BENJAMIN DISRAELI

CONINGSBY; OR, THE NEW GENERATION

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Disraeli B.

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Содержание

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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

As a novelist, Benjamin Disraeli belongs to the early part of the nineteenth century. "Vivian Grey" (1826-27) and "Sybil" (1845) mark the beginning and the end of his truly creative period; for the two productions of his latest years, "Lothair" (1870) and "Endymion" (1880), add nothing to the characteristics of his earlier volumes except the changes of feeling and power which accompany old age. His period, thus, is that of Bulwer, Dickens, and Thackeray, and of the later years of Sir Walter Scott—a fact which his prominence as a statesman during the last decade of his life, as well as the vogue of "Lothair" and "Endymion," has tended to obscure. His style, his material, and his views of English character and life all date from that earlier time. He was born in 1804 and died in 1881.

"Coningsby; or, The New Generation," published in 1844, is the best of his novels, not as a story, but as a study of men, manners, and principles. The plot is slight—little better than a device for stringing together sketches of character and statements of political and economic opinions; but these are always interesting and often brilliant. The motive which underlies the book is political. It is, in brief, an attempt to show that the political salvation of England was to be sought in its aristocracy, but that this aristocracy was morally weak and socially ineffective, and that it must mend its ways before its duty to the state could be fulfilled. Interest in this aspect of the book has, of course, to a large extent passed away with the political conditions which it reflected. As a picture of aristocratic life in England in the first part of the nineteenth century it has, however, enduring significance and charm. Disraeli does not rank with the great writers of English realistic fiction, but in this special field none of them has surpassed him. From this point of view, accordingly, "Coningsby" is appropriately included in this series.

TO HENRY HOPE

It is not because this work was conceived and partly executed amid the glades and galleries of the DEEPDENE that I have inscribed it with your name. Nor merely because I was desirous to avail myself of the most graceful privilege of an author, and dedicate my work to the friend whose talents I have always appreciated, and whose virtues I have ever admired.

But because in these pages I have endeavoured to picture something of that development of the new and, as I believe, better mind of England, that has often been the subject of our converse and speculation.

In this volume you will find many a thought illustrated and many a principle attempted to be established that we have often together partially discussed and canvassed.

Doubtless you may encounter some opinions with which you may not agree, and some conclusions the accuracy of which you may find cause to question. But if I have generally succeeded in my object, to scatter some suggestions that may tend to elevate the tone of public life, ascertain the true character of political parties, and induce us for the future more carefully to distinguish between facts and phrases, realities and phantoms, I believe that I shall gain your sympathy, for I shall find a reflex to their efforts in your own generous spirit and enlightened mind.

GROSVENOR GATE: May Day 1844.

PREFACE

'CONINGSBY' was published in the year 1844. The main purpose of its writer was to vindicate the just claims of the Tory party to be the popular political confederation of the country; a purpose which he had, more or less, pursued from a very early period of life. The occasion was favourable to the attempt. The youthful mind of England had just recovered from the inebriation of the great Conservative triumph of 1841, and was beginning to inquire what, after all, they had conquered to preserve. It was opportune, therefore, to show that Toryism was not a phrase, but a fact; and that our political institutions were the embodiment of our popular necessities. This the writer endeavoured to do without prejudice, and to treat of events and characters of which he had some personal experience, not altogether without the impartiality of the future.

It was not originally the intention of the writer to adopt the form of fiction as the instrument to scatter his suggestions, but, after reflection, he resolved to avail himself of a method which, in the temper of the times, offered the best chance of influencing opinion.

In considering the Tory scheme, the author recognised in the CHURCH the most powerful agent in the previous development of England, and the most efficient means of that renovation of the national spirit at which he aimed. The Church is a sacred corporation for the promulgation and maintenance in Europe of certain Asian principles, which, although local in their birth, are of divine origin, and of universal and eternal application.

In asserting the paramount character of the ecclesiastical polity and the majesty of the theocratic principle, it became necessary to ascend to the origin of the Christian Church, and to meet in a spirit worthy of a critical and comparatively enlightened age, the position of the descendants of that race who were the founders of Christianity. The modern Jews had long laboured under the odium and stigma of mediaeval malevolence. In the dark ages, when history was unknown, the passions of societies, undisturbed by traditionary experience, were strong, and their convictions, unmitigated by criticism, were necessarily fanatical. The Jews were looked upon in the middle ages as an accursed race, the enemies of God and man, the especial foes of Christianity. No one in those days paused to reflect that Christianity was founded by the Jews; that its Divine Author, in his human capacity, was a descendant of King David; that his doctrines avowedly were the completion, not the change, of Judaism; that the Apostles and the Evangelists, whose names men daily invoked, and whose volumes they embraced with reverence, were all Jews; that the infallible throne of Rome itself was established by a Jew; and that a Jew was the founder of the Christian Churches of Asia.

The European nations, relatively speaking, were then only recently converted to a belief in Moses and in Christ; and, as it were, still ashamed of the wild deities whom they had deserted, they thought they atoned for their past idolatry by wreaking their vengeance on a race to whom, and to whom alone, they were indebted for the Gospel they adored.

In vindicating the sovereign right of the Church of Christ to be the perpetual regenerator of man, the writer thought the time had arrived when some attempt should be made to do justice to the race which had founded Christianity.

The writer has developed in another work ('Tancred') the views respecting the great house of Israel which he first intimated in 'Coningsby.' No one has attempted to refute them, nor is refutation possible; since all he has done is to examine certain facts in the truth of which all agree, and to draw from them irresistible conclusions which prejudice for a moment may shrink from, but which reason cannot refuse to admit.

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GROSVENOR GATE: May 1894.

BOOK I

CHAPTER I

It was a bright May morning some twelve years ago, when a youth of still tender age, for he had certainly not entered his teens by more than two years, was ushered into the waiting-room of a house in the vicinity of St. James's Square, which, though with the general appearance of a private residence, and that too of no very ambitious character, exhibited at this period symptoms of being occupied for some public purpose.

The house-door was constantly open, and frequent guests even at this early hour crossed the threshold. The hall-table was covered with sealed letters; and the hall-porter inscribed in a book the name of every individual who entered.

The young gentleman we have mentioned found himself in a room which offered few resources for his amusement. A large table amply covered with writing materials, and a few chairs, were its sole furniture, except the grey drugget that covered the floor, and a muddy mezzotinto of the Duke of Wellington that adorned its cold walls. There was not even a newspaper; and the only books were the Court Guide and the London Directory. For some time he remained with patient endurance planted against the wall, with his feet resting on the rail of his chair; but at length in his shifting posture he gave evidence of his restlessness, rose from his seat, looked out of the window into a small side court of the house surrounded with dead walls, paced the room, took up the Court Guide, changed it for the London Directory, then wrote his name over several sheets of foolscap paper, drew various landscapes and faces of his friends; and then, splitting up a pen or two, delivered himself of a yawn which seemed the climax of his weariness.

And yet the youth's appearance did not betoken a character that, if the opportunity had offered, could not have found amusement and even instruction. His countenance, radiant with health and the lustre of innocence, was at the same time thoughtful and resolute. The expression of his deep blue eyes was serious. Without extreme regularity of features, the face was one that would never have passed unobserved. His short upper lip indicated a good breed; and his chestnut curls clustered over his open brow, while his shirt-collar thrown over his shoulders was unrestrained by handkerchief or ribbon. Add to this, a limber and graceful figure, which the jacket of his boyish dress exhibited to great advantage.

Just as the youth, mounted on a chair, was adjusting the portrait of the Duke, which he had observed to be awry, the gentleman for whom he had been all this time waiting entered the room.

'Floreat Etona!' hastily exclaimed the gentleman, in a sharp voice; 'you are setting the Duke to rights. I have left you a long time a prisoner; but I found them so busy here, that I made my escape with some difficulty.'

He who uttered these words was a man of middle size and age, originally in all probability of a spare habit, but now a little inclined to corpulency. Baldness, perhaps, contributed to the spiritual expression of a brow, which was, however, essentially intellectual, and gave some character of openness to a countenance which, though not ill-favoured, was unhappily stamped by a sinister cast that was not to be mistaken. His manner was easy, but rather audacious than well-bred. Indeed, while a visage which might otherwise be described as handsome was spoilt by a dishonest glance, so a demeanour that was by no means deficient in self-possession and facility, was tainted by an innate vulgarity, which in the long run, though seldom, yet surely developed itself.

The youth had jumped off his chair on the entrance of the gentleman, and then taking up his hat, said:

'Shall we go to grandpapa now, sir?'

'By all means, my dear boy,' said the gentleman, putting his arm within that of the youth; and they were just on the point of leaving the waiting-room, when the door was suddenly thrown open, and two individuals, in a state of great excitement, rushed into the apartment.

'Rigby! Rigby!' they both exclaimed at the same moment. 'By G– they're out!'

'Who told you?'

'The best authority; one of themselves.'

'Who? who?'

'Paul Evelyn; I met him as I passed Brookes', and he told me that Lord Grey had resigned, and the King had accepted his resignation.'

