

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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DOUBLEDAY'S CHILDREN.

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BOOK I. THE NARRATIVE OF BASIL DOUBLEDAY.
CHAPTER VII. THE LITTLE GIRL NEXT DOOR.

I HAD observed our interesting neighbour for some time past. Children are shrewd students of the life about them. If you would know all about your neighbours—their habits, customs, and ways of existence, with interesting facts as to the lady over the way, and exclusive particulars concerning the gentleman round the corner—consult your little boys and girls.

I had often watched the little girl as she played with her skipping-rope, her battledoor and shuttlecock, or that obsolete game with hoops and sticks called "les grâces." For hours I had seen her sit beside her birdcage, talking, laughing, singing, whistling to the little yellow prisoner. And now she would shelter it from the sun by means of a roofing of green leaves, arranged with artful daintiness; now she would fix between the bars a lump of sugar; now she would pout and press her lips against the cage for kisses; and now she would tenderly release the canary from confinement, to afford it warm rest and refuge in her bosom.

Her face I thought exquisitely beautiful, though it had not the usual beauty of childhood. It had nothing of the ruddiness or the roundness, the dimpling substance forming the ordinary charms of infancy. It was a thoughtful face, even somewhat sad of expression, with very finely-shaped features. Her complexion was of an olive darkness, with yet an underlying flush of colour visible

upon her cheeks. Her hair was most abundant, silky, and of a raven blackness. Her eyes were blue, shadowed and fringed by very long dark lashes. She did not look English, and yet there was nothing foreign about her accent, albeit she spoke with a musical distinctness, very different to the slurring and blurring sounds that so often attend upon English speech.

She was small and slight, lithe and graceful of movement, and most symmetrical of figure.

"Please give me my dickie," she repeated. She had climbed up the wall, helped by clefts in its surface, and by the projections of a cistern, or the round sides of a burly water-butt.

"Why don't you give up the bird?" Nick said, turning to me sharply, and shaking me by the collar with needless roughness.

I had not intended to detain the bird. Of course I meant to surrender it most promptly. Still, for the moment I stood motionless, gazing at the lovely little girl, watching the tears gather in her tender blue eyes, listening to the witching music of her voice, and holding, meantime, the bird safer in my breast.

She turned towards me such an appealing glance, I moved nearer to the wall.

"Give it me, clumsy," said Nick, imperiously. "You're not half a fellow. What are you keeping the bird for? It isn't yours, you know."

And he took it from me, and handed it to the little girl.

"Don't hurt him! please—please don't. Oh, thank you! thank you! I'm so much obliged," she cried, addressing Nick. She had been speaking of the bird, not of me. Indeed, she did not look again in my direction.

I felt that I was placed in a false position. After all, it was I, and not Nick, who had caught the bird. True, I had caught it for the simple reason that it had flown by chance into my waistcoat. Still it was my waistcoat and not Nick's, and of course I was not going to keep the bird; only, for the reasons mentioned, I had been rather slow in my movements. As a result, Nick obtained the gratitude that was strictly my due. But there was an alacrity about Nick, a downright resoluteness, that was certainly vexatious at times. He never seemed to need time to think before acting. I always did. He was never shy. I was.

And now he was engaging our neighbour in quite a long conversation. How I envied him his audacity!

"You're the little girl next door?" It was not so much a question as a plain statement of an obvious fact. Still it served its purpose. It engaged our neighbour in talk.

"Yes," she answered. "But let me put dickie safe in his cage. My darling birdie!" And she kissed him. Then turning to Nick: "Oh, you dear nice boy, to give him back to me!"

I felt that this was unjust. But Nick looked very well pleased with himself. I think, by this time, he had quite persuaded himself that it was he who had caught the bird, and not I. That in truth he was a sort of hero, and that I was nobody. But he had been always rather of that way of thinking.

The little girl had reappeared upon the wall.

"What's your name, little girl?" Nick demanded kindly, yet in rather a lordly way too.

"Catalina Martinez." The words sounded melodiously as falling water.

"What?" cried Nick noisily. I thought him an absolute lout not to have heard what was so daintily distinct—rude to compel her to repeat the words. And yet it was delightful to hear them again.

"Catalina Martinez."

He tried to repeat the name after her, and failed stupidly. She laughed merrily at him. Such pretty sparkles of light danced in her eyes.

"It isn't English," observed Nick.

"No, I'm not English."

"What are you then?"

"Spanish. My father's name was Leon Lopez de Martinez."

"Is he alive?"

"He is dead. Years ago. I never saw him."

"Ah!" Then after a pause he asked, like the doltish schoolboy he was: "But wouldn't you sooner be English?" She laughed at him again, and rather scornfully. I thought it served him right.

"Well," she said, "I'm partly English. My mother was English, and I was born in England. For all that, I like to think that my father was Leon Lopez de Martinez. He was a soldier—brave as a lion. Who fought and bled for his country. Who died for her at last."

She spoke this with a sort of pathetic enthusiasm. I loved her for it. Nick surveyed her with astonished eyes.

"How old are you?" he asked.

"Ten. At least, I think so." And then in her turn she asked questions. "How old are you? What's your name? Nick? What a strange name. And what's that boy's name? Basil? Ah! it should have been Basilio. Was that girl, who was here a little time back, who wore a silk dress and flowers in her bonnet, and her hair tied with pink ribbon, your sister? And what's her name? Doris? I never heard such a name. She was beautiful. And is that gentleman with the long hair your papa? He looks a nice, kind, papa; and he sings little songs, and is always humming—like a bee!"

"What's all this about?" cried a loud, sharp voice; and then suddenly—as the figures disappear, and make way for each other in my favourite entertainment of Punch and Judy—the little lady who called herself Catalina Martinez vanished, and her place was occupied by a comical-looking man, in his shirt-sleeves, with bright red hair, that stood erect in a flame-like manner. He leant over the wall and, as he spoke, gesticulated violently.

"What's all this about? Now, look here. I won't have it. You're very nice boys, I daresay, but, give my compliments to your father, who I believe is a most worthy gentleman, and tell him I won't have it. One of you, I don't know which it was, and I don't care, broke a pane of glass in my back-kitchen window only last week. Now, I won't have it. And more—somebody—one of you—again I don't say which, and I don't care which—throws rubbish over the wall. Cabbage stalks, and potato parings, and oyster-shells. And sometimes they lodge in the water-butt. Now, you know that isn't as it should be. I put it to you, as persons of common sense, Is it as it should be? Would you like it yourselves? Of course not—you wouldn't."

Well then, it stands to reason. It's as plain as the sun at noonday. I won't have it, and you mustn't do it."

He spoke at the top of his voice, in a violent oratorical way, swaying to and fro, moving his head with a sort of butting action, and punctuating, as it were, his short sentences by the blows he struck in the air with his clenched fist. I thought, at first, that he was extremely angry. It seemed as though he were addressing, not the two boys who stood listening to him, much amazed at his rhetorical manner, but a vast audience beyond them. He looked over our heads as though at a crowd behind us, and appeared to be singling out individuals, and directing his remarks specially to them. He ended with a very merry laugh, and went on in quite a different tone:

"Don't do it again, that's all. Don't, there's good boys. Because broken windows let in the draughts, and try the temper, and cost money. One of you's been kind to my little girl. I don't care which it is. I don't doubt you're both very nice boys, when all's told, and a credit to your father. Lina's very fond of her bird. Her bird's almost her only playmate, except myself, and I'm her grandfather, though, perhaps, you mayn't think it; and I'm too busy to be often playing with her; but we have our romps together at times, haven't we, Lina? I'm always greatly obliged to anyone who's kind to Lina, and, I'm greatly obliged to you, whichever it was of you, that helped to save her bird for her. I'm glad to make your acquaintance, my lads. You'll grow up into fine fellows, I daresay. Be a credit to your parents and to your country. Mind that, and stand by her—your country—your poor, bleeding, down-trodden country, in the hour of need. Good-bye! A thousand thanks. I hope to have the pleasure of making your father's acquaintance some of these fine days."

He was gone, with the same abruptness that had distinguished his advent. Indeed, I almost think his feet must have lost their hold of the wall. His departure was so precipitate that there was quite the air of an accident, and even a violent accident, about it.

CHAPTER VIII. A POET IN A PINAFORE.

NICK confided to me that he thought Catalina pretty—a nice little thing. Presently he went on to say that he admired her very much—that the colour of her

hair and eyes, the shape of her nose, the way she had of speaking, the tones of her voice, her aspect, gifts and graces generally, completely met his notions of the beautiful. He pronounced her quite the nicest little girl he had ever seen. Finally he confessed—looking very much ashamed of himself, and speaking after a sheepish, hesitating manner—that he was very much in love with her.

Nick was of an age when, to a boy, a girl is an inferior object. She is to be despised for not being male, and yet dreaded, somewhat, for being female. She is a mystery: weak and yet potent. As to mere muscular strength she is on a par with a small boy, and must yield to the slightest exercise of real force; but she is beginning to convey a sense of power in her glance, her smile, her accents—in the simple fact of her sex.

Nick had long professed to hate girls. He never said a word more on that subject. Yet I think his change of opinion was very objectionable to him. He almost hated himself for loving Catalina. He would much sooner have gone on in his old way, had that only been possible to him.

Now I loved Catalina. But I did not think it worth while to say so to Nick. I should have obtained no sympathy from him. He would have ridiculed me. And, what was worse, he would probably have thumped me.

A child's love! Is it a thing to laugh at, or to consider with some respect? It is but false fire, and yet it is so like the real flame, it very nearly scorches. It is the precursor and foreshadowing of genuine and express passion. It may be mere playing at love-making; nevertheless the young performers permit themselves to become so absorbed in the characters they have assumed, that they lose consciousness of the unreality of their proceedings—believe them at last to be absolutely true. And their fond infantile fancy inflicts upon them real suffering—incites them to self-sacrifice—brings with it the woes and jealousies and tears and tribulations of maturer emotion.

I watched Catalina. My eyes followed her hither and thither. I waited for her. I hung about doors and windows, in the hope of seeing her but for a moment, as she passed. I delighted to take note of her beauty, of the delicate lines of her lithe figure, the elastic grace of her step, the natural elegance of her every move-

ment, the gleam of the sun upon her raven black hair, the shadow of her long silken lashes upon her soft cheek. I longed to hear her voice, with its delicate silvery tones and inflections, its musical distinctness.

I haunted her like a spy. I loved her, but I would not, on any account, that she should know of my love. I dreaded her displeasure—her contempt.

I pointed a pencil and tried to draw her face upon a rough scrap of paper—failing completely. Nick thought differently, however.

“Why, I declare it’s rather like the little girl next door,” he said, one day, when, by chance, he discovered the drawing. “I didn’t know you could sketch so well as this, Basil.”

Presently he climbed the wall that parted our premises from the yard next door. Catalina was feeding her bird—tidying its cage. Nick showed her the sketch, and won smiles and blushes from her.

“Do you think it’s like you?” he asked.

“I cannot say. I do not know my own face,” she answered. “But I can see that it is meant for me.”

“Don’t you ever look in the glass then?”

“Yes, but I cannot see my own profile in the glass, can I?” and she laughed at him merrily.

“May I keep the drawing?”

“Yes, if you like. It was done on purpose for you!” What a story!

“Oh, thank you; you are very kind to me.”

