became so terrible to me as I came nearer to it that it has taught me a lesson long enough for all my life. And that is the reason, General Falcon, why I cannot marry you; and as you are a soldier and a gentleman, I ask you to be contented with it.'

'Contented with it—and without you? Never, Mary. I am a soldier, and I am a gentleman; and because of that I feel that I am not unworthy of you. Come, madame, let us be reasonable. I have you here in my power, and I will not let you go. You shall be treated with all the respect due to a princess, and to the woman whom I adore; but you are a captive princess, Mary; and captive you shall remain until you consent to come out free and be my wife.'

'Do you know,' she asked, in growing impatience,' that this is the nineteenth century, and that we are within a short distance of London; and that there is a railway station close at hand, and that the sea, covered with steamers, is breaking on the shore just under the windows? What is the meaning of your attempt to play off some mediæval melodrama here? For Heaven's sake, think of yourself, General Falcon!'

'The nineteenth century has its passions and its melodramas just as well as any of the furthest centuries,' Falcon answered, grimly; 'and it has no passion stronger and more resolved than mine. The sea covered with steamers! I wonder when a steamer last came within hail of this place? Railways! How are you to get to a railway? How is anyone to get from a railway to you? The few people who are in this house are devoted to me and to my purpose; they will not mind what you say.'

'Whose plot is this?' Mary demanded. 'It has not all been conceived and executed by you? Who has helped you in it?'

'No, it is not entirely mine. I have a friend who will sustain me in all I am doing; who has again and again urged me to do it—to save you by doing it. You may as well know it at once, Mary; it will show you that I am not acting without counsel and support. This is Lady Saxon's house; she has put it at my disposal. I brought you here by her advice,'

'Lady Saxon!' Mary cried out. 'That woman! my enemy! I knew she hated me; but I never could have believed this! Falcon, it is not possible that Lady Saxon can be your accomplice in such a shameful and such a senseless act?'

'She is my accomplice, as you choose to call it so. She is my friend; she has given me her house; her yacht is lying at anchor, ready, whenever you like, to carry you and me to some brighter land than this hateful England. We have thought of everything. Do you know,' he whispered, with a gleam of maniacal cunning in his eyes, and a sort of chuckle in his voice—'do you know what we thought of doing, if it should prove necessary? We thought of telling the servants that you were mad; were out of your senses; and had to be kept under restraint until proper medical attention
The Rival Princess.

could be got for you. Ha, Mary! what do you think of that? Who would mind anything you said then?

"My God!" Mary said, aloud. The ghastly suggestion, and the look and tone of utter madness which illustrated it with fearful light, almost for the moment broke down the poor girl's courage and nerves altogether.

"This, then, is your love, General Falcon!" she said, forcing herself to be brave and calm. "This is your love; this is your loyalty; this is your devotion! You would exhibit me to the servants of Lady Saxon—exhibit me as a madwoman—in order that you might be able to keep me in a prison?"

"It is terrible, Mary, terrible!" and the unfortunate old man actually shuddered; "there was a time when, if anyone had told me that this could ever be—but what use is there in talking or thinking of all that now?" and he shrugged his shoulders impatiently. "Yes, Mary, if it be necessary, I will do all that. My mind is made up; I will face hell itself in this."

"I am not afraid of counsels from hell," Mary said; "I put my trust in Heaven, and Heaven will not fail me. Earth will not fail me either. Do you really believe, General Falcon, that I shall not be missed in London? Do you think my friends will not try to find me? Do you think Lady Struthers will do nothing? She, I know, is not in this ridiculous plot."

"No; she is a fool. I could have nothing to do with her."

"Well, do you think she will not take the trouble to find out where I am? Do you think Lord Stonehenge will do nothing? Why, we are within a few miles of Lord Stonehenge's own house."

"Lord Stonehenge will never suspect that you are here," Falcon said, with a grim smile. "He would never believe that you could be kept a prisoner in Lady Saxon's house. Be content, Mary; we thought of all that."

"We thought of all that!" Mary said, sadly. "We! you and Lady Saxon! My father's oldest friend plotting with that base and wicked woman for the destruction of his daughter!"

"The rescue and salvation of his daughter, Mary. But it is no use our arguing in this way. My purpose couldn't be changed though one rose from the dead. If your father's spirit were to appear in this room—here, between us"—Mary started at the words—"were to beseech me to change my purpose—I would not do it; I couldn't! But I know—I told you—your father would be on my side."

"I am sorry I spoke of my father," Mary said; "it hurts me to hear his name desecrated; I had some hope that an appeal to his memory would still have some power over you, and it has none! Well, we have said enough, I think. I am your prisoner, General Falcon, until some happy chance set me free."

"You shall be free this moment if you will consent to become my wife."

Mary shook her head. "Let us not speak of that any more; if I am your prisoner, I am! I suppose I may have the usual privilege of a prisoner—I may be sometimes alone?"
‘Your will and your wishes shall be obeyed in every way, madame. You are mistress and queen here.’