But Mr. Rigby, who, though very fond of news, and much interested in the present, was extremely jealous of any one giving him information, was sceptical. He declared that Paul Evelyn was always wrong; that it was morally impossible that Paul Evelyn ever could be right; that he knew, from the highest authority, that Lord Grey had been twice yesterday with the King; that on the last visit nothing was settled; that if he had been at the palace again to-day, he could not have been there before twelve o'clock; that it was only now a quarter to one; that Lord Grey would have called his colleagues together on his return; that at least an hour must have elapsed before anything could possibly have transpired. Then he compared and criticised the dates of every rumoured incident of the last twenty-four hours, and nobody was stronger in dates than Mr. Rigby; counted even the number of stairs which the minister had to ascend and descend in his visit to the palace, and the time their mountings and dismountings must have consumed, detail was Mr. Rigby's forte; and finally, what with his dates, his private information, his knowledge of palace localities, his contempt for Paul Evelyn, and his confidence in himself, he succeeded in persuading his downcast and disheartened friends that their comfortable intelligence had not the slightest foundation.

They all left the room together; they were in the hall; the gentlemen who brought the news looked somewhat depressed, but Mr. Rigby gay, even amid the prostration of his party, from the consciousness that he had most critically demolished a piece of political gossip and conveyed a certain degree of mortification to a couple of his companions; when a travelling carriage and four with a ducal coronet drove up to the house. The door was thrown open, the steps dashed down, and a youthful noble sprang from his chariot into the hall.

'Good morning, Rigby,' said the Duke.

'I see your Grace well, I am sure,' said Mr. Rigby, with a softened manner.

'You have heard the news, gentlemen?' the Duke continued.

'What news? Yes; no; that is to say, Mr. Rigby thinks—'

'You know, of course, that Lord Lyndhurst is with the King?'

'It is impossible,' said Mr. Rigby.

'I don't think I can be mistaken,' said the Duke, smiling.

'I will show your Grace that it is impossible,' said Mr. Rigby, 'Lord Lyndhurst slept at Wimbledon. Lord Grey could not have seen the King until twelve o'clock; it is now five minutes to one. It is impossible, therefore, that any message from the King could have reached Lord Lyndhurst in time for his Lordship to be at the palace at this moment.'

'But my authority is a high one,' said the Duke.

'Authority is a phrase,' said Mr. Rigby; 'we must look to time and place, dates and localities, to discover the truth.'

'Your Grace was saying that your authority—' ventured to observe Mr. Tadpole, emboldened by the presence of a duke, his patron, to struggle against the despotism of a Rigby, his tyrant.

'Was the highest,' rejoined the Duke, smiling, 'for it was Lord Lyndhurst himself. I came up from Nuneham this morning, passed his Lordship's house in Hyde Park Place as he was getting into his carriage in full dress, stopped my own, and learned in a breath that the Whigs were out, and that the King had sent for the Chief Baron. So I came on here at once.'

'I always thought the country was sound at bottom,' exclaimed Mr. Taper, who, under the old system, had sneaked into the Treasury Board.

Tadpole and Taper were great friends. Neither of them ever despaired of the Commonwealth. Even if the Reform Bill were passed, Taper was convinced that the Whigs would never prove men of business; and when his friends confessed among themselves that a Tory Government was for the future impossible, Taper would remark, in a confidential whisper, that for his part he believed before the year was over the Whigs would be turned out by the clerks.

'There is no doubt that there is considerable reaction,' said Mr. Tadpole. The infamous conduct of the Whigs in the Amersham case has opened the public mind more than anything.'

'Aldborough was worse,' said Mr. Taper.

'Terrible,' said Tadpole. 'They said there was no use discussing the Reform Bill in our House. I believe Rigby's great speech on Aldborough has done more towards the reaction than all the violence of the Political Unions put together.'

'Let us hope for the best,' said the Duke, mildly. "Tis a bold step on the part of the Sovereign, and I am free to say I could have wished it postponed; but we must support the King like men. What say you, Rigby? You are silent.'

'I am thinking how very unfortunate it was that I did not breakfast with Lyndhurst this morning, as I was nearly doing, instead of going down to Eton.'

'To Eton! and why to Eton?'

'For the sake of my young friend here, Lord Monmouth's grandson. By the bye, you are kinsmen. Let me present to your Grace, MR. CONINGSBY.'

CHAPTER II

The political agitation which for a year and a half had shaken England to its centre, received, if possible, an increase to its intensity and virulence, when it was known, in the early part of the month of May, 1832, that the Prime Minister had tendered his resignation to the King, which resignation had been graciously accepted.

The amendment carried by the Opposition in the House of Lords on the evening of the 7th of May, that the enfranchising clauses of the Reform Bill should be considered before entering into the question of disfranchisement, was the immediate cause of this startling event. The Lords had previously consented to the second reading of the Bill with the view of preventing that large increase of their numbers with which they had been long menaced; rather, indeed, by mysterious rumours than by any official declaration; but, nevertheless, in a manner which had carried conviction to no inconsiderable portion of the Opposition that the threat was not without foundation.

During the progress of the Bill through the Lower House, the journals which were looked upon as the organs of the ministry had announced with unhesitating confidence, that Lord Grey was armed with what was then called a ‘carte blanche’ to create any number of peers necessary to insure its success. But public journalists who were under the control of the ministry, and whose statements were never contradicted, were not the sole authorities for this prevailing belief. Members of the House of Commons, who were strong supporters of the cabinet, though not connected with it by any official tie, had unequivocally stated in their places that the Sovereign had not resisted the advice of his counsellors to create peers, if such creation were required to carry into effect what was then styled ‘the great national measure.’ In more than one instance, ministers had been warned, that if they did not exercise that power with prompt energy, they might deserve impeachment. And these intimations and announcements had been made in the presence of leading members of the Government, and had received from them, at least, the sanction of their silence.

It did not subsequently appear that the Reform ministers had been invested with any such power; but a conviction of the reverse, fostered by these circumstances, had successfully acted upon the nervous temperament, or the statesman-like prudence, of a certain section of the peers, who consequently hesitated in their course; were known as being no longer inclined to pursue their policy of the preceding session; had thus obtained a title at that moment in everybody’s mouth, the title of ‘THE WAVERERS.’

Notwithstanding, therefore, the opposition of the Duke of Wellington and of Lord Lyndhurst, the Waverers carried the second reading of the Reform Bill; and then, scared at the consequences of their own headstrong timidity, they went in a fright to the Duke and his able adviser to extricate them from the inevitable result of their own conduct. The ultimate device of these distracted counsels, where daring and poltroonery, principle and expediency, public spirit and private intrigue, each threw an ingredient into the turbulent spell, was the celebrated and successful amendment to which we have referred.

But the Whig ministers, who, whatever may have been their faults, were at least men of intellect and courage, were not to be beaten by ‘the Waverers.’ They might have made terms with an audacious foe; they trampled on a hesitating opponent. Lord Grey hastened to the palace.

Before the result of this appeal to the Sovereign was known, for its effects were not immediate, on the second morning after the vote in the House of Lords, Mr. Rigby had made that visit to Eton which had summoned very unexpectedly the youthful Coningsby to London. He was the orphan child of the youngest of the two sons of the Marquess of Monmouth. It was a family famous for its hatreds. The eldest son hated his father; and, it was said, in spite had married a lady to whom that father was attached, and with whom Lord Monmouth then meditated a second alliance. This eldest son lived at Naples, and had several children, but maintained no connection either with his parent or his native

country. On the other hand, Lord Monmouth hated his younger son, who had married, against his consent, a woman to whom that son was devoted. A system of domestic persecution, sustained by the hand of a master, had eventually broken up the health of its victim, who died of a fever in a foreign country, where he had sought some refuge from his creditors.

His widow returned to England with her child; and, not having a relation, and scarcely an acquaintance in the world, made an appeal to her husband's father, the wealthiest noble in England and a man who was often prodigal, and occasionally generous. After some time, and more trouble, after urgent and repeated, and what would have seemed heart-rending, solicitations, the attorney of Lord Monmouth called upon the widow of his client's son, and informed her of his Lordship's decision. Provided she gave up her child, and permanently resided in one of the remotest counties, he was authorised to make her, in four quarterly payments, the yearly allowance of three hundred pounds, that being the income that Lord Monmouth, who was the shrewdest accountant in the country, had calculated a lone woman might very decently exist upon in a small market town in the county of Westmoreland.

Desperate necessity, the sense of her own forlornness, the utter impossibility to struggle with an omnipotent foe, who, her husband had taught her, was above all scruples, prejudices, and fears, and who, though he respected law, despised opinion, made the victim yield. But her sufferings were not long; the separation from her child, the bleak clime, the strange faces around her, sharp memory, and the dull routine of an unimpassioned life, all combined to wear out a constitution originally frail, and since shattered by many sorrows. Mrs. Coningsby died the same day that her father-in-law was made a Marquess. He deserved his honours. The four votes he had inherited in the House of Commons had been increased, by his intense volition and unsparing means, to ten; and the very day he was raised to his Marquisate, he commenced sapping fresh corporations, and was working for the strawberry leaf. His honours were proclaimed in the London Gazette, and her decease was not even noticed in the County Chronicle; but the altars of Nemesis are beneath every outraged roof, and the death of this unhappy lady, apparently without an earthly friend or an earthly hope, desolate and deserted, and dying in obscure poverty, was not forgotten.

Coningsby was not more than nine years of age when he lost his last parent; and he had then been separated from her for nearly three years. But he remembered the sweetness of his nursery days. His mother, too, had written to him frequently since he quitted her, and her fond expressions had cherished the tenderness of his heart. He wept bitterly when his schoolmaster broke to him the news of his mother's death. True it was they had been long parted, and their prospect of again meeting was vague and dim; but his mother seemed to him his only link to human society. It was something to have a mother, even if he never saw her. Other boys went to see their mothers! he, at least, could talk of his. Now he was alone. His grandfather was to him only a name. Lord Monmouth resided almost constantly abroad, and during his rare visits to England had found no time or inclination to see the orphan, with whom he felt no sympathy. Even the death of the boy's mother, and the consequent arrangements, were notified to his master by a stranger. The letter which brought the sad intelligence was from Mr. Rigby. It was the first time that name had been known to Coningsby.

