

Face to Face

OR, GERVAASE RICKMAN'S AMBITION.

CHAPTER III.

Edward Annesley, finding no trace of his cousin at Arden Cross, took the path indicated to him over the next link in the chain of downs, dismissing Gervase Rickman from his mind with a dim momentary remembrance of having seen and disliked him before.

Thus every day we pass men and women whose hearts leap and ache like our own, taking no more count of them than of the stones along our path, though any one of these may turn the current of our destiny and alter our very nature.

Perhaps this sturdy pedestrian did not think of anything; most likely he rejoiced unconsciously in the keen live air of the downs, the sense of the infinite which moving on a height affords, the splendor of the shifting clouds, through which the setting sun was now breaking—touching Alice Lingard's face with a fresh glamour, as she walked unknown to Annesley by the side of the man whose pulses her presence so deeply stirred—and in the once-familiar but half-forgotten landscape, with its limits of hill and sea, its lake-like sheet of slate roofs down in the hollow where the confluence of two slow streams formed the River Mede. The lake of blue roofs, brooded over by a dim cloud of misty smoke, out of which, slim and spirilike, rose the tall white church tower, its western face touched by the sun's fleeting glow, was Medington, the old familiar town in which he had passed many a school-boy's holiday.

All was now familiar: the furze in which he and Paul once killed snakes and looked for rabbit-holes; the copses where they gathered nuts and blackberries; the heathy waste renowned for whortleberries, and the hamlet with the stone bridge over its mirror-like stream, widening into a pond at the foot of the down, which fell there in an abrupt steep, down which the cousins had made many a rapid descent, tobogganing in primitive fashion. There stood the mill with its undershot wheel; the plaintive cry of the moor-hen issued from the dry sedge rustling in the March wind; all sorts of long-forgotten objects appeared and claimed old acquaintance with him. The chimes of the church clock came floating through the dim gray air, like a friendly voice from far-off boyhood, and, after a little melancholy prelude, struck six deep notes.

Without thinking, he took the old accustomed footpath through the fields by the stream, and began singing some snatch of old song, forgotten for years. "Dear old Paul!" he mused. "Is he as unchanged as these fields?" He knew that was impossible; for the lads had spent a couple of years together at a French school, and had met several times in their manhood.

It was pleasant to find himself in the clean, wind-swept streets of the little town, where the lamps were every moment showing tiny points of yellow fire in the dusk, and the shop-windows were casting pale and scant radiance upon the almost deserted pavement; for even in the High Street the quiet town showed few passengers at this hour, and little was heard save the cries of children at play, and the occasional rumble of a cart and still more occasional roll of a carriage. No one knows what becomes of the inhabitants of small country towns when they are not going to church or to market; the houses stand along the streets, but rarely give any sign of life; the shops offer their merchandise apparently in vain.

He stopped before a large red-brick house, draped with graceful hangings of Virginia creeper, now a mass of bare brown, branches rattling dryly in the wind; a house which withdrew itself, as if in aristocratic exclusiveness, some yards back from the line of houses rising flush on the street, and was fenced from intruders in a high iron railing, behind which a few evergreens grew half stifled by the thick coating of dust upon their shining leaves. There were three doors, one on each side, and one approached by a flight of steps in the middle; on one of the side doors the word "Surgery," was painted, and upon the railings was a brass plate, with "Paul Annesley, Surgeon, etc.," engraved upon it.

He was admitted by the central door into a large hall occupying the whole depth of the house, and having a glass garden-door on its opposite side. He had scarcely set foot within it when a door on his right opened, and from its comparative darkness there issued into the radiance of the lamp-lighted hall a tall and stately woman, with snow-white hair and large bright blue eyes. Save her snowy hair, she showed no sign of age; her step was elastic, her figure erect as a dart.

"How do you do, Aunt Eleanor?" said Edward, going up to her and kissing the still blooming cheeks offered for his salute. "I missed Paul, as you see. How well you are looking!"

Mrs. Annesley held his hands and looked into his face with a seraphic smile, while she replied to his salutations, and said, with formal cordiality:

"Welcome, dear nephew, welcome to our dwelling. Paul should have been here to receive you, but his medical duties have doubtless detained him. You know what martyrs to duty medical men are. You may remember your dear uncle's life with its constant interruptions."

"Yes, I remember," returned Edward, not dreaming that his cousin's medical duties at that moment consisted in drinking tea in the fire-light and talking to a most attractive young woman. "I suppose you never know when to expect Paul."