‘In everything but the one thing which I want,’ Mary said, with a quiet smile, her composure returning to her.

‘I cannot give you your freedom except on the condition I have told you of. Is it, then, so very hard a condition, Mary? Do you not know how deeply and passionately I adore you? Do you not believe that I would give up my whole life—all that is left of it—Ah, yes! I know what you are thinking of now; I know that I am very old; but my love for you sends new youth through me.’

‘General Falcon, you know how fond I was of you always; how much I loved you—as if you were my father—always, always, until this. Yes; and even now I would forget and forgive all this if you will only be your dear old self, your kind old self, again. Oh, my dear old friend, be my dear old friend once again, and let us forget this horrid dream! No one shall ever know of it, so far as I am concerned. Come! There is time enough yet. We are not missed so far. Let us go back to London and to our old life.’

‘Too late, too late, Mary! Do you think I am a madman, Mary, that after having gone so far as this I should stop now and turn back?’

There was something startling in the manner of his putting the hypothesis of his madness; in the entire sincerity with which he treated it as an utterly untenable proposition. It sent a new shudder through Mary. To be in the power of a madman who is fully convinced of his own perfect sanity would try the nerves of the bravest.

‘Well,’ she said, with a weary sigh, for she was now feeling the mere physical weariness of the hopeless altercation, ‘I don’t see any good to come of our going over this any more. I am in your power; I am your prisoner; and you say your mind is made up. Am I to wear chains? am I to be subjected to torture?’

His face flushed.

‘You are cruel, madame.’

‘Oh, cruelty! I am cruel!’

‘Yes; you are cruel to talk of chains and torture, to make such jests.’

‘Yes; I am in a jesting mood, truly! Who wouldn’t be merry in such conditions as mine?’

‘You know that you will be treated like a princess; I have told you that. Tell me what you wish for—anything but one thing—it shall be done.’

‘Only one wish now, General Falcon, is really present to my mind—’

‘And that is, madame—?’

‘Just to be left alone.’

Falcon bowed gravely.

‘Madame will see,’ he said, ‘that there is a bell, and that the rooms—’

‘Are replete with every comfort, as the advertisements say,’ Mary coldly added. ‘Thanks, General Falcon; I shall not make much complaint about the rooms or the attendance.’
'You are mocking me,' he said; 'you always loved to mock me—you know you did.'

'Did I? Well, I suppose, like most girls, I was sometimes in a merry humour. Never mind, General Falcon; I am not likely for the future to distress anyone by the exuberance of my mirth.'

She turned away from him. He gazed at her for a moment, silently, and then he left the room, and she heard him close the door softly as he went.

CHAPTER XXVII.

'TO PETREL'S REST—QUICK!'

She was alone at last. Mary Beaton thanked God that she was alone. For many moments back the whole horizon of her hopes was bounded by the longing to be alone. She wanted to be out of sight of Falcon's wild face, out of hearing of his terrible voice. In all her agony of grief and pity for him, there was mingled a feeling of passionate hatred. She could not get this out of her mind; mad as he was, she could not bring herself to think of him merely as a madman. She wanted to be alone; to think all this over; to think what she could do. She was not afraid; no, not in the least afraid. She knew that sooner or later someone would find her out and save her. She did not believe that Falcon, however mad, would actually use force to compel her to marry him. It was all a hideous, horrid farce; but still it was only a farce, and it would come to an end.

The horror and the pity of it was that Falcon, her devoted old follower and friend, should be the leading actor in such a burlesque. It shocked her, too, and astonished her, to think that Lady Saxon could have helped in such a scheme. Lady Saxon, bad and base as Mary believed her to be, was still a woman of the world—a very cool and clear-headed woman of the world. She could not possibly believe in a Bothwell scheme in nineteenth-century London. What, then, could be her motive in taking part in such a scheme, and giving her own house to be used as a prison for the unfortunate woman who was the victim of the conspiracy? In one sense, it was something of a relief to Mary to hear that Lady Saxon was in the plot. It connected that plot, at all events, with the world of sanity. Any designs Lady Saxon had must be designs which, at least, did not belong to the atmosphere of Bedlam. Lady Saxon was not a madwoman, and was not a fiend.

The first thing Mary did when she was alone was to examine her prison. She found that she had been perfectly right in her conjecture, and that there was no communication with the outer world except by means of the door into the corridor. She saw upon closer examination that the tower was nearly circular, and had two windows, one in each room, built out like turret projections, and so high above her head that she could not touch them with her hand. She felt all round the walls, and looked under the tapestry to see if there were any concealed door or opening; but she could find none. Then she tried the door into the corridor; it was locked on the
outside. So she was a prisoner—actually locked in. The knowl-
edge sent a slight shudder through her. Here was a harsh reality
which, in spite of her courage, put to flight all her reassuring argu-
ments. The door had neither bolt nor key inside. Must she sit
up all night for dread of being intruded upon? No; she would
not do that. Falcon was mad, assuredly; but he was a gentleman,
and she was not afraid that he would murder her to-night at anyrate.