Mr. Rigby was member for one of Lord Monmouth's boroughs. He was the manager of Lord Monmouth's parliamentary influence, and the auditor of his vast estates. He was more; he was Lord Monmouth's companion when in England, his correspondent when abroad; hardly his counsellor, for Lord Monmouth never required advice; but Mr. Rigby could instruct him in matters of detail, which Mr. Rigby made amusing. Rigby was not a professional man; indeed, his origin, education, early pursuits, and studies, were equally obscure; but he had contrived in good time to squeeze himself into parliament, by means which no one could ever comprehend, and then set up to be a perfect man of business. The world took him at his word, for he was bold, acute, and voluble; with no thought, but a good deal of desultory information; and though destitute of all imagination and noble sentiment,

was blessed with a vigorous, mendacious fancy, fruitful in small expedients, and never happier than when devising shifts for great men's scrapes.

They say that all of us have one chance in this life, and so it was with Rigby. After a struggle of many years, after a long series of the usual alternatives of small successes and small failures, after a few cleverish speeches and a good many cleverish pamphlets, with a considerable reputation, indeed, for pasquinades, most of which he never wrote, and articles in reviews to which it was whispered he had contributed, Rigby, who had already intrigued himself into a subordinate office, met with Lord Monmouth.

He was just the animal that Lord Monmouth wanted, for Lord Monmouth always looked upon human nature with the callous eye of a jockey. He surveyed Rigby; and he determined to buy him. He bought him; with his clear head, his indefatigable industry, his audacious tongue, and his ready and unscrupulous pen; with all his dates, all his lampoons; all his private memoirs, and all his political intrigues. It was a good purchase. Rigby became a great personage, and Lord Monmouth's man.

Mr. Rigby, who liked to be doing a great many things at the same time, and to astonish the Tadpoles and Tapers with his energetic versatility, determined to superintend the education of Coningsby. It was a relation which identified him with the noble house of his pupil, or, properly speaking, his charge: for Mr. Rigby affected rather the graceful dignity of the governor than the duties of a tutor. The boy was recalled from his homely, rural school, where he had been well grounded by a hard-working curate, and affectionately tended by the curate's unsophisticated wife. He was sent to a fashionable school preparatory to Eton, where he found about two hundred youths of noble families and connections, lodged in a magnificent villa, that had once been the retreat of a minister, superintended by a sycophantic Doctor of Divinity, already well beneficed, and not despairing of a bishopric by favouring the children of the great nobles. The doctor's lady, clothed in cashmeres, sometimes inquired after their health, and occasionally received a report as to their linen.

Mr. Rigby had a classical retreat, not distant from this establishment, which he esteemed a Tusculum. There, surrounded by his busts and books, he wrote his lampoons and articles; massacred a she liberal (it was thought that no one could lash a woman like Rigby), cut up a rising genius whose politics were different from his own, or scarified some unhappy wretch who had brought his claims before parliament, proving, by garbled extracts from official correspondence that no one could refer to, that the malcontent instead of being a victim, was, on the contrary, a defaulter. Tadpole and Taper would back Rigby for a 'slashing reply' against the field. Here, too, at the end of a busy week, he found it occasionally convenient to entertain a clever friend or two of equivocal reputation, with whom he had become acquainted in former days of equal brotherhood. No one was more faithful to his early friends than Mr. Rigby, particularly if they could write a squib.

It was in this refined retirement that Mr. Rigby found time enough, snatched from the toils of official life and parliamentary struggles, to compose a letter on the study of History, addressed to Coningsby. The style was as much like that of Lord Bolingbroke as if it had been written by the authors of the 'Rejected Addresses,' and it began, 'My dear young friend.' This polished composition, so full of good feeling and comprehensive views, and all in the best taste, was not published. It was only privately printed, and a few thousand copies were distributed among select personages as an especial favour and mark of high consideration. Each copy given away seemed to Rigby like a certificate of character; a property which, like all men of dubious repute, he thoroughly appreciated. Rigby intrigued very much that the headmaster of Eton should adopt his discourse as a class-book. For this purpose he dined with the Doctor, told him several anecdotes of the King, which intimated personal influence at Windsor; but the headmaster was inflexible, and so Mr. Rigby was obliged to be content with having his Letter on History canonized as a classic in the Preparatory Seminary, where the individual to whom it was addressed was a scholar.

This change in the life of Coningsby contributed to his happiness. The various characters which a large school exhibited interested a young mind whose active energies were beginning to stir. His

previous acquirements made his studies light; and he was fond of sports, in which he was qualified to excel. He did not particularly like Mr. Rigby. There was something jarring and grating in that gentleman's voice and modes, from which the chords of the young heart shrank. He was not tender, though perhaps he wished to be; scarcely kind: but he was good-natured, at least to children. However, this connection was, on the whole, an agreeable one for Coningsby. He seemed suddenly to have friends: he never passed his holydays again at school. Mr. Rigby was so clever that he contrived always to quarter Coningsby on the father of one of his school-fellows, for Mr. Rigby knew all his school-fellows and all their fathers. Mr. Rigby also called to see him, not unfrequently would give him a dinner at the Star and Garter, or even have him up to town for a week to Whitehall. Compared with his former forlorn existence, these were happy days, when he was placed under the gallery as a member's son, or went to the play with the butler!

When Coningsby had attained his twelfth year, an order was received from Lord Monmouth, who was at Rome, that he should go at once to Eton. This was the first great epoch of his life. There never was a youth who entered into that wonderful little world with more eager zest than Coningsby. Nor was it marvellous.

That delicious plain, studded with every creation of graceful culture; hamlet and hall and grange; garden and grove and park; that castle-palace, grey with glorious ages; those antique spires, hoar with faith and wisdom, the chapel and the college; that river winding through the shady meads; the sunny glade and the solemn avenue; the room in the Dame's house where we first order our own breakfast and first feel we are free; the stirring multitude, the energetic groups, the individual mind that leads, conquers, controls; the emulation and the affection; the noble strife and the tender sentiment; the daring exploit and the dashing scrape; the passion that pervades our life, and breathes in everything, from the aspiring study to the inspiring sport: oh! what hereafter can spur the brain and touch the heart like this; can give us a world so deeply and variously interesting; a life so full of quick and bright excitement, passed in a scene so fair?

CHAPTER III

Lord Monmouth, who detested popular tumults as much as he despised public opinion, had remained during the agitating year of 1831 in his luxurious retirement in Italy, contenting himself with opposing the Reform Bill by proxy. But when his correspondent, Mr. Rigby, had informed him, in the early part of the spring of 1832, of the probability of a change in the tactics of the Tory party, and that an opinion was becoming prevalent among their friends, that the great scheme must be defeated in detail rather than again withstood on principle, his Lordship, who was never wanting in energy when his own interests were concerned, immediately crossed the Alps, and travelled rapidly to England. He indulged a hope that the weight of his presence and the influence of his strong character, which was at once shrewd and courageous, might induce his friends to relinquish their half measure, a course to which his nature was repugnant. At all events, if they persisted in their intention, and the Bill went into committee, his presence was indispensable, for in that stage of a parliamentary proceeding proxies become ineffective.

The counsels of Lord Monmouth, though they coincided with those of the Duke of Wellington, did not prevail with the Waverers. Several of these high-minded personages had had their windows broken, and they were of opinion that a man who lived at Naples was not a competent judge of the state of public feeling in England. Besides, the days are gone by for senates to have their beards plucked in the forum. We live in an age of prudence. The leaders of the people, now, generally follow. The truth is, the peers were in a fright. 'Twas a pity; there is scarcely a less dignified entity than a patrician in a panic.

Among the most intimate companions of Coningsby at Eton, was Lord Henry Sydney, his kinsman. Coningsby had frequently passed his holydays of late at Beaumanoir, the seat of the Duke, Lord Henry's father. The Duke sat next to Lord Monmouth during the debate on the enfranchising question, and to while away the time, and from kindness of disposition, spoke, and spoke with warmth and favour, of his grandson. The polished Lord Monmouth bowed as if he were much gratified by this notice of one so dear to him. He had too much tact to admit that he had never yet seen his grandchild; but he asked some questions as to his progress and pursuits, his tastes and habits, which intimated the interest of an affectionate relative.

Nothing, however, was ever lost upon Lord Monmouth. No one had a more retentive memory, or a more observant mind. And the next day, when he received Mr. Rigby at his morning levee, Lord Monmouth performed this ceremony in the high style of the old court, and welcomed his visitors in bed, he said with imperturbable calmness, and as if he had been talking of trying a new horse, 'Rigby, I should like to see the boy at Eton.'

There might be some objection to grant leave to Coningsby at this moment; but it was a rule with Mr. Rigby never to make difficulties, or at least to persuade his patron that he, and he only, could remove them. He immediately undertook that the boy should be forthcoming, and notwithstanding the excitement of the moment, he went off next morning to fetch him.

They arrived in town rather early; and Rigby, wishing to know how affairs were going on, ordered the servant to drive immediately to the head-quarters of the party; where a permanent committee watched every phasis of the impending revolution; and where every member of the Opposition, of note and trust, was instantly admitted to receive or to impart intelligence.