"Never," she said, taking Edward's arm, and walking with a slow step and rustling dress into the drawing-room, which was darkened by heavy curtains in the windows, and was only lighted by the fitful gleam of the fire. "Indeed, my life would be very sad and solitary but for the happiness it gives me to think that my dearest child is of so much use to his fellow-creatures. That, dear Edward, is my greatest consolation," and Mrs. Annesley sunk with the air of a saintly empress or imperial saint upon her throne-like arm-chair by the fire, and sighed softly and smiled sweetly as she arranged the white satin strings of her delicate cap, which bore but a traditional resemblance to the widow's cap which she had long since discarded as unbecoming.

Having dutifully placed a footstool for her, he took his seat on the opposite side of the fire, and began losing himself in admiration and wonder of his seraphic and dignified aunt just as he had done in his boyhood; indeed, something of his boyhood's awe returned to him in the fascination of the presence.

She still sat as upright as in those days; neither arm-chair nor footstool were needed, save as adjuncts to her dignity. Every little detail of her dress showed the exactitude and finish that only women conscious of a power to charm bestow on such trifles: there was old rich lace in her cap and about her neck; a few costly jewels, old friends of Edward's, were in her dress; there was a ring on her hand, the diamonds in which caught the fire-light and broke it into a thousand tiny fierce flames; when she smiled, her well-formed lips showed a row of perfect pearls. She was an imposing, as well as a handsome figure.

Her nephew gazed earnestly at her for some time, while she went on in her smooth and gentle tones, asking after his mother and sisters, and telling him various little items of family news; while the fire-light played upon the soft richness of her dress, and drew sparkles from her eyes and her jewels, and threw her shadow, as if in impish mockery, distorted into the changing shapes of old witch-like women, on to the wall behind her.

"Well, aunt," he said, at last, "I need not ask if you are well. You don't look a day older than you used to. I have done nothing but admire you for the last ten minutes."

"So, sir," she returned, smiling, "you have already learned the arts of your profession, and know how to flatter. Eye on you, to practice on your old aunt! And pray, how many young ladies have you bereaved of their hearts in this manner?"

"None," he replied, laughing. "I am not a lady-killer. I am put down as a slow fellow."

"Nay, my dear kinsman; I cannot believe that the ladies of these days have such bad taste. You have grown into such a tall fellow, you remind me of my sainted husband."

"My mother thinks me much like uncle Walter," he replied, wondering by what process his lamented uncle had been canonized after death, since during his life his injured wife accounted him the greatest of sinners; "an ugly likeness, she tells me with cruel candor. Here comes a carriage. Is it Paul's?" he added, going to the window and looking into the dimly lighted street.

"What a capital cob!" The Admiral, as the cob was called, brought his rapid trot to a sudden end by sitting down on his haunches before the door, and in the same instant Paul leaped to the pavement and sprung up the steps with a rapidity which in some men would have been undignified, but in him only gave assurance of boundless vitality.

Edward went to meet him, and led him into the room and with him a breath of the fresh night air and a suggestion of healthy manhood and out-of-door life.

They met with less of the savage indifference which Englishmen usually think fit to assume to welcome their best friends; they shook hands more than once, and smiled. Paul even said that he was delighted to see his dear Ted, that it felt like old times to see his honest face, and that he hoped he would be able to extend the brief visit he purposed making; while Edward avowed that it did him good to see his dear old Paul, and that he was glad to find the old fellow looking so jolly. Then they shook hands again, and the fire-light danced upon Paul's irregular features and dark, fiery-blue eyes, and

brought into unusual prominence a white scar beneath his left eye.

Edward remembered how Paul got that scar, and felt cold chills running over him.

After one more mighty grasp of his cousin's hand, Paul turned to his mother, who presented each cheek to him as she had done to Edward, and solemnly blessed him, as if he had been absent for months, or was at least a Spartan son returning with his shield rather than upon it. Then Paul inquired with an air of deep solicitude about various evil symptoms with which she appeared to have been afflicted in the morning, and was informed that all had happily yielded to treatment, save one.

"I still have that dreadful feeling of constriction across my eyes," she said, in a tone of mournful resignation.

"Have you, indeed?" returned Paul, earnestly. "Perhaps a little wine and your dinner may remove it. If not, I will give you a draught. I will take Ned at once to his room, and then we can dine without delay."

