

Face to Face

OR, GERVASE RICKMAN'S
AMBITION.

PART V.
CHAPTER I.

All the eight bells in the church steeple were pealing down in joyous tumult through the sun-gilt smoke canopy which was spread above the slate roofs of Medington one mild November afternoon; the streets of that quiet little town were filled with an unwonted life and stir, thickest and most turbulent in the vicinity of the town-hall, the open space in front of which was black with human beings. It is curious that crowds, no matter of what they may be composed, always are black; it is curious, too, that human faces in the mass are always of one tint, a very pale bronze without the faintest shade of pink; probably no one ever saw a crowd blush or turn pale, yet these truly awful phenomena must sometimes occur.

The windows surrounding the space before the town-hall were black with humanity, so was the balcony which served as hustings. When the eye became accustomed to the mass and began singling out its component parts, it detected many points of color; a large proportion of the men in the street wore the fustian, garb of the artisan; the few female forms discernible at the windows or in carriages contributed less lugubrious tints, and on many a coat, whether of cloth or fustian, there fluttered gay bunches of ribbon, dark blue and crimson on some, light blue and yellow on others. Those who wore the pale colors were radiantly and triumphantly aggressive, those who wore the dark, sullenly and defiantly so. All were demeaning themselves like Bedlamites; a few sad and anxious policemen jostled about among them were trying not to observe anything, one of these in his efforts to preserve an indifferent and easy demeanor, seemed quite absorbed in a close and searching examination of the pale blue sky above, across which some pigeons were flying, their clanging wings unheard in the tumult; the fact that a band of musicians bearing the dark colors were flying precipitately down a side street, pursued by various missiles, kicks and thumps, with their hats now and then crushed over their noses, and their instruments vibrating to unmusicianly strokes, did not pierce through his apparent abstraction.

It was a scene to kindle wonder in the breast of an observant Chinaman or Bedouin Arab, if such had chanced to be strolling through Medington High Street just then. A gentleman on the balcony was gesticulating and shouting unheard in the tumult made by the bells, and the cheering, yelling, groaning and whistling of the crowd. Yet people appeared to be listening to this frantic person through the uproar, and punctuated his discourse by hootings, hissings, cries of hear, hear! and clapping of hands; also by more personal favors, such as bags of flour, which for the most part fell short of him and burst with uncalculated effect upon unsuspecting citizens below to the loud merriment of citizens not so favored. He was succeeded by another orator, and yet another. Now and again, somebody, usually some half-grown boy, would utter a hoarse, half-despairing, half-defiant shout of "Stuart forever!" whereupon the citizens with light ribbons would fall upon him pell-mell, and hustle and thump him with most Christian vigor, themselves hustled and thumped in turn by a posse of dark colors, who would rush to the rescue of their side. Had the intelligent foreigners asked the reason of these sudden displays of fraternal feeling, the belligerents would probably have been puzzled how to answer them.

So great and overpowering was the joy in the breasts of the light colors, that one of them would occasionally crush the hat over the nose of a brother light color, out of pure gladness of heart and excess of brotherly love. Shop-keepers had hastily put up their shutters at the first crash of the bells, and prudent people, and those who preferred quiet enjoyments to the turbulent delights of laying about them with their fists, had cautiously transferred the dark colors, if so unfortunate as to wear them, from their coats to their pockets, a device which little profited one unlucky citizen, who effected the transfer more quickly than dexterously, and was betrayed by the ends of the streamers peeping from his coat-tail pockets; he was finally seen fleeing coatless down a back street, after having furnished infinite sport to the Philistine crowd.