It was certainly not without emotion that Coningsby contemplated his first interview with his grandfather. All his experience of the ties of relationship, however limited, was full of tenderness and rapture. His memory often dwelt on his mother's sweet embrace; and ever and anon a fitful phantom of some past passage of domestic love haunted his gushing heart. The image of his father was less fresh in his mind; but still it was associated with a vague sentiment of kindness and joy; and the allusions to her husband in his mother's letters had cherished these impressions. To notice lesser sources of

influence in his estimate of the domestic tie, he had witnessed under the roof of Beaumanoir the existence of a family bound together by the most beautiful affections. He could not forget how Henry Sydney was embraced by his sisters when he returned home; what frank and fraternal love existed between his kinsman and his elder brother; how affectionately the kind Duke had welcomed his son once more to the house where they had both been born; and the dim eyes, and saddened brows, and tones of tenderness, which rather looked than said farewell, when they went back to Eton.

And these rapturous meetings and these mournful adieus were occasioned only by a separation at the most of a few months, softened by constant correspondence and the communication of mutual sympathy. But Coningsby was to meet a relation, his near, almost his only, relation, for the first time; the relation, too, to whom he owed maintenance, education; it might be said, existence. It was a great incident for a great drama; something tragical in the depth and stir of its emotions. Even the imagination of the boy could not be insensible to its materials; and Coningsby was picturing to himself a beneficent and venerable gentleman pressing to his breast an agitated youth, when his reverie was broken by the carriage stopping before the gates of Monmouth House.

The gates were opened by a gigantic Swiss, and the carriage rolled into a huge court-yard. At its end Coningsby beheld a Palladian palace, with wings and colonnades encircling the court.

A double flight of steps led into a circular and marble hall, adorned with colossal busts of the Caesars; the staircase in fresco by Sir James Thornhill, breathed with the loves and wars of gods and heroes. It led into a vestibule, painted in arabesques, hung with Venetian girandoles, and looking into gardens. Opening a door in this chamber, and proceeding some little way down a corridor, Mr. Rigby and his companion arrived at the base of a private staircase. Ascending a few steps, they reached a landing-place hung with tapestry. Drawing this aside, Mr. Rigby opened a door, and ushered Coningsby through an ante-chamber into a small saloon, of beautiful proportions, and furnished in a brilliant and delicate taste.

'You will find more to amuse you here than where you were before,' said Mr. Rigby, 'and I shall not be nearly so long absent.' So saying, he entered into an inner apartment.

The walls of the saloon, which were covered with light blue satin, held, in silver panels, portraits of beautiful women, painted by Boucher. Couches and easy chairs of every shape invited in every quarter to luxurious repose; while amusement was afforded by tables covered with caricatures, French novels, and endless miniatures of foreign dancers, princesses, and sovereigns.

But Coningsby was so impressed with the impending interview with his grandfather, that he neither sought nor required diversion. Now that the crisis was at hand, he felt agitated and nervous, and wished that he was again at Eton. The suspense was sickening, yet he dreaded still more the summons. He was not long alone; the door opened; he started, grew pale; he thought it was his grandfather; it was not even Mr. Rigby. It was Lord Monmouth's valet.

'Monsieur Konigby?'

'My name is Coningsby,' said the boy.

'Milor is ready to receive you,' said the valet.

Coningsby sprang forward with that desperation which the scaffold requires. His face was pale; his hand was moist; his heart beat with tumult. He had occasionally been summoned by Dr. Keate; that, too, was awful work, but compared with the present, a morning visit. Music, artillery, the roar of cannon, and the blare of trumpets, may urge a man on to a forlorn hope; ambition, one's constituents, the hell of previous failure, may prevail on us to do a more desperate thing; speak in the House of Commons; but there are some situations in life, such, for instance, as entering the room of a dentist, in which the prostration of the nervous system is absolute.

The moment had at length arrived when the desolate was to find a benefactor, the forlorn a friend, the orphan a parent; when the youth, after a childhood of adversity, was to be formally received into the bosom of the noble house from which he had been so long estranged, and at length to assume that social position to which his lineage entitled him. Manliness might support, affection

might soothe, the happy anguish of such a meeting; but it was undoubtedly one of those situations which stir up the deep fountains of our nature, and before which the conventional proprieties of our ordinary manners instantaneously vanish.

Coningsby with an uncertain step followed his guide through a bed-chamber, the sumptuousness of which he could not notice, into the dressing-room of Lord Monmouth. Mr. Rigby, facing Coningsby as he entered, was leaning over the back of a large chair, from which as Coningsby was announced by the valet, the Lord of the house slowly rose, for he was suffering slightly from the gout, his left hand resting on an ivory stick. Lord Monmouth was in height above the middle size, but somewhat portly and corpulent. His countenance was strongly marked; sagacity on the brow, sensuality in the mouth and jaw. His head was bald, but there were remains of the rich brown locks on which he once prided himself. His large deep blue eye, madid and yet piercing, showed that the secretions of his brain were apportioned, half to voluptuousness, half to common sense. But his general mien was truly grand; full of a natural nobility, of which no one was more sensible than himself. Lord Monmouth was not in dishabille; on the contrary, his costume was exact, and even careful. Rising as we have mentioned when his grandson entered, and leaning with his left hand on his ivory cane, he made Coningsby such a bow as Louis Quatorze might have bestowed on the ambassador of the United Provinces. Then extending his right hand, which the boy tremblingly touched, Lord Monmouth said:

'How do you like Eton?'

This contrast to the reception which he had imagined, hoped, feared, paralysed the reviving energies of young Coningsby. He felt stupefied; he looked almost aghast. In the chaotic tumult of his mind, his memory suddenly seemed to receive some miraculous inspiration. Mysterious phrases heard in his earliest boyhood, unnoticed then, long since forgotten, rose to his ear. Who was this grandfather, seen not before, seen now for the first time? Where was the intervening link of blood between him and this superb and icy being? The boy sank into the chair which had been placed for him, and leaning on the table burst into tears.

Here was a business! If there were one thing which would have made Lord Monmouth travel from London to Naples at four-and-twenty hours' notice, it was to avoid a scene. He hated scenes. He hated feelings. He saw instantly the mistake he had made in sending for his grandchild. He was afraid that Coningsby was tender-hearted like his father. Another tender-hearted Coningsby! Unfortunate family! Degenerate race! He decided in his mind that Coningsby must be provided for in the Church, and looked at Mr. Rigby, whose principal business it always was to disembarrass his patron from the disagreeable.

Mr. Rigby instantly came forward and adroitly led the boy into the adjoining apartment, Lord Monmouth's bedchamber, closing the door of the dressing-room behind him.

'My dear young friend,' said Mr. Rigby, 'what is all this?'

A sob the only answer.

'What can be the matter?' said Mr. Rigby.

'I was thinking,' said Coningsby, 'of poor mamma!'

'Hush!' said Mr. Rigby; 'Lord Monmouth never likes to hear of people who are dead; so you must take care never to mention your mother or your father.'

In the meantime Lord Monmouth had decided on the fate of Coningsby. The Marquis thought he could read characters by a glance, and in general he was successful, for his natural sagacity had been nurtured by great experience. His grandson was not to his taste; amiable no doubt, but spooney.

We are too apt to believe that the character of a boy is easily read. 'Tis a mystery the most profound. Mark what blunders parents constantly make as to the nature of their own offspring, bred, too, under their eyes, and displaying every hour their characteristics. How often in the nursery does the genius count as a dunce because he is pensive; while a rattling urchin is invested with almost supernatural qualities because his animal spirits make him impudent and flippant! The school-boy,

above all others, is not the simple being the world imagines. In that young bosom are often stirring passions as strong as our own, desires not less violent, a volition not less supreme. In that young bosom what burning love, what intense ambition, what avarice, what lust of power; envy that fiends might emulate, hate that man might fear!

CHAPTER IV

‘Come,’ said Mr. Rigby, when Coningsby was somewhat composed, ‘come with me and we will see the house.’

So they descended once more the private staircase, and again entered the vestibule.

‘If you had seen these gardens when they were illuminated for a fête to George IV.,’ said Rigby, as crossing the chamber he ushered his charge into the state apartments. The splendour and variety of the surrounding objects soon distracted the attention of the boy, for the first time in the palace of his fathers. He traversed saloon after saloon hung with rare tapestry and the gorgeous products of foreign looms; filled with choice pictures and creations of curious art; cabinets that sovereigns might envy, and colossal vases of malachite presented by emperors. Coningsby alternately gazed up to ceilings glowing with color and with gold, and down upon carpets bright with the fancies and vivid with the tints of Aubusson and of Axminster.

‘This grandfather of mine is a great prince,’ thought Coningsby, as musing he stood before a portrait in which he recognised the features of the being from whom he had so recently and so strangely parted. There he stood, Philip Augustus, Marquess of Monmouth, in his robes of state, with his new coronet on a table near him, a despatch lying at hand that indicated the special mission of high ceremony of which he had been the illustrious envoy, and the garter beneath his knee.

‘You will have plenty of opportunities to look at the pictures,’ said Rigby, observing that the boy had now quite recovered himself. ‘Some luncheon will do you no harm after our drive;’ and he opened the door of another apartment.

It was a pretty room adorned with a fine picture of the chase; at a round table in the centre sat two ladies interested in the meal to which Rigby had alluded.

‘Ah, Mr. Rigby!’ said the eldest, yet young and beautiful, and speaking, though with fluency, in a foreign accent, ‘come and tell me some news. Have you seen Milor?’ and then she threw a scrutinizing glance from a dark flashing eye at his companion.

‘Let me present to your Highness,’ said Rigby, with an air of some ceremony, ‘Mr. Coningsby.’