It was very late—past one o'clock by her watch. Mary partially
undressed, smiling with a certain melancholy humour to see that
all she could need in the shape of toilette apparatus had been placed
ready for her use. The fine laced linen and the embroidered dressing-
gown were, she supposed, Lady Saxon's own. She spent some time
at her devotions, and then lay down on the bed and slept soundly.

It was broad day when she awoke. She must have slept long
and soundly, for she saw that a bath had been prepared for her;
and there was comfort in the thought that she was not to be
neglected by the women of the household.

By and by the young woman who had waited on her the night
before brought her in some breakfast. Mary tried to talk to her in
English, or German, or French, but only succeeded in getting from
her a few sentences in some tongue she did not understand, but
which she imagined to be Danish or Norwegian. The young
woman had evidently received her orders, for she carefully locked
the door every time she passed in and out; and in any case where
would have been the use of trying to escape by that direction? No
one else came near her all day; and she sat thinking of the various
devices she had read or heard of by means of which captives in
some dungeon had managed to convey a knowledge of their exist-
ence and their whereabouts to the outer air. Should she scratch
her name on some salver, as the Man in the Iron Mask was sup-
posed to have done, and fling it out of the window on the off chance
of its getting to some friendly hand? What would be the use if
Falcon's tale were true, and there was no friendly hand to be
reached within the limits of Petrel's Rest? Should she flutter a
handkerchief out of the window? Could she get hold of a bird
somehow and fasten a letter beneath its wings and send it abroad
on air? These ideas set her thinking about the possibility of
escape through one of the two turret windows—windows set in
solid frames of bronze, highly picturesque, but decidedly formidable
and menacing to one who looked at them with the anxious eye of
a prisoner craving for release. Still, they were quite large enough
for anyone to get through them, provided only they could be
opened. Mary determined to make the experiment at once, before
the light began to fail altogether. She put one chair on another,
with their backs close to the wall; and even then she had to stand
on the topmost rail of the upper chair in order to get to the window.
She did get there, however, and was glad to find that the window
was so deep, the sill so broad, as to allow of her sitting there com-
fortably and safely. She felt oddly like a school-girl as she
scrambled up to her perch. Now would the window open for
her? Oh, yes; it opened quite easily, opened outward. Why,
how very mad poor Falcon must be? He had not even taken the
precaution to fasten the windows of her prison! To talk of making her his prisoner and yet leave her in a room with an open window! Come—there was not much trouble in getting out of such captivity.

‘Ah!’ she drew back with a shudder. She had looked hastily out of the window, and the sight nearly took her breath away. No; Falcon was not so wholly without method in his madness as she at first had fancied. No need to bar that window! Steep and sheer went down this side of the rocky hill on which Petrel’s Rest was perched. This was the seaward side; below her the descent was straight down to the shore, the shingly shore on which the still ebbing tide was beating. She could hear the crash of the waves, and could breathe in the salt savour of the brine. Not a bush or a bramble interrupted the descent. No romantic ladder of ropes was ever made long enough to enable an escaping prisoner to get down from Mary’s window to that rough shore. That hope was gone. Yet she remained in her window, finding a sort of delight in the cool, free air and the sound of the sea. She felt a certain satisfaction in the thought that, come what would, so long as she had her seat in that window she was mistress of her own destiny. ‘No one can force me to marry him—no one mad or sane,’ she thought, ‘while I am here and have that depth below me.’ She began to think herself rather like that Rebecca whose courage and resolve used to delight her childhood; Rebecca on her turret, prepared, if need were, to trust her soul to God.

Sometimes, too, she was impressed with a sense of the whimsicality of the whole situation, its farcical absurdity. She felt a wild desire to laugh at her strange imprisonment. Then, again, she covered her face with her hands for shame at the thought that a man should have trapped her into this place and caged her up there in the hope of forcing her to marry him. To marry, of all men on earth, General Falcon, whom she had always looked on as a sort of father! He was positively older than her own father would be if he were living; she had sat on his knee hundreds of times when she was a child—it seemed only yesterday when she was in the habit of climbing on to his knee—and now he insists on making her his wife! Poor, poor Falcon! He is mad; has literally lost his senses. And she has lost him; lost him for ever, her dear old friend who had been by her side all through her life! She forgot all her own troubles in sorrow for him. Oh, if only this had not happened, happen else what would!