Edward's surprise at finding his blooming aunt the victim of so many dreadful pains was forgotten in the lively chat of the dinner-table, as well as in the great satisfaction that meal afforded him after his long walk.

"Your renown has already preceded you, Edward," Paul observed. "Arden is already full of your arrival."

"Arden? Why I saw no soul there!" "No? Have you forgotten the sign-post?"

"What! was that squint-eyed fellow an acquaintance of yours?" he asked.

"What do you think of that, mother, as a description of honest Gervase Rickman?" said Paul.

"You don't mean to say that was Gervase Rickman?" exclaimed Edward. "I thought I had some faint remembrance of him. Heaven only knows what I said about his father! If he recognized me, why on earth couldn't he say so?"

"He was not sure till he described you to me. By the way, mother, I forgot to say why I was late. I met Rickman, and had to turn in at Arden."

It is thus that Love demoralizes: nothing else would have made Paul Annesley invent lies, especially useless ones. His mother looked amused at his demure face, then she glanced at Edward and laughed.

"And how was dear Sibyl?" she asked, with satirical gravity.

"Sibyl? oh! I believe she was very well. She was out. You remember little Sibbie, Ned?" Paul said, tranquilly.

"A little mischievous imp who was always teasing us? Oh! yes, I dare say I should scarcely recognize her now. Is she grown into a beauty?"

"Are not all ladies beautiful?" returned Paul. "You shall go over and judge for yourself before long. I heard a sad piece of news at Arden," he continued; "Captain Annesley is dead."

"Who was he?" asked Edward, indifferently. "There was an Annesley in the 100th Hussars; I never met him."

Mrs. Annesley flushed deeply and said nothing for a few minutes. Paul looked at her, and the unspoken thought flashed from one to the other, "This brings us very near the Gladesworth inheritance."

"How very sad!" she said at last, in rather a hard voice, while Paul bit his lips and then drank some wine, half ashamed at the interpretation of the swift glance.

"It is important that you should know who Captain Annesley was, Edward," he said, after a minute, "because, after me, you are the next heir to the infant son he leaves."

"This is ghastly; the idea of my being your heir!" replied Edward, who was speedily enlightened as to the exact relationship, and properly refreshed on the subject of the half-forgotten legend, in which he apparently took but a languid interest, and the conversation presently drifted to other topics.

After dinner Mrs. Annesley played some sonatas, and Edward sang some songs to her accompaniment till Paul, who had been up the night before, and in the open air all day, sunk into a sweet slumber. The other two sat chatting in low tones, Edward describing his life as an artillery officer in a seaport town not far off, discussing his chances of promotion and his next brother's progress at Woolwich, and hearing of Paul's position, which was not a happy one. Dr. Walter Annesley's partner, who had carried on the business since his death, unluckily died soon after Paul began to practice with him, thus leaving Paul to make his way single-handed. Patients distrusted his youth and went to older men, so that things were not going as smoothly as could be wished, and the business scarcely paid Paul's personal expenses. So they chatted till the servants appeared, and Mrs. Annesley read prayers, first asking Paul if he felt equal to performing the task himself after his labors, which he did not.

"Come along and have a smoke," said Paul, with alacrity, when his mother had bidden them good-night. "I smoke in the consulting-room."

"Why there?" asked Edward, doubtfully.

"Well! you see it is the only place. I dare not smoke anywhere else. I tell the patients it insures them against infection, and receive the old ladies in the dining-room. I was nervous about her reception of you. But I see you are in high favor."

"She seems perfectly angelic," replied Edward, selecting a cigar from the box offered him. "By the way, I had no idea she was in delicate health."

Paul laughed. "I doubt if any woman in the three kingdoms enjoys such brilliant health as my dear mother," he replied, "but she is never happy without some fancied ailment. I give her a little colored water and a few bread-pills from time to time."

He did not add that Mrs. Annesley's

ailments were in an inverse ratio to her amiability, and formed a good domestic barometer.

Just then there was a tap on the door, and a soft voice said, "May I come in?"

"Certainly," replied Paul, in some trepidation, and his mother entered.

"I will not intrude, dear children," she said; "I merely come to tell Edward on no account to rise for our early breakfast unless he feels quite rested, and to bring him this little gift of my working." She vanished with a "God bless you, dear boys," before her nephew had time to thank her, after which both young men breathed more freely, and Edward took an embroidered velvet cap from his parcel.