‘My dear young friend,’ said the lady, extending her white hand with an air of joyous welcome, ‘this is Lucretia, my daughter. We love you already. Lord Monmouth will be so charmed to see you. What beautiful eyes he has, Mr. Rigby. Quite like Milor.’

The young lady, who was really more youthful than Coningsby, but of a form and stature so developed that she appeared almost a woman, bowed to the guest with some ceremony, and a faint sullen smile, and then proceeded with her Perigord pie.

‘You must be so hungry after your drive,’ said the elder lady, placing Coningsby at her side, and herself filling his plate.

This was true enough; and while Mr. Rigby and the lady talked an infinite deal about things which he did not understand, and persons of whom he had never heard, our little hero made his first meal in his paternal house with no ordinary zest; and renovated by the pasty and a glass of sherry, felt altogether a different being from what he was, when he had undergone the terrible interview in which he began to reflect he had considerably exposed himself. His courage revived, his senses rallied, he replied to the interrogations of the lady with calmness, but with promptness and propriety. It was evident that he had made a favourable impression on her Highness, for ever and anon she put a truffle or some delicacy in his plate, and insisted upon his taking some particular confectionery, because it was a favourite of her own. When she rose, she said,—

‘In ten minutes the carriage will be at the door; and if you like, my dear young friend, you shall be our beau.’

‘There is nothing I should like so much,’ said Coningsby.

‘Ah!’ said the lady, with the sweetest smile, ‘he is frank.’

The ladies bowed and retired; Mr. Rigby returned to the Marquess, and the groom of the chambers led Coningsby to his room.

This lady, so courteous to Coningsby, was the Princess Colonna, a Roman dame, the second wife of Prince Paul Colonna. The prince had first married when a boy, and into a family not inferior to his own. Of this union, in every respect unhappy, the Princess Lucretia was the sole offspring. He was a man dissolute and devoted to play; and cared for nothing much but his pleasures and billiards, in which latter he was esteemed unrivalled. According to some, in a freak of passion, according to others, to cancel a gambling debt, he had united himself to his present wife, whose origin was obscure; but with whom he contrived to live on terms of apparent cordiality, for she was much admired, and made the society of her husband sought by those who contributed to his enjoyment. Among these especially figured the Marquess of Monmouth, between whom and Prince Colonna the world recognised as existing the most intimate and entire friendship, so that his Highness and his family were frequent guests under the roof of the English nobleman, and now accompanied him on a visit to England.

CHAPTER V

In the meantime, while ladies are luncheoning on Perigord pie, or coursing in whirling britskas, performing all the singular ceremonies of a London morning in the heart of the season; making visits where nobody is seen, and making purchases which are not wanted; the world is in agitation and uproar. At present the world and the confusion are limited to St. James's Street and Pall Mall; but soon the boundaries and the tumult will be extended to the intended metropolitan boroughs; to-morrow they will spread over the manufacturing districts. It is perfectly evident, that before eight-and-forty hours have passed, the country will be in a state of fearful crisis. And how can it be otherwise? Is it not a truth that the subtle Chief Baron has been closeted one whole hour with the King; that shortly after, with thoughtful brow and compressed lip, he was marked in his daring chariot entering the courtyard of Apsley House? Great was the panic at Brookes', wild the hopes of Carlton Terrace; all the gentlemen who expected to have been made peers perceived that the country was going to be given over to a rapacious oligarchy.

In the meantime Tadpole and Taper, who had never quitted for an instant the mysterious head-quarters of the late Opposition, were full of hopes and fears, and asked many questions, which they chiefly answered themselves.

'I wonder what Lord Lyndhurst will say to the king,' said Taper.

'He has plenty of pluck,' said Tadpole.

'I almost wish now that Rigby had breakfasted with him this morning,' said Taper.

'If the King be firm, and the country sound,' said Tadpole, 'and Lord Monmouth keep his boroughs, I should not wonder to see Rigby made a privy councillor.'

'There is no precedent for an under-secretary being a privy councillor,' said Taper.

'But we live in revolutionary times,' said Tadpole.

'Gentlemen,' said the groom of the chambers, in a loud voice, entering the room, 'I am desired to state that the Duke of Wellington is with the King.'

'There *is* a Providence!' exclaimed an agitated gentleman, the patent of whose intended peerage had not been signed the day that the Duke had quited office in 1830.

'I always thought the King would be firm,' said Mr. Tadpole.

'I wonder who will have the India Board,' said Taper.

At this moment three or four gentlemen entered the room in a state of great bustle and excitement; they were immediately surrounded.

'Is it true?' 'Quite true; not the slightest doubt. Saw him myself. Not at all hissed; certainly not hooted. Perhaps a little hissed. One fellow really cheered him. Saw him myself. Say what they like, there is reaction.' 'But Constitution Hill, they say?' 'Well, there was a sort of inclination to a row on Constitution Hill; but the Duke quite firm; pistols, and carriage doors bolted.'

Such may give a faint idea of the anxious inquiries and the satisfactory replies that were occasioned by the entrance of this group.

'Up, guards, and at them!' exclaimed Tadpole, rubbing his hands in a fit of patriotic enthusiasm.

Later in the afternoon, about five o'clock, the high change of political gossip, when the room was crowded, and every one had his rumour, Mr. Rigby looked in again to throw his eye over the evening papers, and catch in various chit-chat the tone of public or party feeling on the 'crisis.' Then it was known that the Duke had returned from the King, having accepted the charge of forming an administration. An administration to do what? Portentous question! Were concessions to be made? And if so, what? Was it altogether impossible, and too late, 'stare super vias antiquas?' Questions altogether above your Tadpoles and your Tapers, whose idea of the necessities of the age was that they themselves should be in office.

Lord Eskdale came up to Mr. Rigby. This peer was a noble Croesus, acquainted with all the gradations of life; a voluptuary who could be a Spartan; clear-sighted, unprejudiced, sagacious; the best judge in the world of a horse or a man; he was the universal referee; a quarrel about a bet or a mistress was solved by him in a moment, and in a manner which satisfied both parties. He patronised and appreciated the fine arts, though a jockey; respected literary men, though he only read French novels; and without any affectation of tastes which he did not possess, was looked upon by every singer and dancer in Europe as their natural champion. The secret of his strong character and great influence was his self-composure, which an earthquake or a Reform Bill could not disturb, and which in him was the result of temperament and experience. He was an intimate acquaintance of Lord Monmouth, for they had many tastes in common; were both men of considerable, and in some degree similar abilities; and were the two greatest proprietors of close boroughs in the country.

'Do you dine at Monmouth House to-day?' inquired Lord Eskdale of Mr. Rigby.

'Where I hope to meet your lordship. The Whig papers are very subdued,' continued Mr. Rigby.

'Ah! they have not the cue yet,' said Lord Eskdale.

'And what do you think of affairs?' inquired his companion.

'I think the hounds are too hot to hark off now,' said Lord Eskdale.

'There is one combination,' said Rigby, who seemed meditating an attack on Lord Eskdale's button.

'Give it us at dinner,' said Lord Eskdale, who knew his man, and made an adroit movement forwards, as if he were very anxious to see the *Globe* newspaper.

In the course of two or three hours these gentlemen met again in the green drawing-room of Monmouth House. Mr. Rigby was sitting on a sofa by Lord Monmouth, detailing in whispers all his gossip of the morn: Lord Eskdale murmuring quaint inquiries into the ear of the Princess Lucretia.

Madame Colonna made remarks alternately to two gentlemen, who paid her assiduous court. One of these was Mr. Ormsby; the school, the college, and the club crony of Lord Monmouth, who had been his shadow through life; travelled with him in early days, won money with him at play, had been his colleague in the House of Commons; and was still one of his nominees. Mr. Ormsby was a millionaire, which Lord Monmouth liked. He liked his companions to be very rich or very poor; be his equals, able to play with him at high stakes, or join him in a great speculation; or to be his tools, and to amuse and serve him. There was nothing which he despised and disliked so much as a moderate fortune.

The other gentleman was of a different class and character. Nature had intended Lucian Gay for a scholar and a wit; necessity had made him a scribbler and a buffoon. He had distinguished himself at the University; but he had no patrimony, nor those powers of perseverance which success in any learned profession requires. He was good-looking, had great animal spirits, and a keen sense of enjoyment, and could not drudge. Moreover he had a fine voice, and sang his own songs with considerable taste; accomplishments which made his fortune in society and completed his ruin. In due time he extricated himself from the bench and merged into journalism, by means of which he chanced to become acquainted with Mr. Rigby. That worthy individual was not slow in detecting the treasure he had lighted on; a wit, a ready and happy writer, a joyous and tractable being, with the education, and still the feelings and manners, of a gentleman. Frequent were the Sunday dinners which found Gay a guest at Mr. Rigby's villa; numerous the airy pasquinades which he left behind, and which made the fortune of his patron. Flattered by the familiar acquaintance of a man of station, and sanguine that he had found the link which would sooner or later restore him to the polished world that he had forfeited, Gay laboured in his vocation with enthusiasm and success. Willingly would Rigby have kept his treasure to himself; and truly he hoarded it for a long time, but it oozed out. Rigby loved the reputation of possessing the complete art of society. His dinners were celebrated at least for their guests. Great intellectual illustrations were found there blended with rank and high station. Rigby loved to patronise; to play the minister unbending and seeking relief from the cares of

council in the society of authors, artists, and men of science. He liked dukes to dine with him and hear him scatter his audacious criticisms to Sir Thomas or Sir Humphry. They went away astounded by the powers of their host, who, had he not fortunately devoted those powers to their party, must apparently have rivalled Vandyke, or discovered the safety-lamp.