Nick seemed greatly gratified by her thanks. No word was said of me. Catalina really believed that Nick had executed the drawing, and Nick would not undeceive her. It was hardly fair.

I tried to write verses to Catalina. I was very fond of poetry. By chance I had become possessed of a copy of Walker’s Rhyming Dictionary, which stimulated my muse a good deal; helped me materially to mount my Pegasus.

In my verses I portrayed myself as one banished by adverse fortunes from the presence of his mistress, but in spirit haunting her, nevertheless. This was not absolutely a true statement of the case, but I had already learnt that great licence was permitted to poets: that they were indeed privileged to be very foolish, when so inclined by choice or necessity.

I wrote: To Catalina:

I’m near thee but in heart, in thought;
I may not watch as others may,
The smile that brightens night to day,
With ever changing magic fraught;

The wavering in thy cheek so fair,
Of moonlight’s pale with sunset’s rays,
The throbbing fervour of thy gaze,
The tangled fireflies in thy hair.

I may not in thy presence stand,
Nor in the music of thy voice,
As in some rapturous dream rejoice;
I may not press thy lip, nor hand.

I may not these, though others may;
Yet am I near thee, ever near
In heart, in hope, in thought, in prayer,
Through blackest night, through brightest day.

The soul is free eternally;
So when some vagueness strikes thine ear,
Then turn thee gently, I am there,
In spirit tending, loving thee!

Nick snatched the paper from my hand.

“Who’d have thought of your writing poetry, Basil! But you were always something of a molly-coddle, and molly-coddles always write poetry and stuff. I know it’s poetry because the lines are of such uneven lengths. And then I can see rhymes: ‘may’ and ‘day;’ ‘fair’ and ‘hair;’ ‘voice’ and ‘rejoice;’ ‘ear’ and ‘there;’ that doesn’t sound quite right though.”

“It’s an allowable rhyme,” I cried.

“Oh, I daresay.”

“Walker says so.”

“Walker!” He had never heard of that authority. But although he affected to laugh at my verse-making, I could see that he was impressed by it, all the same. Moreover, as I was well aware, Nick could not have written two lines of verse, no, not to save his life he couldn’t.

“You shouldn’t have put, ‘To Catalina.’ I call that a liberty.”

“It’s a poetic licence.”

“Well, that’s much the same thing. You should have called her Miss Martinez. And I don’t think you ought to have said anything about pressing her lip—a boy like you—I call that coming it rather strong, you know. And what do you mean by ‘tangled fireflies’ in her hair? She’s got no fireflies in her hair, bless you. And what’s ‘throbbing fervour of thy gaze?’ It’s all nonsense, all through. Because, you know, you are near her—you can watch her, if you want to—she lives next door, and you’ve only got to put your head out of window. How can ‘some vagueness strike her ear?’”

“Perhaps ‘stirs thine ear,’ would be better,” I said, depressed and vexed by Nick’s rude and obtuse system of criticism.

"I think 'box on the ear' would be best," he laughed. "And how can you be 'the vagueness' that strikes her ear? That's ridiculous, you know. But I dare say you think it all very clever, and perhaps it is. It's a good deal like the stuff one sees in books. Though, of course, I wouldn't stoop to writing it myself, and I'm surprised that you should. For what good do you suppose it will do you? However," he concluded, philosophically, "I suppose there must be some people to do foolish things in this world—we should never get on if everybody were wise."

He was about to hand me my manuscript, when, as though moved by second thoughts, he withheld it, saying:

"It will serve you just right. A boy of your age has no business to be writing poetry. I shall send these verses to Miss Martinez, with my name at the end of them. She shall think they came from me. She shall believe that I am a poet, and that you are nothing of the sort. It will serve you jolly well right."

I could not see the justice of this, but I felt that it would be perfectly useless to object. Nick governed me with the strict despotism of an elder and bigger brother.

He signed his name in full, "Nicholas Doubleday," at the foot of the verses, and then he altered "Catalina" to "Miss Martinez," folded the manuscript into the form of a three-cornered note, and tossed it over the wall.

But the paper fell into the hands, not of Catalina, but of the little red-haired man who had described himself as her grandfather. Instantly he appeared upon the wall, still in his shirt-sleeves, with his red locks upstanding.

"Who threw this over?" he demanded abruptly.

Nick looked at me. I looked at Nick.

"I did," he answered, his face very red.

"So you write verses?"

I looked at Nick. He looked at me.

"I wrote the verses," I said, rather tremulously, for I thought the little red-haired man, Catalina's grandfather, was in a passion.

"What, you?" he cried, "a poet in a pinafore!" And he broke out into a noisy, jovial laugh. There was something infectious about it. We all laughed merrily.

"But no more verses, or put them from you as you grow older, as you put away toys you have long done with. Don't become a verse-maker by profession. Don't

sing when you can speak. Run after reason, not rhyme. The time for poetry has past, if there ever was such a time. This is the age of prose, of strong, blunt, rude prose, with no mistake about it; no nonsense; no jingling, and tinkling, and tingling; but sound, sledge-hammer, common sense. Every word a blow that hits home and makes itself felt upon someone. For we live in desperate times, desperate times. We need to bare our arms, and gird our loins for the coming struggle. For poets, they may come hereafter if they will, there may be room for them then; they sing of achievements, they are for ever looking back; let us give them something to sing about. But they are useless in the van of conflict; their place is in the rear, with the women and children. For the Muses are but women, you know—old women, too—old as the hills. We want men; that's the want of the age; men with brains and muscles, who, when the proper hour arrives and the right word is spoken, will bring out their guns or their pikes, and descend into the streets to fight for the good cause! But, to be sure, you are but a boy at present, and not a very large boy either."

He surveyed me rather comically, and paused as though for reflection, while he ran his fingers through his hair and compelled it to stand still more erect, until his head resembled in outline somewhat the sculptured flames surmounting the Monument upon Fish-street-hill. He was of a sandy, speckled complexion, with insignificant features, light blue eyes, colourless lashes and eyebrows. But he seemed to have power of inflating himself and acquiring, at will, grander dimensions. As he spoke, he wrought himself into a strangely emotional condition; the veins on his forehead swelled; he rocked and swayed about incessantly, waving his arms aloft, as though he sought by excessive and extravagant motion to prevent any distinct idea of his limited proportions, preferring, as it were, to present a blurred outline to general regard.

I noted that he now addressed himself exclusively to me, ignoring the presence of Nick completely. My sense of justice was satisfied by this preference. Nevertheless, it was clear that his views on the subject of verse-making corresponded rather with Nick's than with mine. Presently he resumed:

"They're not so bad, you know—these lines—not so very bad. I daresay the

little one will like them. It's something to have a poet writing about one, although one's only a little girl in a short frock, and he a child in pinafore. You must come in to tea, my boy, and see Lina and have a chat with me, if your father has no objection. We'll be friends, and you must help me to pet Lina and make her happy. Poor little soul! Let me see, you're Basil, and the other boy's Nick. I shall remember that. Good-bye, Basil; we're to be friends; bear that in mind. Good-bye. My name's Lucius Grisdale. Don't forget it. It's a name that will be memorable one of these fine days."

With a wave of his hand he vanished from his position on the wall.

CONGRESSES AND CONFERENCES.

IN TWO PARTS. PART I.

It is possibly a sign of the degeneracy of the age that the Conference now sitting at Constantinople should precede a probable, instead of succeeding an accomplished, European war. It is almost a novelty to talk first and fight afterwards. It is an inversion of that natural order of things which, with few exceptions, has prevailed throughout modern history. Congresses are, as Professor Durchschlag points out, the legitimate outcome and natural expression of great struggles, arrived at after sword and gun have done their work, and mankind, exhausted with the work and cost of slaughter, sit down in the vain hope of framing their thoughts in cosmic fashion. "Man," writes the professor in the twenty-eighth volume of his Preliminary Dissertation on the Philosophic Study of History, "is a prompt-to-fight but slow-to-reason creature. Bull-like he rushes into combat, and retires not till he is sorely butted and battered, and then is oftentimes glad to have a corner of the field that he once aspired to rule over as absolute king. When everything is burnt and destroyed, and the leaders of the quarrel, mayhap, got rid of forever by dint of steel or lead, then weary man, remembering that bread and cheese, as well as powder and shot, have a place in the economy of things extant, sits down and does exactly what he might have done before fighting. He talks, but in a lower tone than of old—voice pitched, as it were, in a minor key, reduced thereto by sulphurous fumes, and the ague, and asthma of hard-fought campaigns." So far as it is possible to follow

Herr Durchschlag, he thinks but little of the Conference at Constantinople—inclining to the view that the air is charged with thunder, and that until the storm bursts and the electricity is dispersed, the atmosphere is unfavourable to the "rational out-thinking of the Actual and the Possible."

How far the professor's view of the present is justified by the experience of the past may, perhaps, best be estimated by a glance at the famous Conferences and Congresses of bygone times.

Far away in the "mirk" of early Scottish history—the said "mirk" here and there illumined by the ruddy glare of burning homesteads—it is possible to catch a glimpse of a very noteworthy conference. The scene is the church of the Minorites, or Grey Friars, in the old town of Dumfries. Two great barons—Norman both of them by blood, but Scottish by location—meet, under solemn oaths to keep the peace and treat in good faith with each other. But one at least is full of guile. John Comyn, Lord of Badenoch, one of the claimants for the crown of Scotland, is but little pleased to meet Robert Bruce face to face. He had thought to lay him by the heels in London; but Bruce, with only two followers, has escaped, on horses shod the reverse way to baffle possible trackers over the snow. Straight through England and the wild border, the Bruce has ridden hard till at Dumfries—it being Session time—he meets his rival in the church, where, over sacred relics, due conference will be held as to the proprietorship of the Scottish crown. There is distrust on both sides. On the snow, at the opposite doors of the church, mail-clad knights, of equal number on either side, stamp impatiently on the snow, while the two chiefs meet at the high altar within. Presently one door is flung open and Bruce appears, his visage ghastly, his dagger wet. There is cause enough and to spare for the scared look of the Bruce; for this morning's work is not a mere matter of murder—a bagatelle in the year 1306!—but of sacrilege. His comrades ask him what is amiss. Bruce mutters that there is something much amiss, and adds, with true North-country caution, "I doubt I have slain the Comyn." Now there is among his friends a sturdy man of the sort that make history—one Kilpatrick, or Kirkpatrick. This gentleman, on hearing the "doubt" of Bruce, declares that on such matters there should be no doubt whatever, and, winding up

his remarks with the memorable words "I mak sikar"—I make sure or secure—returns into the church, and falls upon the Comyn that he dies. Moreover, blood being up as well as spilt, the Bruce's following fell upon the Comyns and slew them right and left—a notable exploit, the sign whereof is proudly borne even unto this day. The crest of the Kirkpatricks of Closeburn is, "a hand with a dagger erect, in pale, dropping blood," and their motto yet abides, "I mak sikar." A very gentle, pious lady—Eugénie, sometime Empress of the French—is a descendant of the Kirkpatricks, and could wear their dreadful crest, if she cared for it.