Then, as evening fell, she remembered that a whole day had passed—it seemed as if ages had gone since she had driven away from the Temple yesterday. She began to think what a day it was, and what would be happening in London. This was the day on which it had been predicted the great debate would close, and Sir Victor’s first battle be won or lost. They would be all too much absorbed in their parliamentary warfare to think of her. Even Lord Stonehenge was moved beyond his wont by the political excitement which reigned everywhere. Would Champion have her in his mind? Would Bellarmin have a thought to give to her and their sweet, sad friendship, which had come to so painful an end? Would
he hear that she had left London? Would he wonder why she had
gone? Was all to be at an end for ever? Was he too proud, or
did he care too little, to try and prove himself yet worthy to win
her? Had she been too hard? or had she expected more than she
had a right to expect? Ah, well! there was no use in thinking of
all that now; and so, while the darkness grew, she tried to turn her
mind away from Bellarmin, and she wondered if they were going
to bring lights, or if she were to be left alone and unattended and
in darkness, like a common prisoner in a cell. She wondered if
Falcon would come to her that evening. What would happen if
his insanity took some other turn? What if he should try to kill
her? How was she to occupy her time, supposing that nothing
particular were to happen? She lay on her bed and sank into a
sort of sleep, in which she fancied the sound of the sea and the wind,
heard through the open windows, was the cheering of the House of
Commons for Bellarmin's speech.

Yes, Bellarmin had made his speech. He sat down with the
cheers of the House ringing in his ears, but waking no echo in his
heart. He knew he had made a great success. A man generally
knows in the House of Commons when he has made a real hit; and
Bellarmin knew it this time. He had won many cheers even from
the Tories, who did not go with his Progressive Party, for they
sympathised with his earnest protests against the theory that
Toryism means immobility or reaction. He had made some happy
citations from the speeches of the great Tory leader, De Carmel, to
whose memory all sections of Conservatism were doing sincere
honour and homage; and he had shown how, from the first of that
great career to the last, De Carmel had held to the one faith, that
Toryism was a principle consistent with every impulse of real
national progress. There was, therefore, a certain eagerness among
the Tories who were against Champion's motion to let Bellarmin
understand that they sympathised with him in his ideas as to the
real principles and purposes of Toryism. Their cheers seemed to
say 'Yes; we admit all that; these are our principles as well as
yours; only we can't support this particular motion.'

'Well done, Bellarmin,' a stout old Tory whispered in our friend's
ear as he resumed his seat; 'you have advanced the lines of
Toryism; and though I can't go into the lobby with you this time,
I feel obliged to you, all the same.'

Bellarmin ought to have felt satisfied with himself. He had
advanced his own position as well as the lines of Toryism. But
there was a gnawing pain at his heart. He felt it all the time he
was making his speech; felt it with each new and successful effort
to hold the attention and carry the sympathy of the House; felt it
as in each strain of some severe physical exercise one feels the
grief of an old wound. Bellarmin's wound was the ever-present
sense of the loss of the one hope dearest to him in life—the hope of
Mary Beaton. Strangely enough, the very pain was a new stimulus
to him. He tried to drown the sense of pain in the sense of effort.
He tried to throw his whole soul into the struggle of the moment—
into his speech, and nothing else; tried to forget his lost Lenore.
He never succeeded, even for a moment; but the effort told upon the speech, and gave it new fire and passion. When he sat down he was for a minute or two hardly conscious of anything; he hardly saw or heard; he had only a dim, vague sense of relief in the knowledge that the effort was over, that the thing was done. He sat silent in the very stunnedness of reaction and depression. Friend after friend, and even political opponent after opponent, came up, according to the generous way of the House of Commons, to congratulate him on his success, and to shake him cordially by the hand. Bellarmin, when he began to get control of his senses again, felt as if he did not care much about the success or the praise. Six months ago such a success on such an occasion would have set the blood in all his veins dancing with the very joy of triumph. Now he did not seem to care. Nothing would do him any good now. Success would not bring him back Mary Beaton's love. He had lost all that; and, what was more, he felt that he deserved to lose it; that his sentence was rightful and just. He bowed to it contritely, despairingly; he had not a word to say in his own defence, even in his own heart. In a moment of absurd passion, of sensuousness, of what he knew at the very moment to be an unreal and factitious emotion, he had forfeited all right to the love of a pure girl like Mary Beaton, and he did not complain that the forfeit had to be paid. Only it made political success a matter of indifference to him just now. He found a grim satisfaction in the knowledge that the cheers of the House of Commons did not drown the internal wail of his wounded love.

Somebody got up on the Treasury bench to reply, and began with a gracious compliment to the eloquent speech of the honourable member who had just sat down. Bellarmin was not listening; he sat with his hat tilted over his eyes. Presently Tressel, who had gone out of the House for a few minutes immediately on Bellarmin's sitting down, returned, and came across the floor and squatted on the matting of the gangway just at Bellarmin's feet.

'Splendid speech, Bellarmin! just the thing. We'll carry the division, and you'll be in the Cabinet. But, I say, here's a letter for you; I was in the outer lobby just now, and someone asked me to hand it to you, which accordingly I hand.' Then he crossed the floor again.

Bellarmin looked at the letter, and an angry flush darkened his face. It was from Lady Saxon.

His first inclination was to destroy the letter unread. Some idle expression of penitence, he thought—some impulsive regret for that which was deliberately done—'What use to read such words? I couldn't forgive her.'