"Poke the fire, Ned," Paul said, cheerfully, when the door closed after her. Then he opened a closet where stood a skeleton partially draped in a dressing-gown, which the fleshless arm, extended as if in declamation, threw back from the gauntly figure, and crowned by a smoking-cap rakishly tipped on one side of its skull. "Let's be jolly for once, have a rouse before the morn." He transferred the dressing-gown from the bare bones to his own strong young shoulders, and the cap from the grinning skull to his dark-curved brow, beneath which the cruel scar showed. Perhaps it was Edward's fancy, excited by the suggestive revelation of the skeleton, which made the scar appear unusually distinct and livid; perhaps it was only the light.

"My aunt has made me a howling swell," he said, looking at the embroidered cap before he put it on. "Awfully kind of her."

"She is kind," commented Paul, his temporary gayety vanishing as quickly as it came; "no woman has a more heavenly disposition than my dear mother when free from those attacks, which are probably the result of some cerebral lesion."

"Perhaps," Edward suggested, hopefully, "she may grow out of them with advancing years."

"Perhaps," sighed Paul. "But all the Mowbrays are the same, you know. It is in the blood. My uncle Ralph Mowbray was offended with my father once, and he laid awake at night for six weeks concocting the most stinging phrases he could think of for a letter he wrote him. I'll show you that letter some day."

"Well! I hope it will never break out in you, Paul," said Edward incautiously.

"I, my dear fellow?" replied Paul, with his good-tempered smile; "there is no fear for me. I am a pure-bred Annesley."

"Ah!" said Edward, and looking reflectively at the fire.

"There has not been a serious explosion since New-year's-eve," continued Paul, clasping his hands above his head, and looking at the chimney-piece, which was adorned with a centre-piece of a skull and cross-bones, flanked by several stethoscopes and other mysterious and wicked-looking instruments, and above which was the smiling portrait of a lovely little girl, with a strong likeness to Mrs. Annesley. "You know how I valued the Parian Psyche of Thorwaldsen's you gave me? She knew it, for she took it in both hands and dashed it on the hearth."

Edward again felt cold chills creeping over him, and his gaze followed Paul's to the dimpled child-face he had loved, Paul's only sister Nelly, whose end had been so tragic.

"And what did you do?" he asked.

"Oh! I just sent the Crown Derby tea-service after it," replied Paul, "so pray don't notice the absence of either."

"She valued the tea-service," said Edward, inwardly thankful that the fiery Mowbray blood did not flow in his veins.

"Imagine the smash," said Paul, pensively. "And the deed was scarcely done when, with a tap at the door, in walks the vicar and stares aghast at the Lares and Penates shattered on the drawing-room hearth. My mother turns to him with the most heavenly smile and wishes him a Happy New-year. 'And just see what that clumsy boy of mine has done,' she adds, quietly, pointing to the fragments. 'Quite a genius for upsetting things, dear child.'

"I thought I heard something fall," replied the innocent vicar, quoting the lines about 'mistress of herself though China fall,' and congratulating me on having a mother with such a sweet temper."

Edward mused for some time on the misery of his cousin's life, a misery rarely alluded to by Paul himself, and any allusion to which on Edward's part he would have deeply resented. He knew that the chain must be pressing heavily for him thus to disburden himself, and he suggested that he should marry and have a quiet home of his own; to which Paul replied, mournfully, that he was not yet in a position to set up house-keeping.

"Though, indeed," he added, and suddenly stopped.

"Well?"

"It seems so brutal to build on a baby's death," he replied; "and yet—"

"It alters your position, Paul," said Edward, "and being sentimental about it won't keep the baby alive."

"True."

"I think I may assume that the 'unexpressive She' has already been found," Edward said, remembering the dark hints during dinner, and Paul smiled mysteriously. "Perhaps I may meet her at Arden?"

"Who knows? But I have never yet spoken. I am not entitled by my prospects to do so. I don't know if I have the smallest chance. And when you see her, Ned," he added, with some hesitation, "perhaps you will remember—"

Edward burst out laughing and grasped his cousin's hand.

"Don't be afraid," he replied, "I am not a lady's man; and if I were, Aphro-

dite herself would not tempt me to spoil other people's little games."

"Remember your promise," said Paul, solemnly, and they separated for the night, Edward wishing his cousin success, and thinking as he took his way upstairs that whatever Miss Sibyl Rickman's character might be, the Rickman blood was reputed to be an eminently mild and tranquil fluid, well calculated to temper the fire of such of the terrible Mowbray strain as might have been transmitted to Paul.