French history supplies another curious Conference, which supplied the closing scene of one drama, and the opening one of another. That gay and gallant prince, the Duke of Orleans, had, while on excellent terms with his "cousin" of Burgundy, John the Fearless, heedlessly, as Brantôme puts it, left him in a particular private room of his own in Paris, in which was an open cabinet. Jean-sans-peur, not overburdened with delicacy, pried into the cabinet, and found there—the portrait and a lock of the hair of his own wife. The consequence of this unpleasant discovery was that the Duke of Orleans was slain shortly after by an ambuscade near the Port St. Denis. Now a certain gentleman of Brittany, one Tanneguy Duchâtel, swore a great oath that he would be avenged on the Duke of Burgundy for the murder of his master. Getting no immediate opportunity, Tanneguy bided his time until the Conference at the Bridge of Montereau, at the junction of the Seine and Yonne. The Dauphin—afterwards Charles the Seventh—had agreed to meet the Duke of Burgundy, who was anxious to get both him and his father into his power, and, after many preliminary negotiations, the interview was at last arranged. Across the river ran the long bridge, commanded by cannon from the side occupied by the Dauphin's troops. Special agreement had been made as to barriers and other impediments, to prevent the actors in this famous Conference from flying at each others' throats. The conditions were, however, insufficiently fulfilled, for a long, tortuous gallery of wood had been constructed, but without the barriers stipulated for on both sides. The fearless Duke of Burgundy was entreated by his friends not to venture on the interview; but the doughty warrior—incited thereto, moreover, by the Lady of Giac, subsidised,

it is supposed, by the opposite party—insisted on taking the risk. Attended by one gentleman only, the brother of the Captal de Bach, he advanced into the narrow gallery, to his death; for no sooner did he kneel to the Dauphin and implore him to join his fortunes with those of Burgundy, than Tanneguy Duchâtel struck him down with an axe. There were shouts and yells for vengeance on the Burgundian side; but the royal cannon commanded the bridge, and the Conference of the Bridge of Montereau was over.

This vile victory helped the cause of the French king but little, for, within a year, he was compelled to cede his daughter to our Henry the Fifth—that "implacable hunter of men," who, when asked concerning the jousts which should follow the marriage-feast, told his followers that on the morning after the wedding he should be at the siege of Sens, where every one might joust to his heart's content.

From the Bridge of Montereau, in 1419, to the Conference of Péronne, in 1468, is a wide leap—not in time, but in circumstance. In the latter year Louis the Eleventh is already an absolute monarch, saving only his vassal of Brittany and his almost rival, Charles the Rash, Duke of Burgundy. There are weighty matters to discuss between the king and the duke—matters so weighty, that the supposed cowardly, puny wretch of Casimir Delavigne's play actually throws his person into the power of his adversary. But he confides in the loyalty of his guardian host, the rash but loyal Burgundian, and the famous Conference of Péronne takes place. The Savoyards, enemies of the French king, are there; but, for once, wit prevails over force, and the high-contracting parties take Liège together, and depart to their several strongholds—the lion very shortly to be devoured by the fox.

Next in the order of conferences comes on the scene English Harry—Mr. Froude's hero, the demolisher of monasteries, the beheader of wives. On the 7th of June, 1520, begins the Conference of the Field of the Cloth of Gold, to attend which everyone has sold lands and beeves, that he may make a brave show, and carry off the victory in the "duel of expense." To this gorgeous entertainment the kings of England and France bring no queens. Katharine of Aragon sits sadly in her chamber among her handmaidens, whom she seeks to teach the new lacis-work; and poor sickly Queen Claude stays quietly at home, while her

lord, the strange-looking man—all nose and eyebrows—flaunts it gaily with Madame de Châteaubriant. Almost as remarkable as the chief actors in the show, which begins with a pageant but ends ill in a wrestling-match, are two famous figures of the time. One is a dark, saturnine man, with Italian face—half of him a Gonzaga—the Constable of Bourbon, bearing the sword of France, concerning whom Henry remarks to Francis: "If I had such a subject, I should have his head off his shoulders." The other is a slim, delicate girl—yet in her teens—gentle Mistress Anne Boleyn, the traces of whose work in undoing her own life, and making English history, yet endure in marks indelible. Of the Field of the Cloth of Gold—considered as a conference—no trace remains, save the memory of the war of two hundred years which succeeded it.

During those troublous times occurred many momentous meetings, notably, that famous one in 1568, between Catherine de Medicis and the Duke of Alva; at which, so it is said, the still more notable Conference in Paris—a few days before the eve of St. Bartholomew, 1572—was decided on. This famous meeting was the last at which blood was actually shed; but, in point of fact, it was less a conference than the culminating act of a prodigious conspiracy. With it the series of sanguinary congresses dies out, and that of full-bottomed wigs, hair-powder, and questions of precedence comes in.

In the National Gallery is a well-known picture, painted by Gerard Terburg, whose jovial countenance smiles from one corner on a grave assemblage of high-contracting plenipotentiaries. It represents the conclusion of the Peace of Westphalia, in the town-house of Münster. This Treaty of Westphalia was the work of a congress of extinct volcanoes. The Thirty Years' War had burnt itself so thoroughly out, that even religious fervour was cooled down by misery and suffering. Not till 1648—and after four years of conference—would the still haughty Spaniard acknowledge the existence of their High Mightinesses the State of Holland, represented by the burly De Pauw, who took very particular care of his own marvellous country. Everybody was worn out but the indomitable Dutch, who, having practically thrashed Spain forty years before, were yet glad enough to be formally acknowledged, and to seize such waifs and strays of territory as were lying loose

on the confines of the so-called Great Powers. While De Pauw represented Holland, Avaux came on the part of France; Salvenius, on that of Sweden; and Trautmann, on that of the Holy Roman Empire. At this famous Congress we find the independence of Holland and its separation from the Empire formally recognised, and the independence of Switzerland guaranteed. In actual fact, the signature of the Treaty of Westphalia marks the disintegration of the German Empire, which thenceforth existed merely in name. Every sovereign prince of any importance acquired the right of doing as he pleased—a right most scandalously abused, by-the-way—and the ancient empire passed away into the fictions of a bygone age.

There was also a Congress at Nimeguen, from 1676 to 1679, but little was effected there, war raging all the while; and a famous conference took place a little later, in 1697, at Ryswick, in Holland. Another long duel had been fought out, that between the Grand Monarque and our own Dutch William; and the extinct volcanoes again met in council. It was a weighty affair. There was a long dispute as to where it should be held. The emperor proposed Aix-la-Chapelle; but the French objected, and proposed the Hague. It would be bootless to speculate on the shaking of wigs, the taking of snuff, and the fingering of Mechlin lace cravats which accompanied the settlement of this awful difficulty. The question was not the "what," but the "where" and the "how" such awful personages were to be brought together, and intelligence looked blankly on the tremendous problem.

At last, it was solved by an ingenious compromise. It was decided that the ministers of the Allied Powers should meet at the Hague, and the French plenipotentiaries take up their abode five miles off, at Delft. To the crockery town went Harlay, most skilful of French international lawyers, Crécy and de Caillères, and, with them, the latest fashions of Paris—somewhat subdued and severe, for the great king was on his last legs, and much given to piety. At the Hague were the English lords, Pembroke and Villiers; and with them went a person whose name, nowadays, is better known than theirs—one Mr. Matthew Prior, the nephew of a tavern-keeper at Charing-cross, the protégé of Lord Dorset, who took him away from the tap to make him a Cambridge scholar, an elegant poet, and a genial gentleman.

At the head of the Imperial Legation came Count Kaunitz—of the Spanish, Don Francisco Bernardo de Quiros.

Halfway between Delft and the Hague, near the village of Ryswick, there stood—in a rectangular garden, which was bounded by straight canals, and divided into formal roads, melon-beds, and flower-beds—a seat of the Princes of Orange. “The house,” says Lord Macaulay, “seemed to have been built expressly for the accommodation of such a set of diplomatists as were to meet there. In the centre was a large hall, painted by Honthorst. On the right hand and on the left were wings exactly corresponding to each other. Each wing was accessible by its own bridge, its own gate, and its own avenue. One wing was assigned to the Allies; the other, to the French; the hall in the centre, to the mediator,” Lilienroth, the representative of Charles the Eleventh, king of Sweden. The absurdities of this famous Congress have been drawn with so truthful a hand by Macaulay, that the picture resembles a caricature; but we must recollect that the year 1697 fell in the midst of the best period of etiquette—Brussels lace, snuff, red heels, and three-storied periwigs.

“Some preliminary questions of etiquette were, not without difficulty, adjusted,” continues Lord Macaulay’s account of these wonderful transactions; “and at length, on the 9th of May, many coaches-and-six, attended by harbingers, footmen, and pages, approached the mansion by different roads. The Swedish minister alighted at the grand entrance. The procession from the Hague came up the side alley on the left. At the first meeting, the full powers of the representatives of the belligerent governments were delivered to the mediator. At the second meeting, forty-eight hours later, the mediator performed the ceremony of exchanging these full powers. Then several meetings were spent in settling how many carriages, how many horses, how many lackeys, how many pages, each minister should be entitled to bring to Ryswick; whether the serving-men should carry canes; whether they should wear swords; whether they should have pistols in their holsters; who should take the upper-hand in the public walks; and whose carriage should break the way in the streets. It soon appeared that the mediator would have to mediate not only between the Coalition and the French, but also between the different members of the Coalition. The Imperial

ambassadors claimed a right to sit at the head of the table. The Spanish ambassador would not admit this pretension, and tried to thrust himself in between two of them. The Imperial ambassadors refused to call the ambassadors of electors and commonwealths by the title of excellency. “If I am not called excellency,” said the minister of the Elector of Brandenburg, “my master will withdraw his troops from Hungary.” The Imperial ambassadors insisted on having a room to themselves in the building, and on having a special place assigned to their carriages in the court. All the other ministers of the confederacy pronounced this a most unjustifiable demand, and a whole sitting was wasted in this childish dispute. It may easily be supposed that allies who were so punctilious in their dealings with each other were not likely to be very easy in their intercourse with the common enemy. The chief business of Harlay and Kaunitz was to watch each other’s legs. Neither of them thought it consistent with the dignity of the crown which he served, to advance towards the other faster than the other advanced towards him. If, therefore, one of them perceived that he had inadvertently stepped forward too quick, he went back to the door, and the stately minuet began again. The ministers of Louis drew up a paper in their own language. The German statesmen protested against this innovation, this insult to the dignity of the Holy Roman Empire, this encroachment on the rights of independent nations, and would not know anything about the paper till it had been translated from good French into bad Latin. In the middle of April it was known to everybody at the Hague that Charles the Eleventh, king of Sweden, was dead, and had been succeeded by his son; but it was contrary to etiquette that any of the assembled envoys should appear to be acquainted with this fact, till Lilienroth had made a formal announcement. It was not less contrary to etiquette that Lilienroth should make such an announcement till his equipages and his household had been put into mourning; and some weeks elapsed before his coachmakers and tailors had completed their task. At length, on June 12th, he came to Ryswick in a carriage lined with black, and attended by servants in black liveries, and then, in full congress, proclaimed that it had pleased God to take to himself the most puissant King Charles the Eleventh. All

the ambassadors then condoled with him on the sad and unexpected news, and went home to put off their embroidery and to dress themselves in the garb of sorrow. In such solemn trifling week after week passed away."