The balcony was now cleared, the crowd centered itself closely about a carriage waiting at the principal door of the town-hall, and removed the astonished horses decked with light blue favors from the traces; this was the moment for another carriage, bearing dark favors and standing at a door in a side street, to take up a gentleman whose smile was rather forced, and bear him swiftly away. A great deep cheer, such a sound as comes only from broad-chested Englishmen, now rose with gathering intensity like the rising thunder of a league-long breaker and almost silenced the clashing bells, which were firing their sonorous salutes; the windows became white with the flutter of

ladies' handkerchiefs; the crowd exhibited severer signs of dementia, and then a slight figure issued hat in hand from the hall and took his seat in the carriage, followed by three taller and broader men, all wearing the triumphant light favors. Then the carriage moved slowly on, pulled and pushed by strong-armed, loud-voiced citizens, few of whom had any direct influence on the election; bouquets fell into it from the ladies' hands; a citizen, unduly influenced by beer, staggered forward and shook a devious fist in the faces of the gentlemen in the carriage, thickly shouting, "Stuart forever!" and then fell into the arms of a policeman, where he wept and told the policeman he loved him like a brother, and, amid shouts of "Rickman forever!" declarations of the triumphant majority and exultant cheers, the carriage, followed by the light-favored band, wedged its way through the square and moved up the principal street.

The Chinaman and the Arab would have been gratified by the sight of one sane and calm person in the midst of this strange madness, namely, the central figure of all the tumult, who sat serenely observing everything, with the declining sun firing his fair hair, and a very slight expression of disdain upon his thoughtful and resolute face, which was pale with the fatigue of the last few weeks, but the habitual look of power and purpose of which was undisturbed by any sign of excitement or triumph.

"It is the first step," he thought to himself; yet he was constrained to confess, that although it was a fine thing for a young provincial attorney of no particular family or local influence to be returned a Liberal member for that fine old Conservative borough, the first Liberal member within the memory of man, it was a very long way from ruling England and perhaps the world, which latter would need some slight alterations before being ruled by England. But "the rest will follow," Gervase thought, knowing that almost anything is possible to a born ruler with a fixed purpose and resolute will. Mrs. Walter Annesley, leaning from her open window to throw him a bouquet bound with his colors, and receive his deferential salute, felt a thrill of pride when she looked upon the pale, intellectual face, so self-contained and calm amid the mad tumult; and when she contrasted the expression of his countenance with that of his supporters in the carriage, two of whom were well-known public men, and all of whom were flushed with excitement at this unexpected accession to their party, she echoed Gervase's thought, "the rest will follow." She knew too that these men, with whom Gervase had been actively working for some time before he stood for the borough, expected a great deal to follow from talents such as his. Gervase was in some sort her own creation; she had given him substantial aid; and it was she who had introduced him to the Liberal ex-Cabinet Minister who would not fail to see that powers so exceptional as his should be put to good use. Through Gervase, life had acquired a fresh interest for Mrs. Annesley; his career would feed the pride which had been so cruelly crushed by her son's untimely death.

At this moment Gervase smiled, for his observant eye caught a glimpse of Dr. Davis, that worthy alderman and ex-mayor, that staid and important medical gentleman and acknowledged leading practitioner, being hustled and boneted, and laying about him manfully in defense of his dark favors, which the triumphant Radicals were trying to snatch. A little further on, that discreet and learned limb of the law, Mr. Pergament, was ignominiously bolting down a side street and vanishing into the darkness of a friendly passage, the door of which opened for him, and Mr. Daish, Rickman's own partner, arm-in-arm with Mr. Dales, the grocer, was marching along in triumph, colors flying, and uttering spasmodic cries of "Rickman forever! Hurrah!"

Gervase wondered if any other influence save that of strong drink would have power thus to move these grave sons of civilization from their wonted decorum, and mused deeply on the eccentricities of the national temperament, so ponderously and immovably solemn, and yet on occasion so absurdly boyish and capable of rollicking fun. Here was a quiet little town, full of sad-faced shop-keepers and stolid workmen, going stark mad because somebody was about to represent some of them—a very small proportion—in Parliament. It amused him excessively to think that he was supposed to represent the cumulative political mind of such a set of simpletons. He thought what humbug representative government was, even if pushed to the logical fullness of universal suffrage. The great thing in moving the masses, he reflected, is to have a cry, a catch-word, the more dubious in meaning the better. He had seen two little girls slap each other's faces because one was for Rickman and the other for Stuart. The crowd surging about him and dragging his carriage knew and cared little more than those little maids for the meaning of the cry, most of them had no votes, the most enthusiastic were

the street boys. Some voices, it is true, shouted "the ballot" and "extension of suffrage," but even these were catch-words for the most part, caught up from constant iteration in recent speeches and newspapers. So it was and so it will be. The cries of Guelph and Ghibelline rent the Italian communities of the Middle Ages asunder, and one of the factions formed by these cries was itself cut into Blacks and Whites in Florence in the days of Dante, whose life was soured for a word's sake. These were catch-words in the olden days of

"The glory that was Greece,
And the grandeur that was Rome."