Still, his sense of what was due to a woman—to any woman, especially to a woman who had once held such a fascination over him—recalled him to a kinder and gentler mood. He went into one of the division lobbies, and found out a lonely place, and sat down and opened the letter. The first glance he gave at it sent a shock through him.

'I am not altogether so bad but that I should like to give your
princess a chance of being saved, and you a chance of saving her. She is at Petrel's Rest; Falcon has beguiled her into going there, and he means to keep her there a prisoner until she consents to marry him. Yes; it was I who put this Bothwell scheme into his head; and I put Petrel's Rest at his disposal. But I only meant to make your princess ridiculous; and I didn't know then, as I know it now, that Falcon is a madman—mad with his love for her. Get to her as soon as you can; I presume I may leave all that to you. Hate me as much as you choose, you owe me some thanks for this.'

Petrel's Rest! Mary Beaton a prisoner in Petrel's Rest, and with General Falcon, a madman, for a gaoler! We live in prosaic days; and the first thing Bellarmin did was to look at his watch, and the next was to clutch a railway guide.

A train to leave Charing Cross at seven twenty; to arrive at the station nearest to Petrel's Rest at nine five. It now wanted but ten minutes to seven. Yes; that would do; he would catch that train. What to do when he got there he did not know, did not think about. But he found he had his senses all about him, and his mind was becoming very clear, his nerves quite firm. He felt his pulse; it beat strongly and steadily now. He was good for any task. Was he to go alone? No, surely. Who ought to go with him? Lord Stonehenge at once came into his mind. Yes; Lord Stonehenge was the great man of all the region round Petrel's Rest; he was Mary's most devoted friend. Bellarmin did not know that a closer bond than mere friendship now held Mary Beaton and Lord Stonehenge together. He darted across the lobby, and saw, to his joy, that the lights of the House of Lords were still burning. Thank Heaven that the peers had had more than their usual half-hour's sitting! He hurried into the little pen below the bar of the Lords which is reserved for members of the Commons and for strangers, and he sent in a message for Lord Stonehenge. In a moment he saw Lord Stonehenge coming out to him. A thrill of positive joy went through him; it was such a relief to find Lord Stonehenge there. Man's horizon of feeling expands and contracts in marvellous ways. It made Bellarmin almost happy for the moment, because he had got at Lord Stonehenge with so little delay. He drew Lord Stonehenge into the lobby. 'Read that!' was all he said. Lord Stonehenge read; looked up at him wonderingly; read again; coloured slightly.

'Who writes this?' he asked, in amazement. 'Do you know?'
'I do know—Lady Saxon.'

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A CATASTROPHE.

Through all the hours of the last day's debate Lady Saxon suffered tortures. Everyone said that Champion would carry his motion by a large majority; that the Conservatives would appeal to the
country; that they would be defeated at the general election, and that Champion would become prime minister, and bring Bellarmin into his cabinet. All this triumph was to be won not only without her, but in spite of her. She had dreamed of doing great things for Champion, for Bellarmin too; and now she had done her best against them, and she had failed utterly, and they were to triumph. A wild, last, despairing idea took hold of her. The vulgar nature of the mountebank reasserted itself in her. If she could do nothing else, she would spoil their division; she would surprise and scandalise the town. Neither Champion nor Bellarmin should appear in the division lobby. That, at least, would be something done to feed her revenge! Full of this freak of half-insane spite, she sent her letter to Bellarmin, and her messenger soon brought her certain news that Bellarmin and Lord Stonehenge had left Westminster Palace at once together. Later on she sent to Champion a letter, begging him to come and see her at once, if only for five minutes; she had something to tell him on which all her hopes depended. She would be lost utterly if he did not come and give her counsel that night, that very night. She worded her letter so that Champion should be led to believe there was a threatened scandal and quarrel with Lord Saxon. That she knew would bring him, even on the eve of his triumph.

At half-past eleven Sir Victor Champion came. He had got out of the House by the Ladies' Gallery entrance. He had said nothing to the Liberal whips on leaving—it would not be worth while; he could be back before twelve, in time to hear Lord Saxon's speech, and to reply on the whole subject. Lord Saxon was not expected to get up much before twelve o'clock. Champion was distressed and angry at having to leave the House even for a few minutes just then; but he did not venture to neglect Lady Saxon's appeal. He observed with a little surprise that the door was opened for him not by a man-servant, but by Lady Saxon's Japanese maid.

He was shown into the outer room, and then through heavy curtains into the dimly lighted inner room, and in a moment or two Lady Saxon made her appearance. She hurried towards him; he stood coldly back, and there was a complaining, even reproachful, look on his face. Suddenly she broke down; the strain was too great for her; she burst into tears. All her pride and hate had vanished at sight of him, and only the old passion of love was filling her. Champion came near and tried to soothe her, and besought her in a gentle tone to tell him of her trouble.

'Don't speak to me,' she sobbed, 'just yet; just for a little; I shall soon be better.'