While this mummery was going on, William the Dutchman grew impatient, and opened a separate negotiation. Portland and Boufflers—soldiers both—met near Hal, a town some ten miles from Brussels. Walking up and down in an orchard, the amateur diplomatists got through more real work in a couple of hours than the professors had accomplished in as many months. When the news reached Ryswick, Harlay, the French ambassador, saw the fun of the thing at once, and exclaimed, "It is curious that while the ambassadors are making war, the generals should be making peace!" and peace was actually signed at Ryswick on the 10th of September. But not without fresh difficulties. Three treaties were to be signed; and there was a long dispute on the momentous question which should be signed first, and "day was breaking before all the instruments had been executed. Then the plenipotentiaries, with many bows, congratulated each other on having had the honour of contributing to so great a work."

The rejoicings that followed the announcement of peace were natural, but premature; for, hardly was the ink well dry on the Treaty of Ryswick than the disputed Spanish succession plunged Europe into the war in which Marlborough and Peterborough reaped their brightest laurels; a struggle finally brought to a close by another congress—that of Utrecht. Early in January, 1712, Queen Anne, being ill with the gout and unable to open Parliament in person, sent her communication as a message to both Houses. It was mainly to announce that the congress was on the point of opening, and that Her Majesty's plenipotentiaries had already arrived at Utrecht. These were the Earl of Strafford and the Bishop of Bristol (Lord Privy Seal), who appeared at Utrecht "in a black velvet gown adorned with gold loops, with a long train borne up by two pages in ash-coloured coats, laced with silver orris, and waistcoats of green velvet." France had sent the Maréchal d'Huxelles, the Abbé de Polignac, and M. Mesnager; while M. Buys was the principal negotiator on the part of Holland, and the Marquis de Borgo on the part of Savoy. The ambassadors

began in the approved style. It had been hoped that business would commence in mid January, but so much time was consumed "in visits of ceremony and regulations of forms," that the first conference was not held until the 29th of that month. The business of the congress was weighty enough. It had seemed good to William the Third in his last years to strike one more blow against Louis the Fourteenth, and to oust, if possible, his grandson from the throne of Spain. That a Bourbon should, by virtue of the will of the wretched creature who closed the line of Castile and Aragon, sit on the throne of Spain and justify the saying of the proud old French king, "The Pyrenees exist no more" (never said by Louis, by-the-way), was gall and wormwood to the Dutchman. Hence the Grand Alliance and all that had come of it—glory to England certainly in plenty, and prosperity too, money and honour, wit and elegance. What would the period of Anne have been without Almanza, Ramillies, and Blenheim, the latter supplying the necessary opportunity for the ingenious Mr. Addison to manufacture his famous angel ready to "ride the whirlwind and direct the storm?" But, except for England, the Grand Alliance had effected very little, and to the mind of some dull people might as well have acquiesced in the Spanish Bourbon from the first. All that had been done to lay the spectre, which had affrighted Europe, of France and Spain united under one crown, was to induce the French ambassadors at Utrecht to propose that things should remain as they were; that fortresses and territory should be restored; and that Philip of Anjou was to continue king of Spain and the Indies; but that, as the late Earl Stanhope put it, "measures were to be concerted to hinder the crowns of Spain and France from ever being united on the same head."

At first, events ran grievously against the congress at Utrecht. An epidemic, the most malignant form of measles, not—it was said at the time—unaided by poison, swept away the flower of the French royal family. First, on the 12th of February, died Marie Adelaide of Savoy, the young and charming dauphiness, better known as the Duchess of Burgundy. Nine days later she was followed by her husband, the pupil of Fénelon and the rising hope of France. They left two sons, the Dukes of Brittany and Anjou—the former only five and the latter only two

years of age. Both fell ill of the same malady which had proved fatal to their parents, and the elder expired on the 8th of March. Thus had three dauphins gone to the grave in one year. The Duke of Anjou—a sickly infant, whose life was long despaired of, but who lived to misrule France for many wretched years as Louis the Well-Beloved—was now the only bar between Philip of Spain and the throne of France. Under these circumstances it was deemed unlikely that Philip would be induced to forego the reversion of the French crown; the treaty languished, and the conferences at Utrecht were suspended. Meanwhile, negotiations were carried on outside. The Duke of Ormond was ordered not to act in concert with Prince Eugene; and the old French king tried all his influence to arrange the peace, of which France was desperately in want. Backwards and forwards rode couriers with all kinds of propositions, in which courtiers and peoples were shuffled and dealt as if they were packs of cards. France made large offers to England: "to give up its portion of the island of St. Kitts, with Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and other territory in North America." Spain offered the fortress of Gibraltar, the whole island of Minorca, "and the monopoly in the trade of negroes for thirty years." Negotiating went on concurrently with fighting and junketing.

Bolingbroke and Mr. Matthew Prior enjoyed themselves hugely in Paris; while the Duke of Hamilton and Lord Mohun slew each other in London. Perhaps all the attempts at peace might have failed, had not the sudden death of the Duke of Vendôme inclined the Spanish court to peaceful counsels. This great captain was lost by an unhappy accident. Hearing the sea-fish at the village of Vinaros highly spoken of, he went thither, unattended by any of his officers, to pass some days in strict seclusion and gorge himself at will. He was seized with a surfeit, and, other symptoms supervening, he was soon at the point of death, and actually died, vainly struggling with a thieving domestic for the coverlet on his bed.

The new year, 1713, found the treaty very little advanced, and nothing would have been done but for the "English Phoenix" Bolingbroke, whose firmness, expressed in a haughty and peremptory despatch, at length brought the solemn wigs together; and the famous Peace of Utrecht was signed on the 31st of March.

One other noteworthy congress occurred in the Old World, then just beginning to show signs of disintegration. It was held at Soissons, for the settlement of the eternal Spanish question, but proved a mere routine of forms—a dull accumulation of memorials and counter-memorials, without leading to the settlement of one of the points in dispute, A.D. 1728. The only interesting feature to Englishmen in this very dry-as-dust conference is the fact that England was represented by William Stanhope, Poyntz, and Horace Walpole; while our interests at the Hague were watched by the courtly Chesterfield. With a deep bow we may take our leave of the Congress of Soissons; for the next meeting of the kind we shall have occasion to visit will be one held amid the crash of falling kingdoms, the roar of artillery, and the rattle of sabres which ushered in the New Time.

MASTER HORNER'S PIE.

WHEN young Mr. Horner sat in a corner, eating a Christmas-pie, he was not aware how many curious and interesting questions might be raised concerning that favourite dish; how many are the historical connections between that and other substantial luxuries, which are placed upon the dinner-table at the "festive season." When he put in his thumb, and pulled out a plum, he adopted rather an untidy mode of procedure, certainly inconsistent with the rules of good breeding laid down in the Boke of Curtasye. This curious tract, supposed to be not less than five hundred years old, was ferreted out by Mr. Halliwell from among the Sloane Manuscripts, and printed a few years ago in the Percy Society's publications. Two lines in this versified book of etiquette propound the rule:

Dip not thi thombe thi drynke into;
Thou art uncurtasye yf thou hit do.

To dip the thumb into a Christmas-pie was quite as bad as to dip it into one's cup or tankard, as all must admit. To pull out a plum was the best part of Master Horner's proceeding, inasmuch that plums are thus shown to have been among the ingredients of his pie.

Plum-pudding, plum-porridge, Christmas-pie, mince-pie—what relation have they borne one to another in past periods of our national history? We shall find this a question not unworthy of attention.

A French writer, humorously bantering us on our praises of plum-pudding, declares his belief that it was an ancient Greek dish, which we have borrowed. He notices the description given by Pollux, in his *Onomasticon*, of the dish called "thrion;" and adds, "I can only see currants as an English addition to the Greek compound. The addition may have been intended as a delicate compliment to the Greeks, Corinth being one of their famous cities." (The French name for our dry currants is "raisins de Corinthe.") "Should we not revive the old name of thrion for it? I do not think that this would wound the consciences of English cooks and housewives, or be regarded as a *casus belli*." As this Frenchman would give the honours of plum-pudding to the ancient Greeks, so did an English writer of the last century look to the Wise Men of the East as the unconscious authors of mince-pie. "May not the minced-pie, a compound of the choicest productions of the East, have in view the offerings made by the Wise Men, when they came from afar to worship, bringing spices, &c.?"

In England, December-pie, Christmas-pie, mince-pie, spice-broth, and plum-porridge are mentioned at earlier dates than plum-pudding; but the lines of separation between them are by no means clearly marked. At one time Christmas-pie was a mixture of meat, eggs, raisins, and spice. The late Dr. Rimbault held an opinion that, in old England, porridge had nearly the meaning of modern pudding, while pudding was something akin to our force-meat, such as black-pudding, &c. The country dish known as "furmety" was, for aught we know, the forerunner of plum-porridge; as it consisted of wheat grains boiled in sweet milk, sugared, and spiced; in an additionally savory form, at Christmas, it also contained milk of almonds and yolk of eggs. Easy from this is the transition to a dish containing also the dried fruits of the East, such as we now know as plums and currants.

We have the means of learning something definite concerning mince-pies in the time of Charles the First, for Sir Roger Twysden's writings contain the following receipt: "To make mynce-pyes. Take a phillet of veale, or a leag of mutton; and when it is parboyled, shred it very smalle. Then put to it three pound of beife, shred likewise very smalle; then put to it three pound of Corinthes well washt and pickt, and one pound of

sugar beaten; of nutmegs and synnamon each one ounce. So put them in coffins or pyes, and bake them. You must lay some of the Corinthes at toppe of y^e meat, when they be made, and must not therefore mingle them all with the rest." This description gives us some curious items of information. The meat and the spice are larger in proportion, and the fruit smaller, than in modern mince-pies. Indeed, the meat is sometimes wholly omitted in our cheap and imperfect imitations; and then the name is a misnomer, for mince implies minced meat. The coffin shape, mentioned by Twysden, is not now familiar to us. There is reason to believe that, in old times, the form was symbolic of the manger at Bethlehem; and that the Christmas-pie, whether mince or not, had a religious as well as a gastronomic association with this particular season.

In the later years of Charles's reign, and during the Commonwealth, the Puritans opposed many Christmas customs, simply from antagonism to the Church and King party. Mince-pie and plum-porridge were denounced at Christmas, although sanctioned at other seasons of the year; and the term Christmas-pie was disowned in any sense whatever. Butler, in his *Hudibras*, did not fail to hit this blot:

Rather than fail, they will defie
That which they love most tenderlie;
Quarrel with mince-pie, and disparage
Their best and dearest friend, plum-porridge.

No wonder that, after the Restoration, the people were glad to revert to many of the old customs. A ballad of fifteen verses became popular, under the title *Old Christmas Revived, or Hospitality Restored*. One verse we will give, because it shows that plum-pudding and mince-pies were alike familiarly known at that time:

All you that to feasting and mirth are inclined,
Come, here is good news to pleasure your mind;
Old Christmas is come for to keep open house,
He scorns to be guilty of starving a mouse.
Then come, boys, and welcome, for dyet the chief,
Plum-pudding, goose, capon, mince't pies, and roast
beef.

The last two lines formed a chorus to every verse. There is reason to believe that, at that time, Christmas-pie was not necessarily mince-pie; for we read of a Christmas-pie that was coffin-shaped, and contained steaks, salt, and pepper—nearly equivalent to our modern beef-steak pie, except in form. As to their plum-pudding, we obtain a little insight through Southey's *Omniana*, containing an extract

from a work published by Chevalier d'Arvieux, after a visit to England: "Their pudding was detestable. It is a compound of scraped biscuit or flour, suet, currants, salt, and pepper, made into a paste, wrapped in a cloth, and boiled. It is then taken out of the cloth, and put into a plate, and some old cheese is grated over it, which gives it an unbearable odour. Leaving out the cheese, the thing itself is not so very bad." Cheese with plum-pudding would, we opine, meet with a bad reception at our Christmas dinners at the present day.