There are catch-words in the youngest colonies of to-day, and he, thought the new member for Medington, who knows how to fashion and wield catch-words knows how to rule mankind.

After all, what are catch-words but imperfect and attenuated symbols, and what are symbols but bodies to the souls of thoughts? Perhaps even worn-out, soul-vacated symbols are better than absolute vacancy.

Mr. Rickman, half incredulous of his senses, sat with Sibyl at a window, looking toward the town-hall and heard the final-state of the poll declared; Sibyl heard it with less surprise but with a gladness which made her eyes brighter than ever; she smiled inwardly at the sight of her brother's triumph, the comic side of which did not fail to appeal to her.

Alice had refused to be present, and Gervase had thought this a good sign. Mrs. Rickman had declined going, on the ground that her son's possible defeat would be too serious a thing to learn in public, in which Alice agreed with her; they stayed at home to console each other.

In those days, before the ballot and compulsory education and all such fine recipes for the regeneration of mankind, news did not fly quite so fast as now; people were not on such familiar terms with their freshly-tamed demon, electricity, and country roads were not cobwebbed with telegraph wires. I think nobody had as yet thought of extending and multiplying the plague of human babble and other noises by means of wires and drums.

Thus people in Arden were ignorant of the result of the great political battle raging within a few miles of them; there was no cannon-thunder to come booming on the wind to the listening ears of the villagers; the nearest approach to the noise of fight was the faint, confused swirl of the Medington bells, when the eddying wind rushed up the valley and over the downs with a larger sway, and that far-off sound merely told them that the battle was lost and won, as most battles are; it did not say who was the victor in the bloodless fray. Nevertheless, Raysh Squire, with a large dark-blue and crimson favor, pinned with ostentatious profusion upon his jacket, descended early in the afternoon into the village for news, and naturally took his way to the Golden Horse, which, besides, was the first house in the street, as the proper magazine for that commodity. But the Golden Horse offered absolutely no attractions that afternoon, beyond the gross and obvious charms of potent liquor; even the landlord was absent, and the landlady was not in the mood for social intercourse.

Just opposite the Golden Horse, on the same side of the high-road and forming the other corner house to the by-road which led past the parsonage and on to the church-yard, stood a solid stone cottage, so old that it had sunk a couple of

feet beneath the level of the high-road, which, perhaps, when new, it dominated; like the leaders of thought, who in their golden prime stand above mankind, but, as Time rushes on, depositing a thick sediment of fresh ideas, sink gradually into the groove of old-fashioned thinkers.

This sunken condition, though inconvenient in heavy rains, added, in Raysh's opinion, to the charm of the cheery little home, because it enabled one, without stirring from the cozy ingle-nook, to see over the flowers in the window the lower parts of everything that passed, thus enabling a person of imagination to divine the whole, and preventing small things from being overlooked, and here he was wont to spend many a leisure quarter of an hour at the hearth of his daughter, who was married to Joshua Baker, the vicar's gardener, and had more than once conferred the dignity of grandfather upon him.

It looked specially inviting in the mild November day; the pear-tree spread over the blank gabled wall facing the inn, though leafless, was yet suggestive of mellow fruitage, and the few flowers in the tiny channel between the brick-edged road and the windows, though past bloom were still cheerful; the geraniums inside the diamond lattices were glowing with scarlet blossoms, the pale sunbeams brought out warm tints in the stone and thatch, and rosy-faced Ruth stood in the doorway, with a baby in her arms and an infant playing on the dry road in front of her, to take the air and see the world.

"Who's in?" she asked, moving aside, while Raysh descended the two steps and bowed his head to enter the low doorway, which admitted at once to the dwelling-room, a cozy little nest, pervaded by the vague odor peculiar to country cottages and mellowed rather than darkened by the smoke of years.