Now in these dinners, Lucian Gay, who had brilliant conversational powers, and who possessed all the resources of boon companionship, would be an invaluable ally. He was therefore admitted, and inspired both by the present enjoyment, and the future to which it might lead, his exertions were untiring, various, most successful. Rigby's dinners became still, more celebrated. It, however, necessarily followed that the guests who were charmed by Gay, wished Gay also to be their guest. Rigby was very jealous of this, but it was inevitable; still by constant manoeuvre, by intimations of some exercise, some day or other, of substantial patronage in his behalf, by a thousand little arts by which he carved out work for Gay which often prevented him accepting invitations to great houses in the country, by judicious loans of small sums on Lucian's notes of hand and other analogous devices, Rigby contrived to keep the wit in a fair state of bondage and dependence.

One thing Rigby was resolved on: Gay should never get into Monmouth House. That was an empyrean too high for his wing to soar in. Rigby kept that social monopoly distinctively to mark the relation that subsisted between them as patron and client. It was something to swagger about when they were together after their second bottle of claret. Rigby kept his resolution for some years, which the frequent and prolonged absence of the Marquess rendered not very difficult. But we are the creatures of circumstances; at least the Rigby race particularly. Lord Monmouth returned to England one year, and wanted to be amused. He wanted a jester: a man about him who would make him, not laugh, for that was impossible, but smile more frequently, tell good stories, say good things, and sing now and then, especially French songs. Early in life Rigby would have attempted all this, though he had neither fun, voice, nor ear. But his hold on Lord Monmouth no longer depended on the mere exercise of agreeable qualities, he had become indispensable to his lordship, by more serious if not higher considerations. And what with auditing his accounts, guarding his boroughs, writing him, when absent, gossip by every post and when in England deciding on every question and arranging every matter which might otherwise have ruffled the sublime repose of his patron's existence, Rigby might be excused if he shrank a little from the minor part of table wit, particularly when we remember all his subterranean journalism, his acid squibs, and his malicious paragraphs, and, what Tadpole called, his 'slashing articles.'

These 'slashing articles' were, indeed, things which, had they appeared as anonymous pamphlets, would have obtained the contemptuous reception which in an intellectual view no compositions more surely deserved; but whispered as the productions of one behind the scenes, and appearing in the pages of a party review, they were passed off as genuine coin, and took in great numbers of the lieges, especially in the country. They were written in a style apparently modelled on the briefs of those sharp attorneys who weary advocates with their clever commonplace; teasing with obvious comment, and torturing with inevitable inference. The affectation of order in the statement of facts had all the lucid method of an adroit pettifogger. They dealt much in extracts from newspapers, quotations from the *Annual Register*, parallel passages in forgotten speeches, arranged with a formidable array of dates rarely accurate. When the writer was of opinion he had made a point, you may be sure the hit was in italics, that last resource of the Forcible Feebles. He handled a particular in chronology as if he were proving an alibi at the Criminal Court. The censure was coarse without being strong, and vindictive when it would have been sarcastic. Now and then there was a passage which aimed at a higher flight, and nothing can be conceived more unlike genuine feeling, or more offensive to pure taste. And yet, perhaps, the most ludicrous characteristic of these facetious gallimaufreys was an occasional assumption of the high moral and admonitory tone, which when we recurred to the general spirit of the discourse, and were apt to recall the character of its writer, irresistibly reminded one of Mrs. Cole and her prayer-book.

To return to Lucian Gay. It was a rule with Rigby that no one, if possible, should do anything for Lord Monmouth but himself; and as a jester must be found, he was determined that his Lordship should have the best in the market, and that he should have the credit of furnishing the article. As a reward, therefore, for many past services, and a fresh claim to his future exertions, Rigby one day broke to Gay that the hour had at length arrived when the highest object of reasonable ambition on his part, and the fulfilment of one of Rigby's long-cherished and dearest hopes, were alike to be realised. Gay was to be presented to Lord Monmouth and dine at Monmouth House.

The acquaintance was a successful one; very agreeable to both parties. Gay became an habitual guest of Lord Monmouth when his patron was in England; and in his absence received frequent and substantial marks of his kind recollection, for Lord Monmouth was generous to those who amused him.

In the meantime the hour of dinner is at hand. Coningsby, who had lost the key of his carpet-bag, which he finally cut open with a penknife that he found on his writing-table, and the blade of which he broke in the operation, only reached the drawing-room as the figure of his grandfather, leaning on his ivory cane, and following his guests, was just visible in the distance. He was soon overtaken. Perceiving Coningsby, Lord Monmouth made him a bow, not so formal a one as in the morning, but still a bow, and said, 'I hope you liked your drive.'

CHAPTER VI

A little dinner, not more than the Muses, with all the guests clever, and some pretty, offers human life and human nature under very favourable circumstances. In the present instance, too, every one was anxious to please, for the host was entirely well-bred, never selfish in little things, and always contributed his quota to the general fund of polished sociability.

Although there was really only one thought in every male mind present, still, regard for the ladies, and some little apprehension of the servants, banished politics from discourse during the greater part of the dinner, with the occasional exception of some rapid and flying allusion which the initiated understood, but which remained a mystery to the rest. Nevertheless an old story now and then well told by Mr. Ormsby, a new joke now and then well introduced by Mr. Gay, some dashing assertion by Mr. Rigby, which, though wrong, was startling; this agreeable blending of anecdote, jest, and paradox, kept everything fluent, and produced that degree of mild excitation which is desirable. Lord Monmouth sometimes summed up with an epigrammatic sentence, and turned the conversation by a question, in case it dwelt too much on the same topic. Lord Eskdale addressed himself principally to the ladies; inquired after their morning drive and doings, spoke of new fashions, and quoted a letter from Paris. Madame Colonna was not witty, but she had that sweet Roman frankness which is so charming. The presence of a beautiful woman, natural and good-tempered, even if she be not a L'Espinasse or a De Stael, is animating.

Nevertheless, owing probably to the absorbing powers of the forbidden subject, there were moments when it seemed that a pause was impending, and Mr. Ormsby, an old hand, seized one of these critical instants to address a good-natured question to Coningsby, whose acquaintance he had already cultivated by taking wine with him.

'And how do you like Eton?' asked Mr. Ormsby.

It was the identical question which had been presented to Coningsby in the memorable interview of the morning, and which had received no reply; or rather had produced on his part a sentimental ebullition that had absolutely destined or doomed him to the Church.

'I should like to see the fellow who did not like Eton,' said Coningsby, briskly, determined this time to be very brave.

'Gad I must go down and see the old place,' said Mr. Ormsby, touched by a pensive reminiscence. 'One can get a good bed and bottle of port at the Christopher, still?'

'You had better come and try, sir,' said Coningsby. 'If you will come some day and dine with me at the Christopher, I will give you such a bottle of champagne as you never tasted yet.'

The Marquess looked at him, but said nothing.

'Ah! I liked a dinner at the Christopher,' said Mr. Ormsby; 'after mutton, mutton, mutton, every day, it was not a bad thing.'

'We had venison for dinner every week last season,' said Coningsby; 'Buckhurst had it sent up from his park. But I don't care for dinner. Breakfast is my lounge.'

'Ah! those little rolls and pats of butter!' said Mr. Ormsby. 'Short commons, though. What do you think we did in my time? We used to send over the way to get a mutton-chop.'

'I wish you could see Buckhurst and me at breakfast,' said Coningsby, 'with a pound of Castle's sausages!'

'What Buckhurst is that, Harry?' inquired Lord Monmouth, in a tone of some interest, and for the first time calling him by his Christian name.

'Sir Charles Buckhurst, sir, a Berkshire man: Shirley Park is his place.'

'Why, that must be Charley's son, Eskdale,' said Lord Monmouth; 'I had no idea he could be so young.'

'He married late, you know, and had nothing but daughters for a long time.'

‘Well, I hope there will be no Reform Bill for Eton,’ said Lord Monmouth, musingly.

The servants had now retired.

‘I think, Lord Monmouth,’ said Mr. Rigby, ‘we must ask permission to drink one toast to-day.’

‘Nay, I will myself give it,’ he replied. ‘Madame Colonna, you will, I am sure, join us when we drink, THE DUKE!’

‘Ah! what a man!’ exclaimed the Princess. ‘What a pity it is you have a House of Commons here! England would be the greatest country in the world if it were not for that House of Commons. It makes so much confusion!’

‘Don’t abuse our property,’ said Lord Eskdale; ‘Lord Monmouth and I have still twenty votes of that same body between us.’

‘And there is a combination,’ said Rigby, ‘by which you may still keep them.’

‘Ah! now for Rigby’s combination,’ said Lord Eskdale.

‘The only thing that can save this country,’ said Rigby, ‘is a coalition on a sliding scale.’

‘You had better buy up the Birmingham Union and the other bodies,’ said Lord Monmouth; ‘I believe it might all be done for two or three hundred thousand pounds; and the newspapers too. Pitt would have settled this business long ago.’

‘Well, at any rate, we are in,’ said Rigby, ‘and we must do something.’

‘I should like to see Grey’s list of new peers,’ said Lord Eskdale. ‘They say there are several members of our club in it.’

‘And the claims to the honour are so opposite,’ said Lucian Gay; ‘one, on account of his large estate; another, because he has none; one, because he has a well-grown family to perpetuate the title; another, because he has no heir, and no power of ever obtaining one.’

‘I wonder how he will form his cabinet,’ said Lord Monmouth; ‘the old story won’t do.’