At the beginning of the last century, "Porridge with plums, and turkey with the chine," were mentioned in a book by Dr. King. The two forms of plum-delicacies were in use somewhat later, in the time of Addison, who says, in the *Spectator*, "No man of the most rigid virtue gives offence by any excess in plum-pudding, or plum-porridge, and that because they are the first parts of the dinner"—a custom which we certainly do not generally follow in our time, when we wind up with pudding after partaking of meat and other viands.

M. Misson, a French traveller who published his impressions of England in the time of George the First, mentions Christmas-pie and plum-porridge among the dishes of which he partook. "Every family about Christmas," he tells us, "make a famous pye, which they call Christmas-pye. It is a great nostrum; the composition a most learned mixture of neat's tongue, chicken, eggs, sugar, raisins, orange and lemon peel, various kinds of spicery, &c. . . . Plum-porridge is a sort of soup with plums, which is not at all inferior to the pye." Some of the ingredients in this "pye" are quite consistent with those of mince-pie; the doubt is, whether the meat was minced and mixed up with the plums, spice, &c.; if not, it was a complicated meat-pie rather than a mince-pie.

Later in the century, when the pleasant essays in the *Connoisseur* were published, the two names of mince-pie and Christmas-pie appear to have been applied indiscriminately to the same compound. Speaking of old-fashioned and new-fashioned folks, in the early days of the reign of George the Third, the essayist said: "These good people"—the old-fashioned—"would indeed look upon the absence of mince-pies as the highest violation of Christmas, and have recounted with con-

cern the disregard that has been shown of late years to this old English repast; for the excellent British olio is as essential to Christmas as pancakes to Shrove Tuesday, tansy"—large thin cakes having a mingled sweet and bitter taste—"to Easter, furmety to Mid-lent Sunday, or goose to Michaelmas-day. And they think it no wonder that our finicking gentry should be so loose in their principles, as well as weak in their bodies, where the solid, substantial, Protestant meat-pie has given place among them to Roman Catholic amulets, and light puffy heterodox pasties." A few years later in the same century, proof was afforded that a Christmas-pie, with no mince or mincing in any sense, was sometimes made of truly vast dimensions. The *Newcastle Chronicle* informed its readers that, "On Monday last was brought from Howick Hall to Berwick, to be shipped to London for Sir Henry Grey, a pie, the contents whereof were as follow: two bushels of flour, twenty pounds of butter, four geese, two turkeys, two rabbits, four wild ducks, two woodcocks, six snipes, four partridges, two curlews, seven blackbirds, six pigeons, and two neat's tongues. It was made by Mrs. Dorothy Patterson, housekeeper at Howick. It was nearly nine feet in circumference at bottom, and weighed over twelve stone. It was neatly fitted with a case, and four small wheels to facilitate its use to every guest inclined to partake of its contents at table." Oh, what a pie was there! And what must have been the dinner-table, compared with our puny affairs, that would admit of such a viand being wheeled along it! Little Jack Horner most assuredly could not have sat in a corner eating this Christmas-pie, even if it had contained plums—which it didn't.

At the beginning of the present century, a satirical or mock-heroic poem was published under the title of *The Mince-pie*. A few lines will suffice to show that sweet and odoriferous ingredients played an important part in the dish which formed the poet's theme, whatever may have been the kind and quantity of meat introduced:

The spices from the eastern grove,
The fragrant cinnamon, the dusky clove,
The strength of all the aromatic train
That careful Dutchmen waft across the main.

The pastry frontier, the embattled crust
Moulded with butter and the mealy dust,
The taper rolling-pin that, white and round,
Rolls o'er the dresser with a thund'ring sound.

* * * * *

Can apples, currants, raisins, all combined,
 Make a mince-pie delight a taste refined,
 Command the praises of the pamper'd guest,
 Or court the palate with a genuine zest?

Apple is a component which we have not seen mentioned in connection with earlier mince-pies; but it is evident that housewives claimed the right to increase or lessen the variety at pleasure. We have proof that, about that same period, plum-pudding was nearly as much in its glory as mince-pie. The Annual Register records that, at the house of Mr. Champion, of Darnall, near Sheffield, some workmen were regaled on one occasion with a plum-pudding, comprising twenty-four pounds of flour, sixteen pounds of raisins and currants, and forty eggs; it measured five feet in circumference. Mr. Brand, the antiquarian, tells us that, about that same period—the beginning of the present century—plum-porridge shared with the more solid compound the honour of being well-esteemed by the English people; for, dining with the royal chaplain in St. James's Palace, he noticed that a tureen of rich luscious plum-porridge commenced the dinner.

Coming down a little into the century, we learn from a Devonshire newspaper, that, at Paignton Fair, near Exeter, a plum-pudding of vast dimensions was drawn through the town amid great rejoicings. No wonder that a brewer's copper was needed for the boiling; seeing that the pudding contained four hundred pounds of flour, a hundred and seventy pounds of beef suet, a hundred and forty pounds of raisins, and two hundred and forty eggs. This eight hundred pounder, or so, required continuous boiling from Saturday morning till the following Tuesday evening. It was finally placed on a car decorated with ribbons and evergreens, drawn through the streets by eight oxen, cut up, and distributed to the poor. At Bartholomew Fair, some years later, there was a plum-pudding seller who was quite a character in his way; neatly dressed, his hair powdered and tied à la queue, and without a hat, he carried his delicacy on a board, announcing its merits in a full and ringing voice, letting off verbal squibs of wit and humour, and selling his plum-pudding at a penny a slice.

Plum-pudding never has really taken root (so to speak) in any part of Europe save England. The Venetians, some years ago, had a dish called "torta di lasagna," a mixture of dough or paste, raisins, currants,

candied orange-peel, onions, parsley, lime-nuts, and oil. One writer speaks of this complex mixture as a pottage, but we infer that it more resembled mince-pie; for "torta" in Italian is a tart, while "lasagna" is a thin layer of paste of flour or vermicelli. Italy, however, puts forth a claim to something more nearly resembling our plum-pudding. A traveller partook, at Rome, of "a rich ebony-looking block, bathed in a yellow cream, lighter and more delicate in flavour than the English plum-pudding."

The French have never exactly liked to admit their inferiority to their insular neighbours, in the preparation of this celebrated component of a Christmas dinner. They have made many attempts, but with only partial success. It is said that Louis the Eighteenth, who resided many years in England as an exile during the Napoleonic era, and had imbibed a liking for plum-pudding, made a point of having one on his table on Christmas-day; the cold remains were willingly accepted by his English domestics, but not by those of French birth and customs. There was another French monarch (we are not certain which) who, wishing to give pleasure to an English Ambassador Extraordinary, gave instructions to his chef de cuisine to prepare a plum-pudding in honour of the guest. The ingredients, the proportions, the quantity of water, the time of boiling—all were noted with great care; but as no cloth was named, none was used; and the ambassador (though, of course, too polite to make any comments) was rather taken aback to see the plum-pudding brought in, as a kind of thick soup in a tureen. A story somewhat similar to this was told of Lord Macartney, when he went on his embassy to China, and wished to give gratification to a distinguished mandarin. There have in all probability been more instances than these two; for the blunder may easily be made by a cook who had never before boiled a pudding in a cloth.

A curious paragraph appeared in an English newspaper, just about half a century ago, showing, in the words of a Paris correspondent, to how small an extent plum-pudding had become naturalised in France: "For Christmas-day all the English cooks in Paris are in full business. The queen of cooks here is Harriet Dunn. As Sir Astley Cooper among the cutters of limbs, and M. D'Egville among the cutters of capers, so is Harriet Dunn among the professors of one of the most necessary, and in its

results most gratifying professions in existence. Her services are secured beforehand, by special retainers; and happy is the peer who can point to his pudding, and declare that it is of the true Dunn composition. Her fame has even extended to the provinces. For some time prior to Christmas-day she forwards plum-puddings in cases to all parts of the country, ready cooked and fit for the table, after the necessary warming. All this is, of course, for the English."

In our own day and our own country, plum-porridge has gone nearly into oblivion; Christmas-pie is known chiefly in country districts; while mince-pie is a small affair, often intended to be held in the hand, and eaten like a tart or a slice of cake. But plum-pudding reigns—as we have before said, and as everybody knows—more supreme amongst us than ever in the last week of the year. Whenever English travellers are in foreign lands on Christmas-day, they use their best endeavours to get a plum-pudding, if it be at all practicable. North or south, frigid or torrid, the taste accompanies them. Mr. Henty, when at Ashanti as the special correspondent of one of the London daily newspapers, was in that hot and swampy season at Christmas (there is no really cold season in that part of the world); he narrated his experiences of the day thus: "I have spent my Christmas-days in strange places, and among strange surroundings; from the cold of the Crimea to the heat of Abyssinia; but I do not remember one which passed off so unnoticed, so unheeded, as that on the Gold Coast. At all the messes an attempt was made, by the appearance of plum-pudding upon the board, to record the day; but it would not do." Hard work and hot swamps made even Christmas fall dead upon them; and yet, as we see, plum-pudding did not fail to put in an appearance.

As in the south, so in the north. All the Arctic Expeditions are furnished, among their supplies, with the materials for plum-pudding; and Christmas-day is not allowed to pass without due honour in this respect.

"KNOWLEDGE IS POWER."

"UPON my soul you mustn't come into the place, saying you want to know, you know," said Mr. Barnacle, junior, of the Circumlocution Office, to Mr. Clennam, as readers of LITTLE DORRIT will remember. If I were the editor of a ladies' newspaper, I

think I should sympathise with that unfortunate young Barnacle.

"Want to know?" What is it that the correspondents of these useful and instructive journals do *not* want to know? They appear to be absolutely without exact information on any subject. They know, it would seem, nothing. Where to live in the summer; what to do in the winter; how to dress; what to eat, drink, and avoid; how, and where, to bring up an orphan family; how to rejoice; how, in how much crape, and for how long, to mourn; how to feed a household, of, generally, an unspecified number; the authorship of anything; the meaning of most things; the way to anywhere; the climate of the best known places; how much furniture, and of what sort, to put into a drawing-room, size not mentioned with particularity; the ordinary habits and merest conventionalities of civilised society; all these things, and many—very many—more seem to be pitfalls and stumbling-blocks, in the paths of most of these helpless seekers after knowledge.

And the singular part of the business is that these encyclopædic questioners must be absolutely friendless, or that the circles in which they live must be wrapped in ignorance as profound as their own. If they had any friends who could help them, they would not, it may be presumed, fly to the editor for succour. Private sources of information must be closed to them, or they would not, one would think, take the public into their confidence. It is difficult to imagine that they can have access even to the cheapest, the most elementary, and the most accessible books of reference. It is certain that, if they can get them, they don't know how to use them.

It is almost impossible to conceive that the mind of anybody who has received any sort of education, however frivolous, can be wholly a blank as to any simple subject. But that this would seem to be really the case with many of the ladies who "want to know," let some of their questions and "wants" be brought into court to prove.