(To be continued).

PERSONAL POINTERS.

Interesting Gossip About Some of the World's Prominent People.

It is said that, apart from Royalty, the only man who figures on the active list both of Army and Navy is the Hon. Rupert Guinness, who is Lord Iveagh's heir, and well known in the athletic world for his prowess with the sculls. He is a captain of the London Rifle Brigade, and also commander of the new force of Royal Naval Volunteers.

Mr. W. W. Duffield, who is known as the "Grand Old Man" of Chelmsford, England, is a wonderful person in many ways. Although nearly eighty-six years of age, he does physical exercises night and morning—he learned them at the grammar school three-quarters of a century ago—walks at least five miles every day, and fills numerous public appointments.

If Edison be the wizard of the New World, then certainly Jan Szecepanik holds a similar position in Europe. Although still but thirty-two years of age, his name is already immortal as the inventor of a loom which does in a few hours what by old methods took years! He presented to the Emperor of Austria a piece of tapestry containing 200,000,000 crossings of silk thread, which was begun and finished within five hours. By old methods this would have taken four years to make.

Sir Douglas Fox, who is preparing the new Channel tunnel plans, is one of the greatest living engineers. He is best known in the north of England as the man who engineered the Mersey tunnel. The construction of bridges is another form of his engineering genius, and he will always be remembered by the great bridge across the Victoria Falls on the Zambesi River. But perhaps the work that will make him live as one of the greatest engineering intellects of the day is the Cape to Cairo railway, which he transformed from a Cecil Rhodes dream into an actuality.

Lord Lonsdale is a boxer of no mean skill, and on one occasion displayed his pugilistic powers in public. His lordship was riding home from a fox-hunt one day, when he encountered a wagon-driver who insolently refused to make way for a lady driving a trap. The noble lord got off his horse and, without throwing off his coat, ordered the wagoner to "put up his hands," which he did promptly, being an expert in the "noble art" and confident. It was a sanguinary fight for both combatants, but the wagoner was made to "bite earth" and acknowledge defeat.

King Haakon, when he first joined the Danish Navy, though he was the King of Denmark's grandson, was treated exactly like any other boy. The chief purser issued his mess gear, consisting of an iron knife and fork, a tin spoon, two tin plates, and a zinc mug. On his way back to quarters the lad stumbled while going up a ladder, and all these things went flying over the deck, waking the chief gunner from a nap and bringing down on himself a volley of abuse. He then acted as mess-boy for the other apprentices, and had to fetch their soup, wash the plates, and clean up generally.

Dr. F. H. Cowen, the famous composer, was a young man of only twenty-five when he wrote the music of "The Better Land"; he is now over fifty. During the intervening years he has written much beautiful music, but nothing from his pen has obtained the world-wide renown of this simple ballad. It was written in an hour or two on the suggestion of the late Mme. Antoinette Sterling. Dr. Cowen was calling one day upon the popular vocalist, when she read Mrs. Hemans's poem to him, saying she thought it would make a beautiful song for her. When the score was sent to her next morning, Mme. Sterling liked it so much that she offered to buy the copyright from the composer—an unusual course for a singer to take; but to this Dr. Cowen, fortunately for himself, would not agree.

The Duke of Connaught is a soldier first and last, and no member of the Royal Family has a greater dislike of unnecessary fuss or ceremonial. Walking one night after sundown along the road through camp a sentry recognized him and promptly turned out the guard. The Duke acknowledged the salute, and then walked up to the sentry. "Why did you turn the guard out after Retreat had sounded?" he inquired. "Orders is, turn out the guard at all hours to members of the Rifle Family, sir." "Then kindly remember that I'm only a general at Aldershot, whatever I am at Windsor," was the quick reply.

One of the most remarkable and most interesting men in the British peerage is the Earl of Crawford. He is the head of the house of Lindsay and Premier Earl of Scotland, and one of his titles is Baron Wigan. He owns extensive coal-fields in the neighborhood of Wigan, as well as many acres of land in Scotland. He is a keen philatelist, having a collection of stamps valued at £25,000, and he is also a great scientist and traveller. Many museums have been enriched by his gifts of rare birds, etc., and recently he presented to the Zoo a small family of elephantine tortoises which he had found in the Aldabra Islands, and some leaf insects from the Seychelles.