What could he do but wait until her passion of tears was over? And then time was running on, and Lord Saxon would soon begin his speech. She jumped up from the sofa on which she had been lying. 'There! I am better now,' she said, taking her kerchief from her eyes. 'Now ask me anything you like.'

'Why have you sent for me on such a night as this?'

'Because I felt that I must see you; that I must speak to you; that you must talk over things with me; that we must see each other—this very night.'
'Have you thought,' he asked her, 'what this night is? have you thought what its consequences may be to me?'

'Oh, yes, I know; the night of your great division, to be sure; the night that you expect is to bring you back to power! I have thought of it. That is the way with all of you men: your own ambition is what you love the most. It is not the way of women; I could love you if you failed. I feel more like hating you now that you stand on the verge of success. What do I care for your division? You want to rush away to the House of Commons, I suppose, to record your vote, as the newspapers put it in their stilted jargon. Well, why don't you go?'

'I must go, Josephine, as you know; it is getting late already, and where would be the use of my staying here any longer? You have nothing to tell me.'

'Then go,' she said, rising to her feet and pointing to the door with a melodramatic air. 'Go and record your vote, and win your victory, and gratify your ambition; but take this little scrap of news with you—the moment you leave this room I shall kill myself!' She struck her breast with her open palm as she gave out these words. Champion stopped—amazed, incredulous, horrified.

'I shall kill myself,' she repeated, 'that moment; the moment you leave this room. Look here,' she drew something from her bosom; 'I have been used to drugs and decoctions, Victor, in my early days, as you know; and one never knows when one may not get sick of life; so I have always carried this dainty little companion with me. You see, it is only like the tiniest of sugar-plums. But Locusta never had a poison so quick and subtle as this. The moment you leave this room I shall swallow it; and before you have reached the street I shall be dead.'

'Josephine, what folly, what madness, what wickedness it is to talk like that! Give me that vile thing; I will have it; I must have it! Give it to me—do, I beg of you!'

She laughed at his appeal.

'Go to your division,' she said, scornfully. 'Why should you care about me? why should you want me to live? What if, after all, you should be late for the division—what a pretty talk that would make!'

'Oh, give me that thing!' he cried, passionately, and he made a movement as if he would snatch it from her. She closed her right hand on it. Champion caught both her hands in his and held them tightly. But although he could hold her hands, he could not get the poison from her. She was a strong woman, and it took all his masculine power merely to hold her hands.

'Don't we look pretty and statuesque?' she said, with another wild laugh. 'What a situation for a dramatic author! what a melodrama in high life! Let go my hands, Victor, and go to your division. You need not turn back if you should hear me fall; indeed, I don't think I shall allow myself to fall; I shall arrange myself in a becoming order and attitude on that sofa, and when Saxon comes in from the House he will find me dead! He will be rather shocked, don't you think? I wonder will he really be very sorry in the end? I have been a bad lot, and he would be sure to find it out soon or late.
Champion did not at that moment doubt the sincerity of her declaration. Later on he often had the conviction that, after all, she was but acting a part, but just then he felt sure that if he left her she would kill herself. He tried to reason with her, but she only laughed at his reasoning. He implored her, but she made mockery of him.

'How amusing!' she said; 'the great orator thinks he can talk over a desperate woman as he talks over his people in the House of Commons. It can't be done, Sir Victor Champion. You see, you are helpless. All the servants are in bed except Saxon's coachman and groom, who will not come home until Saxon comes. We are absolutely alone, you and I—left to our own devices. Even if you were to make a rush for the bell, I should have swallowed my little sugar-plum before you could reach it; and what would be the good of making a row then?'

'Do you want to set me mad?' Champion asked of her, in the tone of one truly perplexed in the extreme.

'Mad? Set you mad? Oh, no! I couldn't do that; not I nor any other woman; not even Miss Beaton herself—whom you adore. You are far too cool-headed a man to be set mad. You have set me mad; but that's a different thing. Still, you have set me mad, and you must put up with some of the unpleasant consequences.'

'Let us sit down,' he said, 'and talk this quietly over—as quietly as we can.' He drew her towards the sofa and induced her to sit there. He sat beside her, still holding her hands in his. It was an odd picture, and would have curiously puzzled anyone who suddenly came within sight of it.

'Victor,' she said, 'I am conquered, completely conquered. I went into this in cold blood; I was determined to captivate you once more, and to avenge myself in one way or another for the manner in which you had cast me off—dropped me down, at all events. But I lost myself almost before I knew it. Yes; I lost myself in love for you. I hate the stupid life I have to lead; I am sick of Saxon's companionship; I only want to be with you; I am as much in love as if I were not out of my teens—'

'Josephine, what use is it to tell me all this? I can do nothing; I can't marry you.'

'No; not now; not this moment, or this week, or this month. But if I give up everything for you, if we go away together, then there must be a divorce; and then, then, Victor, you could marry me. And you would, would you not? Anyhow, I would trust you, and take my chance.'