"What is the climate of Southsea?" asks one of these idealess and acquaintanceless questioners. "Are apartments easily had there? Are provisions plentiful all the year round?" "Four of us," cries another, "are desirous of spending a few weeks in the Isle of Wight. Which is best, Ryde or Ventnor? Are lodgings

let at moderate rates? Which is the best part of either town to look for them?" "What sort of place is Amélie les Bains?" several others demand, "Is there an English church there? What is the best mode of conveyance to it? Is Bagnères de Bigorre a place of resort in winter? Is the air of Mentone relaxing? Is Castellamare a pleasant place for a family? What is the probable cost of a sitting-room and two bed-rooms near Belgrave-terrace, Torquay? Is there a good theatre at Dieppe? Is there any fishing in the river? Would it be a nice place for a lady who has been accustomed to live in Boulogne? Is there a suburb at Cardiff where it is pleasant to live? Are rents high? Is there good society? Could residence be found in proximity to St. Michael's Mount, Cornwall? Is Dinan dear? Which route is best, and is it warm? What would be the probable annual rent of two sitting-rooms and six bed-rooms at Bath? What is the cost of living at Boulogne? Is Geneva expensive? What would be the expense of 'pension' for two ladies at Nice?" It is not surprising that an exasperated editor turns round—in brackets—on a ridiculous asker with, "You know that Torquay is the resort of many feeble folk in winter; consult your doctor;" and that he snarls out to Tiny Fidget, Lily of the Valley, Dacie, Majolica, Maggie, and so forth: "We have no room for such indefinite questions;" "Your very elementary inquiries will be answered in such a book;" "Margate would not suit you;" "Edinburgh is not considered a very expensive place;" "Your queries are too vague—write to Mr. Cook."

It is no wonder an exasperated editor turns round at last. The real wonder is what women can be induced to spend (as they do) time, and letter-paper, and postage-stamps, in giving these other women answers. Women of average ability, of average social standing, if they met these silly questioners in journeyings, or calls, or visits, and were beset by them, would reply (gently, and generally), that pleasant life depends upon tastes; that "good" society has many definitions; that bedrooms anywhere would be an excellent criterion of bedrooms at Bath; that cost of living is regulated by how many have to live, by whether the living is to be en prince or—alliteratively—en papillotes; that, above all, although a lady may have resided at one French watering-place, nobody but herself would

be able to tell whether she would like to reside at another. Such women, too, if they had just returned from a sea-side jaunt, or a more ambitious Continental flight, would be quite willing to tell their intimates—because they would know their tastes, and wants, and habits—where they stayed, whom they met, what they saw, and what particular dress they found most comfortable. But they would not dream of advising a stranger, of whom they knew absolutely nothing, on any such points. It is very different with the ladies who enlighten our helpless friends. They are ready enough, and willing, two or three of them turning up sometimes in reply to the same questioner. "Southport and its neighbourhood is very healthy and pleasant, there is good water and first-rate schools for girls," says one lady, who should not—and does not—sign herself Lindley Murray. "There are plenty of donkeys at Ilfracombe," says another. And then there come, "Huntingdon is a very pleasant town, there are three booksellers in it; Penelope can live most comfortably on three hundred pounds a year in Natal; luggage is always a nuisance, and the less the better; a tin travelling-bath will be found useful; the wisest plan is to buy things as you want them; take two hats and a bonnet, a waterproof cloak, and a thin shawl to be carried on the arm, and put on at sunset; for tables-d'hôte, nothing is so nice as good black silks; if Mouse-ear goes to Bologna, let her on no account neglect to see Ravenna; Caen has an excellent climate; Pinerolo is a pretty place; there are good lodgings to be had at Tenby." When "Touchstone" thinks of going to Italy; when "Mrs. J. G." is travelling to Nice; when "Veuve" wants to know where she can live cheaply, and best bring up her three young children, nothing short of a perfect gush of comment can assuage the gentle agitation; nothing short of a loquacious list of hotels, and sights, and sceneries—every word of which could be found, indexed, and assorted, in a continental Bradshaw. "Do you write and tell people what they want to know, dear, in *The Weekly Smile*, or *The Everyday Simper*? I do; and it's so nice! And, if ever I am going anywhere, I always write and ask how I'm to get there; and somebody is always sure to tell me! I have such a pretty pseudonym, or nom de plume, too! I was a long time fixing upon it; because correspondents are full of Pattie, and Minna, and Meta, and Nellie, and Gipsy, and Lady Fair, and

White Rose—some of them even sign themselves Countess So-and-so, and I wonder whether they are!—but at last I chose the one you see, and if you choose one, I should recommend this other. For there's this poor thing, who says she is left a widow with a young family, and she wants suggestions where she had better live. It's true that most widows would consult their relations, their friends, their circumstances, themselves; but perhaps this widow hasn't a relation, a friend, a circumstance, a self—has nothing, in short, except a newspaper; so I'll just tell her what in my opinion would be best. It is all so nice, dear, and so interesting, and so delightful!"

It must be something after this fashion. If it is not, what else can it be?

Here is the lady who says, "I am going out to the Cape, and wish information as to the outfit required, the sort of trunks that would be most useful, the amount of underlinen, the number and kind of dresses usually considered necessary." Here is another lady who wants to know, "How can I clean a tortoiseshell-comb, that has become dull from having been some time laid aside?" Here is the lady, not, apparently, gifted with inventive genius, who says, "I have a quantity of small parrots' feathers of all colours. Can anyone suggest an idea for using them, not hand or fire-screens?" Here is the lady who says, "What is the proper cement for alabaster? I have had a valuable vase broken in transit, and no one in our small town can repair it properly." Here are the scores of ladies who cry out perpetually, "Will M. E. tell me the quantity of Shetland wool required for knitting a small shawl? Can I mix cretonne flowers with paper pictures on a screen? How can I form an oval net for the hair? Is there an institution in London for retired ladies'-maids? What will take old ink stains out of Russia leather? What should be mixed with white paint to give a polish to stone stairs?" Here are the scores again of the other, and more silly, ladies who cry out, "Where can I obtain photographs of Folkestone and Bristol?"—to which a companion-picture would appropriately be, "Where did the Witch of Endor come from?"—"Where could I procure a small printing-machine? Where is Tell me where is Fancy Bred published? Is Under the Willow arranged as a waltz? Where can I get a poem called The Secret Drawer? Who is the publisher of Light

in the Dwelling? Where do the lines occur:

Be to her faults a little blind,
Be to her virtues ever kind?"

Side by side with these were the ladies in copious answer. "The hymn Tosty asks for is in such a book," they say; "I should recommend Robin Dale to knit a little dress and petticoat for her baby; I think Dot and Polijane had better knit in brioche stitch throughout; Wildfowl should certainly use a frame for her crewel work; I shall be happy to lend Miss Perinckety one of my little shawls to copy; Clare should purl one, slip one, knit one, twist one, &c.; I have just made a pretty tobacco-pouch in gray kid—the kid was cut in a circle. Theta New will find a small leg of mutton inexpensive; an excellent way of using stale biscuits or cakes is to pound them fine in a mortar; I wash my cork carpet with warm water and yellow soap, without soda; in reply to Pitchpipe, we use the atmospheric churn, and obtain butter in ten minutes from milk, which is afterwards sweet and excellent for household use—extraordinary fluid! Avril should procure some ebony varnish; Innishowen could easily make a stamp snake by, amongst other things, threading two thousand stamps on a piece of double purse silk, till the snake measures thirty-four inches! I should like to ask Yokohama whether he has seen the new game called Finesse, or the Contest for the Flags? Fox will find "A Fox went out" in such a publication; I make one or two smoking-caps every year; I think Kitty Clover will hardly find anything easier, cheaper, or more effective, than North-country work-house sheeting, worked in a design of periwinkles and bamboo stems in various shades of blue; would Juliet say whether by "tricot" she means crochet tricotée? Eileen will find wool much more suitable for a gentleman's mitten than silk; Rahin should send for a large shuttle; A. E. P. should cast off the back entirely, and knit a shoulder-strap four inches long."

It is the same throughout. Tibby-Wib, and Pekie-Pet, and Sookie-Suck, are not to take the least trouble themselves if they want anything; are not to use the brains they may be supposed (anatomically-speaking) to possess; but—they are to write to a newspaper. Thus, Belem, wanting the Life of the Rev. Mild Pleasey, does not order it of her bookseller, but writes, Can anyone tell me the name of the publisher? Thus Silkworm,

discovering herself to be interested in the recent explorations in Syria, writes: Where can I obtain publications? Thus, Piga Wiga, "going in for" Alpine botany, writes: I want to hear of a practical useful book; I wish it in English, and not expensive. Thus, Frizzles, attracted by the word Manolo (and wanting, possibly, a little exercise in letter-writing and a short walk to a post-office), writes: Will anyone inform me what it means? If Huntress, having a voice of somewhat extended compass, wants good secular songs to display it in, she must make known to all the readers of her weekly newspaper that she wants them. It would never do for her, or for Jabberwocky, who wishes for the names of some nice little sixpenny story-books for little girls, or for Penny Marker, who is going to knit some muffatees, to be wanting songs, and books, and knitted muffatees, without proclaiming those important facts, and endeavouring to get a certain amount of public attention. Right into the midst of a shoal of "pseudonymists" the little hint is flung, and straightway (apparently) there is a scramble who shall be the first to act upon it. There is no fear of indifference or overlooking. When R. N. B. F. asks, Where can I get a photo scrap called "Le Printemps," a boy and girl in a swing? R. N. B. F. is quite certain that somebody will be very quickly at a desk answering, though the "photo scrap" may only involve an outlay of threepence or fourpence current money. Ditto with Spinning Jenny wanting directions how to knit a jersey. Ditto with Flip, wanting initial letters in very fine crochet. The wide scope, too, of these queries and announcements, the ignorance and helplessness they disclose among the querists and answerers, are not the least singular items in the matter. Emma has to be told, seriously, How can the friends possibly know you are in the neighbourhood? Go and see them if you wish. Madcap Violet has to be told, also seriously, The custom of standing arm-in-arm in the pauses of a valse is unheard-of in good society. Little Woman has to be advised, You had better consult the consul of the town in which you wish the marriage to take place. Muslin has to be informed, The mourning must be the same as for your own sister—three months in crape; two, in black; one, in half-mourning. To Mrs. R. M. it says, Add folds of *écru* tulle inside the square bodice; if not sufficient, place white silk beneath the tulle, and button to the throat. To