‘I hear that Baring is to be one of the new cards; they say it will please the city,’ said Lord Eskdale. ‘I suppose they will pick out of hedge and ditch everything that has ever had the semblance of liberalism.’

‘Affairs in my time were never so complicated,’ said Mr. Ormsby.

‘Nay, it appears to me to lie in a nutshell,’ said Lucian Gay; ‘one party wishes to keep their old boroughs, and the other to get their new peers.’

CHAPTER VII

The future historian of the country will be perplexed to ascertain what was the distinct object which the Duke of Wellington proposed to himself in the political manoeuvres of May, 1832. It was known that the passing of the Reform Bill was a condition absolute with the King; it was unquestionable, that the first general election under the new law must ignominiously expel the Anti-Reform Ministry from power; who would then resume their seats on the Opposition benches in both Houses with the loss not only of their boroughs, but of that reputation for political consistency, which might have been some compensation for the parliamentary influence of which they had been deprived. It is difficult to recognise in this premature effort of the Anti-Reform leader to thrust himself again into the conduct of public affairs, any indications of the prescient judgment which might have been expected from such a quarter. It savoured rather of restlessness than of energy; and, while it proved in its progress not only an ignorance on his part of the public mind, but of the feelings of his own party, it terminated under circumstances which were humiliating to the Crown, and painfully significant of the future position of the House of Lords in the new constitutional scheme.

The Duke of Wellington has ever been the votary of circumstances. He cares little for causes. He watches events rather than seeks to produce them. It is a characteristic of the military mind. Rapid combinations, the result of quick, vigilant, and comprehensive glance, are generally triumphant in the field: but in civil affairs, where results are not immediate; in diplomacy and in the management of deliberative assemblies, where there is much intervening time and many counteracting causes, this velocity of decision, this fitful and precipitate action, are often productive of considerable embarrassment, and sometimes of terrible discomfiture. It is remarkable that men celebrated for military prudence are often found to be headstrong statesmen. In civil life a great general is frequently and strangely the creature of impulse; influenced in his political movements by the last snatch of information; and often the creature of the last aide-de-camp who has his ear.

We shall endeavour to trace in another chapter the reasons which on this as on previous and subsequent occasions, induced Sir Robert Peel to stand aloof, if possible, from official life, and made him reluctant to re-enter the service of his Sovereign. In the present instance, even temporary success could only have been secured by the utmost decision, promptness, and energy. These were all wanting: some were afraid to follow the bold example of their leader; many were disinclined. In eight-and-forty hours it was known there was a 'hitch.'

The Reform party, who had been rather stupefied than appalled by the accepted mission of the Duke of Wellington, collected their scattered senses, and rallied their forces. The agitators harangued, the mobs hooted. The City of London, as if the King had again tried to seize the five members, appointed a permanent committee of the Common Council to watch the fortunes of the 'great national measure,' and to report daily. Brookes', which was the only place that at first was really frightened and talked of compromise, grew valiant again; while young Whig heroes jumped upon club-room tables, and delivered fiery invectives. Emboldened by these demonstrations, the House of Commons met in great force, and passed a vote which struck, without disguise, at all rival powers in the State; virtually announced its supremacy; revealed the forlorn position of the House of Lords under the new arrangement; and seemed to lay for ever the fluttering phantom of regal prerogative.

It was on the 9th of May that Lord Lyndhurst was with the King, and on the 15th all was over. Nothing in parliamentary history so humiliating as the funeral oration delivered that day by the Duke of Wellington over the old constitution, that, modelled on the Venetian, had governed England since the accession of the House of Hanover. He described his Sovereign, when his Grace first repaired to his Majesty, as in a state of the greatest 'difficulty and distress,' appealing to his never-failing loyalty to extricate him from his trouble and vexation. The Duke of Wellington, representing the House of Lords, sympathises with the King, and pledges his utmost efforts for his Majesty's relief.

But after five days' exertion, this man of indomitable will and invincible fortunes, resigns the task in discomfiture and despair, and alleges as the only and sufficient reason for his utter and hopeless defeat, that the House of Commons had come to a vote which ran counter to the contemplated exercise of the prerogative.

From that moment power passed from the House of Lords to another assembly. But if the peers have ceased to be magnificoes, may it not also happen that the Sovereign may cease to be a Doge? It is not impossible that the political movements of our time, which seem on the surface to have a tendency to democracy, may have in reality a monarchical bias.

In less than a fortnight's time the House of Lords, like James II., having abdicated their functions by absence, the Reform Bill passed; the ardent monarch, who a few months before had expressed his readiness to go down to Parliament, in a hackney coach if necessary, to assist its progress, now declining personally to give his assent to its provisions.

In the protracted discussions to which this celebrated measure gave rise, nothing is more remarkable than the perplexities into which the speakers of both sides are thrown, when they touch upon the nature of the representative principle. On one hand it was maintained, that, under the old system, the people were virtually represented; while on the other, it was triumphantly urged, that if the principle be conceded, the people should not be virtually, but actually, represented. But who are the people? And where are you to draw a line? And why should there be any? It was urged that a contribution to the taxes was the constitutional qualification for the suffrage. But we have established a system of taxation in this country of so remarkable a nature, that the beggar who chews his quid as he sweeps a crossing, is contributing to the imposts! Is he to have a vote? He is one of the people, and he yields his quota to the public burthens.

Amid these conflicting statements, and these confounding conclusions, it is singular that no member of either House should have recurred to the original character of these popular assemblies, which have always prevailed among the northern nations. We still retain in the antique phraseology of our statutes the term which might have beneficially guided a modern Reformer in his reconstructive labours.

When the crowned Northman consulted on the welfare of his kingdom, he assembled the ESTATES of his realm. Now an estate is a class of the nation invested with political rights. There appeared the estate of the clergy, of the barons, of other classes. In the Scandinavian kingdoms to this day, the estate of the peasants sends its representatives to the Diet. In England, under the Normans, the Church and the Baronage were convoked, together with the estate of the Community, a term which then probably described the inferior holders of land, whose tenure was not immediate of the Crown. This Third Estate was so numerous, that convenience suggested its appearance by representation; while the others, more limited, appeared, and still appear, personally. The Third Estate was reconstructed as circumstances developed themselves. It was a Reform of Parliament when the towns were summoned.

In treating the House of the Third Estate as the House of the People, and not as the House of a privileged class, the Ministry and Parliament of 1831 virtually conceded the principle of Universal Suffrage. In this point of view the ten-pound franchise was an arbitrary, irrational, and impolitic qualification. It had, indeed, the merit of simplicity, and so had the constitutions of Abbé Siéyès. But its immediate and inevitable result was Chartism.

But if the Ministry and Parliament of 1831 had announced that the time had arrived when the Third Estate should be enlarged and reconstructed, they would have occupied an intelligible position; and if, instead of simplicity of elements in its reconstruction, they had sought, on the contrary, various and varying materials which would have neutralised the painful predominance of any particular interest in the new scheme, and prevented those banded jealousies which have been its consequences, the nation would have found itself in a secure condition. Another class not less numerous than the existing one, and invested with privileges not less important, would have been added to the public

estates of the realm; and the bewildering phrase ‘the People’ would have remained, what it really is, a term of natural philosophy, and not of political science.

During this eventful week of May, 1832, when an important revolution was effected in the most considerable of modern kingdoms, in a manner so tranquil, that the victims themselves were scarcely conscious at the time of the catastrophe, Coningsby passed his hours in unaccustomed pleasures, and in novel excitement. Although he heard daily from the lips of Mr. Rigby and his friends that England was for ever lost, the assembled guests still contrived to do justice to his grandfather’s excellent dinners; nor did the impending ruin that awaited them prevent the Princess Colonna from going to the Opera, whither she very good-naturedly took Coningsby. Madame Colonna, indeed, gave such gratifying accounts of her dear young friend, that Coningsby became daily a greater favourite with Lord Monmouth, who cherished the idea that his grandson had inherited not merely the colour of his eyes, but something of his shrewd and fearless spirit.

With Lucretia, Coningsby did not much advance. She remained silent and sullen. She was not beautiful; pallid, with a lowering brow, and an eye that avoided meeting another’s. Madame Colonna, though good-natured, felt for her something of the affection for which step-mothers are celebrated. Lucretia, indeed, did not encourage her kindness, which irritated her step-mother, who seemed seldom to address her but to rate and chide; Lucretia never replied, but looked dogged. Her father, the Prince, did not compensate for this treatment. The memory of her mother, whom he had greatly disliked, did not soften his heart. He was a man still young; slender, not tall; very handsome, but worn; a haggard Antinous; his beautiful hair daily thinning; his dress rich and effeminate; many jewels, much lace. He seldom spoke, but was polished, though moody.

At the end of the week, Coningsby returned to Eton. On the eve of his departure, Lord Monmouth desired his grandson to meet him in his apartments on the morrow, before quitting his roof. This farewell visit was as kind and gracious as the first one had been repulsive. Lord Monmouth gave Coningsby his blessing and ten pounds; desired that he would order a dress, anything he liked, for the approaching Montem, which Lord Monmouth meant to attend; and informed his grandson that he should order that in future a proper supply of game and venison should be forwarded to Eton for the use of himself and his friends.