"That's just what I was agwine to ask," returned Raysh, dropping into the wooden arm-chair fronting the window and tapping the bowl of his pipe on the hearth, on which burned a fire of wood and furze, making warm reflections in the walnut dresser with its shining plates and cups, and on the tall oak-cased eight-day clock, which ticked with a familiar home-like sound against the smoke-browned wall. "Ain't Josh home?"

"No; Josh likes to see what's going on. You may be bound he won't start home till he knows who's got in."

Then Raysh informed his daughter that a person from Medington passing through Arden at midday had declared the state of the poll to show a majority for Rickman. "Twas a Liberal lie," he commented, not intending any double meaning. "They thinks if only they lies hard enough, 'twill hearten up 'others to vote on the winning side."

"I wish Josh wouldn't bide in Medington," returned Ruth, whose politics were of a purely personal cast. "I can't abide these elections; they're nothing but drink and broken heads, so fur as I can make out, and family men are better out of them."

"It takes a powerful mind to see into politics," observed Raysh; "politics is beyond women. For why? A ooman's mind is made to hold in-door things; 'tain't big enough for out-door."

Ruth reflected on this remark in silence, while she laid her baby in the cradle and called the elder child in by the fire, where it babbled happily to itself.

"What has politics to do with Mr. Gervase getting in?" she asked at length.

"Many's the time I've asked Josh what politics is, and all he can say is 'it's what the women can't understand.' There must be a power of politics in the world, for there's a many things I can't understand."

"Understanding," continued Raysh, "ain't expected of women. They talks overmuch a'ready without understanding, and the Lord only knows where their tongues would be if they'd got summat to talk about! There's mercy in the way a ooman's made after all, Ruth. Politics now is a 'mazing subject; it makes the men talk pretty nigh so fast as the women. I've a year'd 'em say these yer members 'll take two hours at a stretch in Parlyment; some on 'em 'll go on v'ir dree or vour hours when they be wound up. They does nothing but talk, so v'ur as I can see—a talky trade is politics, a talky trade."

"I haven't anything agen the talk," replied Ruth, "it's the drink and the broken heads I can't abide. There! It's gone four and the bit of dinner done to death a'ready. One side is as bad as the other, so fur as I can see."

"You can't see fur, Ruth; you ain't made to, and you med war'n't whenever a ooman tries to look furder than Providence meant her to, there's mischief. 'Tain't every man can see into politics, let alone a female ooman. Politics has two sides. One side's v'ur keeping what we've a-got, 'others for drowing of it all away. A mis'able 'mazing subjick is politics—mis'able 'mazing, to be sure."

"I'm sure I wish they'd keep their politics up in Parlyment and not bring 'em down this country-side, throwing temptation in the way of steady family men with their living to get," said Ruth, going to the door and once more looking vainly down the road for the truant husband, whose dinner was spoiled now beyond remedy.

"Ay, that's the way with the women," continued her father, reflectively; "there ain't hroom inside of 'em v'ur out-door speculations. Their minds is made v'ur to hold vittles and clothes, and children, and elaning and sickness. I 'lows there ain't hroom enough inside o' they v'ur mazing subjicks like politics. But there ain't no call v'ur ee ta hrum out agen what you can't understand, Ruth. Providence have a-made politics v'ur menfolks, so as they med hae zummat to talk about and brade in the newspapers when they've a done v'ur. Providence have a-made politics v'ur gentlevolks so as they med hae zummat to do when they baint a-hunting or a-shooting. Whatever would gentlevolks do if they'd hadn't a got no politics? I 'lows they'd pretty nigh fret the skin off their boans, they'd be that dull and drug. You haint no call to hrum out agen Providence, Ruth." Raysh sighed with a pious air, and shook his head over his daughter's errors, the latter hearing him with the tolerant reflection that menfolk would have their say, and it mattered little what they said.

(To be continued.)

SOME NEW OCCUPATIONS.

A hundred and twelve new trades, some strange and a few gruesome, are included in the new London Directory for 1907. For the first time a cast-iron repairer comes on the scene, as also do the addressing-machine maker, the inventor of safety breathing appliances, the soluble coffee creator, the folding baby-car constructor, the indiarubber life maker, the theatrical hatter, and the maker of embalming fluid.

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