Zara it says, Right is synonymous with correct; therefore, wrong and incorrect are synonymous. Illicit simply means without licence. Other ladies are told, "If you have a long garden, let you and your mamma have a race round it four or five times a day; if you look upon the gentleman as a lover, there is no impropriety in corresponding with him; take camomile pills occasionally; the hair is very much worn plaited or twisted low on the back of the neck; a yellow rose signifies infidelity, heliotrope devotion, faithfulness; for our own part we always find more comfort in purchasing the best quality of ready-made boots; you do not say if the correspondence has been one of friendship or love; the best plan to sober a person who is in liquor would be to put him under a pump; the prettiest flowers to wear with very light sage green silk at a wedding would be blush roses and half-open buds; it is the seventy-sixth year of the century, we presume you do not really want to know when any year begins; you must say whether you require books on High Church or on Evangelical principles, as we cannot publish answers sent at random; fish knife and fork, two large steel knives, two large silver forks, one small knife and fork, and a dessert spoon, are generally placed to each person; yes, the song Bid me Discourse, is very difficult; we are not acquainted with any literary gentlemen who make it a business to look over MS. plays, and give their opinions upon them for a consideration; the fashionable wedding-days now are Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays; 'his' being the genitive case of 'he,' all possessed by 'he' is of course 'his;' there is no work on fantail pigeons; in the refreshment-room, tea, coffee, iced coffee, ices, cakes, lemonade, claret-cup, and fruit would be provided at the buffet; it is too bad to expect us to occupy space in explaining that when even elderly people are carefully manipulated at the toilette, they may be made to look fresh and beautiful, and may be compared for the nonce to Venus or Hebe." In addition, also, to the curious range of all of this, and to the curious condition of the minds wanting information upon such matters, there is the striking fact that a long time must elapse between the day on which a query is sent, and the day on which an answer to the query is obtained. Interrogators, one newspaper says, must not think themselves overlooked if six weeks go by without a reply; it is quite certain the "business"

of the thing cannot be managed much under a month. How, then, of the lady who asks, Can anyone tell me on what to feed little French tree-frogs during the English winter? Her little French tree-frogs will probably be dead days and days before "anyone" can say how they are to be kept alive. How, too, of the lady who has lost some lovely white Persian kittens, and wants to save the others? And how of the lady whose African parrot has taken a chill; of the lady who wants to know if she or her rich neighbour is to make the first call; of the lady anxious for the best material for a spring dress; of the lady wishing to write to the Hon. Mrs. Jones and not knowing how to do it; of the lady asking how to wash Macrome lace; of the great many ladies blushing inquisitive as to the right finger on which to wear the engaged ring? They must all have their ardour cooled, their pets buried, their desires changed, their occasions gone. Assuredly, the ladies who want to know how to remove freckles, how to lay a wedding-breakfast, how to register a letter, how to pronounce Llandudno, how to change the colour of their hair, how to mount their drawings, how to manage ferns, how to get wire-holders for suspending plates on walls, and so on, must be very Griseldas, if, when they want, they take a means of getting that must cost them wearying suspense. It must be a very "trying" affair to desire to know whether the crape would look well over cream silk, or maroon silk, or velvet, and to have to wait the whole of a long August, say, to receive the decision. It must be equally trying to have some blue silk in possession, and to have to look at it, and feel it, and see how "sweet" it is, for thirty days, at least, before being told to make it up with velvet, cashmere, brocade silk, or broderie laine. How dreadful, too, to want to make moss fringe, and daisy mats, and crest fans, and Hélène pincushions, and to have to want to make moss fringe, and daisy mats, and crest fans, and Hélène pincushions, for a whole six weeks! Then, naturally, many answers must be utterly useless when this unavoidable waiting has been done. W. is answered, "You should return the visit within a week;" but how can she? Black Eyes is told, "If you have exchanged visits with the lady, you can of course send her an invitation;" but, meanwhile, will not the party have "come off," or, the temperature of the—evidently—very slight acquaintance have reached a chill?

"Queries relating to merely personal or private matters," it is written in one set of notices to correspondents, "and queries relating to frivolous fancies are not admitted."

Now what, in the name of sense and literature, can be set down to be personal matters and frivolous fancies, if the greater part of these that have been quoted are not so? And what, in the further name of sense and literature, can be the questions with which unhappy editors are deluged and overpowered, when they are compelled to decide that these they have printed are not so obviously personal and frivolous? It is only absolutely certain that, if there is a bank of pity anywhere in existence, these unhappy editors may write the heaviest drafts they like upon it, and be quite sure that every one of them will be duly and instantaneously honoured.

WHAT HE COST HER.

BY JAMES PAYN,

AUTHOR OF "LOST SIR MASSINGBERD," "AT HER MERCY,"
"HALVES," &c.

CHAPTER XXIV. THE PICNIC.

IN these days there are many ways of going to Virginia Water. You can go by one of the many coaches, which, in the summer time, have endeavoured to revive the glories of "the road" with more or less of success. Holiday folks who use this mode of conveyance, and pass, on a fine day, through beautiful scenery to the end of a short journey, forget that the season and the locality have been chosen for them, that they have selected the weather for themselves, that they are not in a hurry, and are bound solely on pleasure; and on the strength of what is, after all, but a mere trip (though even that begins to grow a little tedious at the last), are apt to talk of the "old coaching-days" with regret, and to undervalue the advantages of the rail. But in the times we write of—unless people were mad enough to drive down in their own carriages—no opportunity was afforded of tiring themselves out, and getting weary of their company, in this way, before they had arrived at the spot selected for their enjoyment. You went by train to Windsor—there was then but one line—and drove the rest of the distance through the beautiful Park. In these days, again, it is not uncommon for a gentleman, who is giving a garden-party, to secure "a special" for his London guests; but it is only within

the last twenty years that luxury has taken such gigantic strides, and for General Groves's picnic at Virginia Water no such convenience was provided.

His guests travelled by ordinary train, to which, however, a saloon carriage was attached for their especial behoof, and at the door of it stood Percy Groves, the general's nephew, and heir-presumptive, to welcome his uncle's friends, and indicate the means of transit provided for them. The general himself would as soon have thought of patronising a picnic, even of his own, as of presiding at a teetotal meeting. When the train was starting, he was in his brougham upon his way to the Megatherium Club, where he had occupied the same corner in the whist-room, every afternoon for the last quarter of a century. He no longer played, for his memory could not be depended on, but his judgment remained to him, and he backed it on the best performers, with much pleasure to himself and not a little profit. As far as society was concerned with him, he had been extinct for a whole generation; but his wife, Lady Elizabeth, was a leader of fashion, with more acquaintances—and, we had almost added, fewer friends—than any woman in London. She knew everybody, so soon as they had established their claim to be anybody; authors, artists, travellers, millionaires, or beauties. She made a point of getting an introduction to them, of asking them to her receptions in Eaton-square, and of puffing them to other people; she made much of them for periods varying from a fortnight to six months, and then she dropped them, taking no sort of precaution as to breaking their fall. If they ventured to importune her for an explanation of this singular conduct, she put up her large gold glasses—for she affected near sight—and regarded them with a resuscitation of interest. It seemed so funny that they should not understand that they no longer afforded her any amusement. Even the beggar in the street does not look for a second penny, when you have said: "My good man, I have nothing more for you," and she had said that to these good people, as plainly as looks could speak. One would really think, to see them behaving in this way, that they had been persons of her own rank in life, who visited her by right, and were not called upon to afford her any excitement!

She had patronised the Landons on account of Ella's exceeding beauty, and was as much surprised as pleased to find

her husband so "presentable." She had been informed that he was "an oil and colour man," and had expected him to smell of paint. In her search for "novelties" she sometimes picked up some very queer people; and, indeed, one of her aristocratic acquaintances had likened her garden-parties to a day with the Odd Fellows; but she succeeded—perhaps from this very circumstance—in making them very popular. Aristocracy by itself is an insipid "plat" indeed; but, mingled with a dash of Bohemianism, and, still more, with a suspicion of impropriety, it becomes piquant.

There was nobody that could be called "improper" in the reserved saloon-carriage on the present occasion, but the company was very mixed. The aristocratic element—which included a cabinet minister who had taken to spirit-rapping, was well represented; and the "scratch lot," as the cabinet minister irreverently described his hostess's notabilities, was a remarkable one. There was Mr. Marks, the latest sensational novelist, who had excited the town by his original disposal of all the bad characters of his story; he had shut them up in a snow-bound cavern in Patagonia, where they had been driven to the extremity of devouring one another; and the survivor of them, and principal villain, had only escaped to be similarly dealt with by a native cannibal, afterwards converted by the angelic character of the story, and only prevented from becoming a ritualist clergyman by the consciousness of what he had swallowed.

There was the great Prima Donna, Madame Livoli, who never opened her pretty mouth, except to sing and show her teeth; and the still greater pianist Herr Stägger, who never opened his mouth at all, but shook his long whity-brown hair, and rolled his eyes, in a manner pregnant with genius, and more eloquent than words. There was Mr. Theodore Plum, the rising historical painter, who dressed as much like Charles the Second as he dared, and talked of "his art," till you wished his "art" was dead, and worse.

There was Mr. Rufus Bond, the famous financier, who boasted that he held the South American Republics in the hollow of his hand, and who afterwards became more famous still, by having conferred upon him by the representative of his sovereign (in a court of justice) the sentence of five years' penal servitude.

Each of these distinguished personages

were received by Lady Elizabeth with well-affected rapture, and took their seats in the saloon where they would, or whither embarrassment hurried them. Cecil and Ella, who were never embarrassed, and the former of whom had at least as good an eye for comfort as Mr. Theodore Plum for colour, selected a comfortable corner, with their backs to the engine, and looked about them.

"By jingo! there's that owl Whymper, blinking at us," whispered Cecil.

And indeed, in the opposite corner sat Mr. Whymper-Hobson, looking very uncomfortable, and unknown, and endeavouring to attract their attention.

He was of good family enough by the mother's side, but would certainly not have found himself in that reserved saloon, save for his recent acquisition of wealth. So soon, however, as that circumstance had been made public, Lady Elizabeth Groves had remembered how tenderly she had once been attached to his mother, when they were girls at school, and wrote to the young man a letter full of graceful sentiments, with an invitation to her picnic in the postscript. She had a niece unmarried, who was likely to become a charge upon her, if she were not otherwise provided for. "I should die happy," she was wont to sigh to confidential friends, "if I could only see dearest Julia suitably settled in life;" but it is probable that she would not have thought seriously of dying, even then. It was a subject that not even the general himself had begun to think of, who was five-and-thirty years her senior.

Mr. Whymper-Hobson had greatly improved in appearance since we knew him at the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich. The time had been unfavourable for making his personal acquaintance, it being that period at which the face of youth is apt to put forth pimples, and straggling tufts which only a mother can admire, or flattery designate as hair. He had now become a good-looking young fellow, with soft whiskers and moustaches to match, and with a certain bashfulness of air which those who did not know him for a sneak, might easily mistake for modesty. Cecil of course was not deceived in this respect, nor was he at all gratified by the signs of recognition made by his former slave. Very few men care to renew acquaintance with their old school-fellows, unless they have happened to be their intimate friends, and not always even then. It takes some courage to say so, for over this subject

conventional sentiment has of late years reigned supreme; but as a matter of fact, friendships at school mostly end there, unless, indeed, they are renewed at college, when they often last for life. In the unregenerate days of which we write, at all events, our boyish antecedents were not always so perfectly satisfactory that it was pleasant to be reminded of them. And more especially, I fear, was this the case with those who had been at the Royal Military Academy, which was "neither fish nor flesh"—neither school nor college.

To Cecil's mind, for example, Whymper's appearance recalled some high-handed, not to say tyrannical behaviour on his own part; and although there was a smile on the other's face, he could not believe in its sincerity. However, there was nothing for him but to make a sign to the young gentleman that he would be welcome to come and sit beside himself and Ella; an invitation that was accepted at once. His greeting of his old acquaintance was so cordial that, as Cecil afterwards said, "It sickened me to hear the fellow, knowing that he wished me dead;" and, after a few words of commonplace, he turned his back upon him, and, man like, left the task of entertainer to his wife. What they might say to one another was not likely to have much interest for him; and, besides, the train had started, so that it would have been difficult to attend to their conversation, even had he been so minded.