'All this is simply impossible. For Heaven's sake, dear Josephine, do try to be reasonable! How could I allow Saxon's wife to go away with me? Saxon, who is my friend—'

'You must have known long before this that your dear friend's wife was again in love with you, and you didn't discourage her, you didn't rebuke her.'

'No; because I looked on you as a woman of the world, who would not involve herself or her husband, or anyone else, in a public scandal and shame.'

'Oh!' she cried, tossing her head impatiently, 'the horrible cold—
ness and calculation of all that! That is not the way in which a woman loves. Look, I have forgiven you everything—forgiven you your old neglect—forgiven you your love-making to your Mary Stuart. I would forgive you even your coldness and your calculation. Oh! can you not love me? Can you not sacrifice something for me? See, I am ready to sacrifice all for you—my position in the world, my husband’s rank, my future—ah! even my soul, I suppose, if what good people tell us is true—I sacrifice all this for you. Do you care for nothing but your career and your ambition and yourself?’

‘It is not a question of personal ambition, Josephine; it is a question of the duty one owes to a great cause, to a party, to a people, to England! Think what dishonour I should bring upon that party and that cause! Think what a pain it would be to that people if now, at my time of life, in my position of acknowledged leadership, I were to take you at your word, to take you from your husband! Josephine, you talk very lightly of loving me; I tell you this is not love. A woman who really loved a man would do anything rather than bring disgrace on him.’

‘Oh, cold! cold and heartless—cold and heartless as ever! Well, then, let me die; you cannot want me to live. I do not want to live without you; life has all shrivelled up into this one desire, this longing for your love. See how I stoop and abase myself before you! Oh, but I have still—’

In the eagerness of their talk he had let one of her hands pass from his, and she now made a sudden gesture as if she were about to bear it to her lips. He caught it again in alarm and horror, and held it fast. She smiled a wild smile.

‘Some time or other,’ she said, ‘you will have to let my hands go, Victor, and then you will see. Do you know that you will have lost your division after all? Do you know that the moment the division is over my husband will come home, and that he will come at once to me, wondering why I have not gone down to the House to learn the great news? What do you think he will say when he sees you and me in this picturesque attitude, you holding my hands firmly clasped in yours?’

‘Oh, for God’s sake,’ Champion remonstrated, ‘don’t talk in that way! Don’t put such horrible thoughts into words.’

‘Words, words—yes! you always think of the words, Victor. No matter what the thoughts or the deeds, provided only that the words are well chosen and sound right. Well, I wish he would come! I wish he would draw that curtain at this moment, and look in on us and see you and me, and hear me tell of my love for you and my willingness to go away with you!’

For a moment Champion felt an almost uncontrollable impulse to throw her hands from him. But the mere relaxation of his grasp set her renewing once more her attempt to get free, and, as he now fully believed, to put her poison to its use. He held her more firmly than before. Where and how was this to end? He felt a completeness of despair.

‘Yes,’ she repeated, ‘I wish he would come this moment and hear me tell how I love you—draw aside that curtain and see us now!’

The curtains which divided the one room from the other were
suddenly drawn aside; but neither Champion nor Lady Saxon heard any sound or looked towards the parted screen. Lord Saxon stood there for a moment and stared at them. He seemed like one paralysed. His face was purple and distorted; his eyes blazed. He made an effort to speak, but only an inarticulate voice came from his lips. The sound, however, was enough to startle Lady Saxon and Champion. Lady Saxon sprang to her feet with a cry, and she tore her hands from Champion's grasp, and her poison phial rattled on the hearth. Champion leaped up and made a movement towards Lord Saxon, as if to put himself between Saxon and the unfortunate woman.

'Saxon! Saxon!' he exclaimed; 'don't make any mistake. Let me tell you; everything can be explained—'

He had no need to say any more. Explanation was not needed—never could be given; never could be understood. Saxon remained standing for a moment in that same appalling attitude of speechless passion, his dumbness more terrible than any words of hate or menace. For the moment while Saxon stood thus, Champion felt as if his heart were sickening and ceasing to beat from horror. Lady Saxon had shrunk back to the wall at the farther end of the room, and stood there with her back pressed against it, like some creature who stands on her last defence, and she covered her eyes with her hands. One moment the three were thus standing, and then Saxon made apparently a new effort to speak, and again tried in vain; and then a kind of sob burst from his lips, and he fell forward on the floor. Champion knelt beside him and raised his head.

'Quick, Josephine! help me,' he said, in a low voice.

'Oh, he has fainted!' she murmured, still afraid to leave her place of refuge; 'he has fainted before; leave him to me. You, Victor, get away; save yourself; I will explain all. Go; go. I am not afraid—but I want you to go—I don't want you to be here when he comes to.'

'Josephine,' Champion said, in a deep, sad voice, 'he will not come to; Heaven has punished us; he is dead.'