Mr. Whymper-Hobson's small-talk was not, however, it seemed, without its attraction for Ella. If one had not known that he was almost a stranger to her, the look of her face, when she first caught sight of him, might have aroused suspicions that, at one time, this young man had not been wholly indifferent to her, and her present behaviour would have strengthened them. The simple explanation of it all of course was, that he had only recently left Woolwich, and might have heard the story which Gracie had advised her to contradict, but which did not admit of contradiction. As it happened, he at once began to talk of Gracie, whom he knew by sight, and who, he was aware, was Ella's friend.

"She has had a sad loss," said he, "in the death of her mother."

Ella assented, with the proper expression of sympathy; but she was not thinking of the dead, but of the living. What unhappy fate had brought this man to the picnic on the only day that, for some time at least, Cecil would be within hearing of that

hateful rumour? Mr. Whympers might not have heard of it, of course; but she fancied that his face said that he had. There was an expression of sly jocosity about it, which in reality was natural to him when talking to ladies—with whom he thought it effective—but which she imagined to proceed from what he knew about her. Even if she was right, it was very unlikely he should speak of the matter to Cecil, of whom, as she knew, he did, or had been wont to stand in fear; but still there was the chance. She bitterly repented that she had not had the strength of mind to tell all to her husband, even though the time had seemed, of late, inopportune.

"I think it pretty certain that he will marry again," observed Mr. Whympers-Hobson.

"Marry again!" exclaimed Ella, fortunately not aloud, but in a whisper, hoarse with horror.

"Well, it is generally understood that Miss de Horsingham has hooked him."

Then she understood that some intermediate remark of her companion had escaped her observation, and that he was speaking of the commissary.

Miss de Horsingham was governess in the family of the commandant at Woolwich; and it was a joke in the garrison that she was the only lady to whom Acting Deputy-Assistant Commissary-General Ray ever paid any attention. She was not very young, but she was what is called "a fine woman," and was supposed to have saved a good bit of money.

"You seem quite shocked, Mrs. Landon," said Mr. Whympers-Hobson, with an odious giggle, which was part of his lady-conversational effects.

"I am shocked," said she, "that people should say such things of a man, before his wife is cold in her grave."

"Oh, at Woolwich, you know, people say all sorts of things," returned the young gentleman, so slyly that she felt sure that he was referring to the subject that engrossed her mind.

"It is rather dangerous to disseminate personal scandal," said Ella, "whether at Woolwich or anywhere else."

She had suddenly remembered that, when talking of this man, Cecil had hinted that he was not remarkable for personal courage; and she resolved, if possible, to frighten him.

"Nay, a scandal is a thing that is not true, Mrs. Landon," replied the young gentleman; "and this talk about the commissary is a fact. He has speculated

for years, it is well known, upon his wife's death; and has had this lady in his eye. Trotter tells me—who is a cousin of the commandant's—that Ray has always made up to her; her personal beauty not being so much the attraction as the main chance. She openly gave out that she became a governess, not for the salary, which was no object to her, but for the pleasure she derived from 'seeing the minds of her young pupils expand like the flowers to the sun;' 'and it is therefore probable,' says Trotter, who is a cynic in a small way, 'that the commissary will catch a Tartar.'"

"I sincerely hope he will," said Ella; and then turned away to admire Windsor Castle, to which her attention had been drawn by a civil neighbour.

Everybody was in ecstasies about the castle; partly because it indeed stood up most nobly against the delicate spring sky, and partly because it was complimentary to their hostess so to do, to whom they were indebted for the view.

Lady Elizabeth had, doubtless, admired it in her time as much as the rest, only she had seen it about five hundred times before, and her mind was now a little preoccupied; first, with the reflection that her niece Julia was little better than a fool to have permitted Mr. Whympers-Hobson to stray from her side, to that of that abominably-pretty young woman—Ella's name her ladyship had forgotten, though she remembered with satisfaction that she was married—and secondly, she was occupied with a calculation of the number of her guests, and how they would find carriage accommodation. In pleasure-parties of this description, there are always some who are audacious enough to bring friends, so that it is difficult to make an exact computation. However, at the station, everything was found as it should be, and her ladyship took great care not only to pack Mr. Whympers-Hobson and the niece that was on hand in the same conveyance, but to put Mrs. Cecil Landon somewhere else.

The party were not going to picnic in the Park, you may be sure—it was but the latter end of May; nor in any other month was Lady Elizabeth (who never so much as sat down in a low chair, because of the rheumatism in her knees) likely to propose anything so imprudent as dining in the open air; nor were they bound for the hotel, which satisfies the aspirations of middle-class people. The general was one of those privileged persons who have a

house at Virginia Water within the confines of the Park, and it was thither that the party were bound. Everything would there be found in order for them, and after their entertainment under that hospitable roof, they might picnic, in the sense of wandering about, and enjoying themselves, wherever they pleased. The drive, of course, was lovely—the most lovely of its kind to be found in England, or, for that matter, out of it—and under any other circumstances Ella would have enjoyed it thoroughly. She had contrived—in spite of some opposition—to be in the same carriage with her husband; he was in high spirits, and made himself very agreeable to the other occupants of the vehicle, and she was usually never so happy as when she saw that others admired him. But every now and then she caught, through the trees, a view of Mr. Whymper-Hobson in the vehicle ahead, and the sight of him chilled her with vague alarms. The many-summered trees that towered along the way, the browsing deer, the rabbits darting through the fern, were spectacles for which she had no leisure. She saw them, indeed, for every incident upon that journey was stamped upon her mind, and recurred to her afterwards a hundred times, with sharp distinctness; but she had no pleasure in them. That May-day in the Forest, with all its glorious sights, and scents, and sounds, was lost upon her. It seemed as though the very air, laden as it was with the freshness and sweetness of the coming summer, had been poisoned by this stranger's presence.

Arrived at their journey's end, she fled from him into a little coterie with which she had grown to be tolerably intimate, and wherein she felt he would not venture to intrude; but he fascinated her, nevertheless, and her eyes pursued him. It was some comfort to see that Cecil evidently avoided him, for she would rather the man had sought her own companionship than his. At dinner he was seated by Julia Groves, and away from both of them; but, even then, she fancied that she formed the subject of his conversation. Miss Julia had looked up once with elevated eyebrows in her direction, and then had coloured, and looked down, confused. Doubtless, that hateful wretch had been telling his neighbour what he thought would please her best—a scandal about a friend. If she could only have got Cecil quietly away immediately after dinner, upon pretence of sudden indisposition, she would

have done it; but that would have made a fuss, and drawn the general attention to herself, from which she now shrank as timorously as though she had exchanged natures with Gracie Ray. She saw her husband leave the house with some gentlemen, of whom Whymper was one, to have a stroll by the lake-side with their cigars; and at the same time Lady Elizabeth proposed a visit to the famous temple which George the Magnificent set up, and of course she had to acquiesce. The thrush was loud in the woods that afternoon, but it had no melody for her; she was listening for a voice that had wont to be more sweet to her than any bird's, but which she feared to find discordant. Never had that modern ruin, with its carpet of tender green, pranked with the flowers of spring, looked more exquisitely beautiful, but her eyes were fixed upon the quarter from which her husband must needs return, and beheld neither grass nor flower. Around her broke the light jest, followed by tinkling laughter, as the sparkling wave breaks on the summer beach, but her ears were deaf to it; they were on the watch for some sound—she knew not what—but with which she felt very sure no mirth would mingle.

Presently, Percy Groves—the general's aide-de-camp, as he was called—who had been one of the lake-side party, was seen strolling slowly back alone. He took his seat on the ground beside her, and began chatting in his thin, good-humoured way. Then, dropping his voice to a grave whisper, "Will you take my arm," he said, "and come as far as the inn, your husband is waiting for you."

She obeyed at once, though her limbs trembled as she rose, and she clung to him in a manner that some aides-de-camp would have misconstrued.

"What is the matter?" faltered she, "for I am sure that something has happened."

"Well, yes; I hope it is nothing serious. They have got him out, and he was coming too all right——"

"Good heavens! Has Cecil fallen in the lake?"

"No, no, it was Whymper-Hobson. He took a little more champagne than was good for him, and somehow or other picked a quarrel with your husband."

"With my husband!" her heart sank almost as low, as when she had thought Cecil had been half drowned.

"Yes, it was foolish of him, for Landon is almost the last man to choose for such an experiment; and the place was badly

chosen too—the only deep one in all the lake.”

“What, did Cecil push him in?”

“No, indeed he didn’t; there was no pushing about it; he took him round the waist and flung him in as though he had been a water-spaniel, which, unhappily for Whympers-Hobson, he was not. It was touch-and-go with him for a minute or two, though, as I said, he is all right now; only, of course, it is an unpleasant business, and Landon thinks it better to get away and avoid a row.”

“You are not deceiving me, Mr. Groves?” gasped Ella; “the man is not drowned?”

“Not a bit of it; he is rather wet, of course, but that’s all, and by this time they have put him to bed. A carriage will be ready at the inn for you and your husband. I am so awfully sorry you have to leave us. Shall I run back and fetch your shawl?”

For Ella was shivering as though she had fallen into the lake herself.

“No, no; I am quite warm, thank you.”

They had reached the inn garden, crowded with early pleasure-seekers, who had already heard of the “accident,” and who gazed with curiosity at her pale and frightened face, for she wore no veil.

“Where is my husband?” murmured poor Ella.

“Outside the inn, no doubt; he didn’t want to be in the way when Hobson was brought in, I daresay.”

In the road was a closed carriage with Cecil standing by it. He did not even look at Ella as he opened the door for her to enter, but turned his pale, stony face to her companion.

“I am much obliged to you, Groves,” said he. Then, in a lower voice, “If that fellow wishes anything more, you will tell him where to find me.”

“Oh, stuff; he took too much wine—and, begad, too much water afterwards—that’s all; it will all come to nothing, my dear fellow.”

“Drive on,” cried Cecil, in a harsh, impatient voice, and off whirled the carriage with the unhappy pair.

If her husband had begun to storm and swear, if he had even threatened to leave her by reason of her perfidy and falsehood,

Ella could have borne it better than the silence and contempt in which he wrapped himself. Not a word dropped from his lips, and he kept his eyes averted from her, fixed on the glancing trees and vanishing hedgerows.

“Oh, Cecil, won’t you speak to me?” said she, presently.

“Not now,” returned he, curtly.

“Then, may I speak to you?”

“Not now,” returned he again, in such a tone that she felt it was hopeless to address him.

The last time they had travelled together in a similar conveyance alone had been during their honeymoon, only a few months back, yet how long ago it seemed, and alas! by what a distance were they now parted. Would that icy voice ever speak to her in loving accents again, or that stony face beam with its old smile? It was very cruel of him to act as he was doing; and though she allowed that she had done wrong, she did not think that she deserved this. Even at the railway station, though they had to stop there half an hour for a train, he did not speak to her; but, having placed her in the waiting-room, walked up and down the platform alone, smoking a cigar. In the train he selected a carriage with several people in it, notwithstanding there were others empty, and, though he sat beside her, he never opened his lips. He was dumb, too, in the cab on their way home. Not till they got within doors, and were alone together in the drawing-room, did he break silence, with, “And now, madam, perhaps you will tell me why you married me under a false name?”

“WHEN THE SHIP COMES HOME,”

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