She gave a wild cry, and ran across the room and flung herself on the carpet, and took in her hands the head of the dead man. For he was dead. The long threatened had come. The shock which Saxon had been so earnestly admonished to avoid had forced itself upon him, and its terrible consequence came. He had seen his wife with her hands clasped in the hands of his friend; he had heard some of her words, and had given them their too natural interpretation; and the discovery had been more than he could bear. He fell dead in the belief that his friend and his wife had betrayed him; he died of that belief. Extinction threatens the direct line of the great Whig family, and Josephine Saxon will never be Duchess of Athelstane.
CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE LAST.

MARY was roused from her dreamings by the sound of the opening door. With the swiftness of desperation she sprang upon her scaffolding of chairs, and secured her place in the window just as Falcon entered the room. He looked up amazed.

'Why are you seated there, madame?' he asked. 'Come down; I wish to speak to you.'

'I prefer to be here, General Falcon.'

'Do you not see the height—the danger? Don't, don't dare to lean out, Mary.'

'I feel a pleasant sense of safety here, General Falcon; I am not a bit afraid, for I know that while I am here with this open window I can set myself free whenever I please.'

'Oh,' he groaned, 'to think that it should come to this between you and me!'

'Yes; to think that it should come to this between you and me! Will you let me go, General Falcon? Give me your word that you will let me go—and I will believe you, and come down and trust to your keeping your word, for all that has come and gone.'

'Come down first; come down first and trust me,' he begged.

Mary saw the advantage she had gained by her resolute composure; a new and sudden thought came to her. She dropped lightly down from her window.

'You see,' she said, 'I am not afraid of you. Why should I be afraid? I shall leave this place to-night, General Falcon—and I will believe you, and come down and trust to your keeping your word, for all that has come and gone.'

'Come down first; come down first and trust me,' he begged.

Mary saw the advantage she had gained by her resolute composure; a new and sudden thought came to her. She dropped lightly down from her window.

'You see,' she said, 'I am not afraid of you. Why should I be afraid? I shall leave this place to-night, General Falcon—yes, I know that—I shall leave it; with your consent or in spite of you. If we are ever to be friends again, I must leave it with your consent, but I shall leave it all the same.'

'You cannot, Mary; I tell you it is impossible. I am master here; absolute master.'

She turned on him with an intrepid look. 'God is master, absolute master here,' she said; 'as He is everywhere, and He will send help to me.'

Just at that moment steps were heard, and Lady Saxon's German servant was seen to open the door, and Bellarmin and Lord Stonehenge rushed into the room. Mary lost herself in a moment; the answer to her appeal was too sudden for her to bear—the sight of Bellarmin come to her rescue then and there was overwhelming; and she flung herself into his arms, and clasped him with all her might. What did she care if Lord Stonehenge saw her; if Falcon saw her; if all the world saw her? What did she care for the devices of Lady Saxon? She was saved, and saved by him—and she knew it.

'Where did you come from?' Falcon exclaimed fiercely to the German servant.

'My lady sent me down here,' was the quiet answer, 'to let these gentlemen in.'

Falcon gave a cry of pain.
'General Falcon,' Lord Stonehenge said, sternly, 'you will have to come up to London at once—with me; not with Miss Beaton—Miss Beaton goes to Stonehenge Park.'

Falcon remained silent for a moment. Bellarmin and Mary were absorbed in each other. Lord Stonehenge turned to the German servant to give some directions. Suddenly Falcon sprang to the top of Mary's little scaffolding of chairs, and scrambled into the window, and then gave utterance to a wild yell of insane triumph. All the men rushed at him at once; but they were too late. He had thrust himself feet first through the window, and he shot himself into space. One last shriek rang in their horrified ears, and then all was silence outside, except for the sigh of the wind and the moan of the waves, that might have served as the dirge of the man whose corpse was already swallowed by the sea.

There was much news to go over London next day. The great division had been taken, and Sir Victor had won. The government would appeal to the country, and would be defeated, and Sir Victor would come into power, and bring Bellarmin with him. But even this was overshadowed by the sad story of Lord Saxon's sudden death. This was why Champion did not take part in the division. Lord Saxon had not spoken, as it was fully expected that he was going to do; he left the House and went home, feeling ill, no doubt, and Lady Saxon sent for Champion. And Champion came too late to see Lord Saxon alive.

Bellarmin, people said, was not in the division, because he had been sent for by Miss Beaton, whose old friend, General Falcon, had been taken with madness at Stonehenge Park, and had committed suicide. Such a sad thing for that charming young woman! And of course she telegraphed for Mr Bellarmin, because everyone knows now that she is engaged to him. And with Champion for prime minister, and Bellarmin in the cabinet, there was great likelihood indeed that her family claims would be allowed to her. And then, of course, sensible people added, when she marries an English statesman, she will settle down to be an English lady, and we shall hear no more of the Stuart princess. But those who knew her better than the sensible people could possibly do, will know that the romance which is the tradition and inheritance of her race will not fade out of her life, or turn to the prosaic in it, and that by whatsoever name Mary Beaton is called, she will still be the Stuart princess, and will still in her heart of hearts wear the sweet unfading rebel rose.

THE END.
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