CHAPTER VIII

After eight o'clock school, the day following the return of Coningsby, according to custom, he repaired to Buckhurst's room, where Henry Sydney, Lord Vere, and our hero held with him their breakfast mess. They were all in the fifth form, and habitual companions, on the river or on the Fives' Wall, at cricket or at foot-ball. The return of Coningsby, their leader alike in sport and study, inspired them to-day with unusual spirits, which, to say the truth, were never particularly depressed. Where he had been, what he had seen, what he had done, what sort of fellow his grandfather was, whether the visit had been a success; here were materials for almost endless inquiry. And, indeed, to do them justice, the last question was not the least exciting to them; for the deep and cordial interest which all felt in Coningsby's welfare far outweighed the curiosity which, under ordinary circumstances, they would have experienced on the return of one of their companions from an unusual visit to London. The report of their friend imparted to them unbounded satisfaction, when they learned that his relative was a splendid fellow; that he had been loaded with kindness and favours; that Monmouth House, the wonders of which he rapidly sketched, was hereafter to be his home; that Lord Monmouth was coming down to Montem; that Coningsby was to order any dress he liked, build a new boat if he chose; and, finally, had been pouched in a manner worthy of a Marquess and a grandfather.

'By the bye,' said Buckhurst, when the hubbub had a little subsided, 'I am afraid you will not half like it, Coningsby; but, old fellow, I had no idea you would be back this morning; I have asked Millbank to breakfast here.'

A cloud stole over the clear brow of Coningsby.

'It was my fault,' said the amiable Henry Sydney; 'but I really wanted to be civil to Millbank, and as you were not here, I put Buckhurst up to ask him.'

'Well,' said Coningsby, as if sullenly resigned, 'never mind; but why should you ask an infernal manufacturer?'

'Why, the Duke always wished me to pay him some attention,' said Lord Henry, mildly. 'His family were so civil to us when we were at Manchester.'

'Manchester, indeed!' said Coningsby; 'if you knew what I do about Manchester! A pretty state we have been in in London this week past with your Manchesters and Birminghams!'

'Come, come, Coningsby,' said Lord Vere, the son of a Whig minister; 'I am all for Manchester and Birmingham.'

'It is all up with the country, I can tell you,' said Coningsby, with the air of one who was in the secret.

'My father says it will all go right now,' rejoined Lord Vere. 'I had a letter from my sister yesterday.'

'They say we shall all lose our estates, though,' said Buckhurst; 'I know I shall not give up mine without a fight. Shirley was besieged, you know, in the civil wars; and the rebels got infernally licked.'

'I think that all the people about Beaumanoir would stand by the Duke,' said Lord Henry, pensively.

'Well, you may depend upon it you will have it very soon,' said Coningsby. 'I know it from the best authority.'

'It depends on whether my father remains in,' said Lord Vere. 'He is the only man who can govern the country now. All say that.'

At this moment Millbank entered. He was a good looking boy, somewhat shy, and yet with a sincere expression in his countenance. He was evidently not extremely intimate with those who were now his companions. Buckhurst, and Henry Sydney, and Vere, welcomed him cordially. He looked at Coningsby with some constraint, and then said:

'You have been in London, Coningsby?'

'Yes, I have been there during all the row.'

'You must have had a rare lark.'

'Yes, if having your windows broken by a mob be a rare lark. They could not break my grandfather's, though. Monmouth House is in a court-yard. All noblemen's houses should be in court-yards.'

'I was glad to see it all ended very well,' said Millbank.

'It has not begun yet,' said Coningsby.

'What?' said Millbank.

'Why, the revolution.'

'The Reform Bill will prevent a revolution, my father says,' said Millbank.

'By Jove! here's the goose,' said Buckhurst.

At this moment there entered the room a little boy, the scion of a noble house, bearing a roasted goose, which he had carried from the kitchen of the opposite inn, the Christopher. The lower boy or fag, depositing his burthen, asked his master whether he had further need of him; and Buckhurst, after looking round the table, and ascertaining that he had not, gave him permission to retire; but he had scarcely disappeared, when his master singing out, 'Lower boy, St. John!' he immediately re-entered, and demanded his master's pleasure, which was, that he should pour some water in the teapot. This being accomplished, St. John really made his escape, and retired to a pupil-room, where the bullying of a tutor, because he had no derivations, exceeded in all probability the bullying of his master, had he contrived in his passage from the Christopher to have upset the goose or dropped the sausages.

In their merry meal, the Reform Bill was forgotten. Their thoughts were soon concentrated in their little world, though it must be owned that visions of palaces and beautiful ladies did occasionally flit over the brain of one of the company. But for him especially there was much of interest and novelty. So much had happened in his absence! There was a week's arrears for him of Eton annals. They were recounted in so fresh a spirit, and in such vivid colours, that Coningsby lost nothing by his London visit. All the bold feats that had been done, and all the bright things that had been said; all the triumphs, and all the failures, and all the scrapes; how popular one master had made himself, and how ridiculous another; all was detailed with a liveliness, a candour, and a picturesque ingenuousness, which would have made the fortune of a Herodotus or a Froissart.

'I'll tell you what,' said Buckhurst, 'I move that after twelve we five go up to Maidenhead.'

'Agreed; agreed!'

CHAPTER IX

Millbank was the son of one of the wealthiest manufacturers in Lancashire. His father, whose opinions were of a very democratic bent, sent his son to Eton, though he disapproved of the system of education pursued there, to show that he had as much right to do so as any duke in the land. He had, however, brought up his only boy with a due prejudice against every sentiment or institution of an aristocratic character, and had especially impressed upon him in his school career, to avoid the slightest semblance of courting the affections or society of any member of the falsely-held superior class.

The character of the son as much as the influence of the father, tended to the fulfilment of these injunctions. Oswald Millbank was of a proud and independent nature; reserved, a little stern. The early and constantly-reiterated dogma of his father, that he belonged to a class debarred from its just position in the social system, had aggravated the grave and somewhat discontented humour of his blood. His talents were considerable, though invested with no dazzling quality. He had not that quick and brilliant apprehension, which, combined with a memory of rare retentiveness, had already advanced Coningsby far beyond his age, and made him already looked to as the future hero of the school. But Millbank possessed one of those strong, industrious volitions whose perseverance amounts almost to genius, and nearly attains its results. Though Coningsby was by a year his junior, they were rivals. This circumstance had no tendency to remove the prejudice which Coningsby entertained against him, but its bias on the part of Millbank had a contrary effect.

The influence of the individual is nowhere so sensible as at school. There the personal qualities strike without any intervening and counteracting causes. A gracious presence, noble sentiments, or a happy talent, make their way there at once, without preliminary inquiries as to what set they are in, or what family they are of, how much they have a-year, or where they live. Now, on no spirit had the influence of Coningsby, already the favourite, and soon probably to become the idol, of the school, fallen more effectually than on that of Millbank, though it was an influence that no one could suspect except its votary or its victim.

At school, friendship is a passion. It entrances the being; it tears the soul. All loves of after-life can never bring its rapture, or its wretchedness; no bliss so absorbing, no pangs of jealousy or despair so crushing and so keen! What tenderness and what devotion; what illimitable confidence; infinite revelations of inmost thoughts; what ecstatic present and romantic future; what bitter estrangements and what melting reconciliations; what scenes of wild recrimination, agitating explanations, passionate correspondence; what insane sensitiveness, and what frantic sensibility; what earthquakes of the heart and whirlwinds of the soul are confined in that simple phrase, a schoolboy's friendship! Tis some indefinite recollection of these mystic passages of their young emotion that makes grey-haired men mourn over the memory of their schoolboy days. It is a spell that can soften the acerbity of political warfare, and with its witchery can call forth a sigh even amid the callous bustle of fashionable saloons.

The secret of Millbank's life was a passionate admiration and affection for Coningsby. Pride, his natural reserve, and his father's injunctions, had, however, hitherto successfully combined to restrain the slightest demonstration of these sentiments. Indeed, Coningsby and himself were never companions, except in school, or in some public game. The demeanour of Coningsby gave no encouragement to intimacy to one, who, under any circumstances, would have required considerable invitation to open himself. So Millbank fed in silence on a cherished idea. It was his happiness to be in the same form, to join in the same sport, with Coningsby; occasionally to be thrown in unusual contact with him, to exchange slight and not unkind words. In their division they were rivals; Millbank sometimes triumphed, but to be vanquished by Coningsby was for him not without a degree of mild satisfaction. Not a gesture, not a phrase from Coningsby, that he did not watch and ponder over

and treasure up. Coningsby was his model, alike in studies, in manners, or in pastimes; the aptest scholar, the gayest wit, the most graceful associate, the most accomplished playmate: his standard of excellent. Yet Millbank was the very last boy in the school who would have had credit given him by his companions for profound and ardent feeling. He was not indeed unpopular. The favourite of the school like Coningsby, he could, under no circumstances, ever have become; nor was he qualified to obtain that general graciousness among the multitude, which the sweet disposition of Henry Sydney, or the gay profusion of Buckhurst, acquired without any effort. Millbank was not blessed with the charm of manner. He seemed close and cold; but he was courageous, just, and inflexible; never bullied, and to his utmost would prevent tyranny. The little boys looked up to him as a stern protector; and his word, too, throughout the school was a proverb: and truth ranks a great quality among boys. In a word, Millbank was respected by those among whom he lived; and school-boys scan character more nicely than men suppose.

A brother of Henry Sydney, quartered in Lancashire, had been wounded recently in a riot, and had received great kindness from the Millbank family, in whose immediate neighbourhood the disturbance had occurred. The kind Duke had impressed on Henry Sydney to acknowledge with cordiality to the younger Millbank at Eton, the sense which his family entertained of these benefits; but though Henry lost neither time nor opportunity in obeying an injunction, which was grateful to his own heart, he failed in cherishing, or indeed creating, any intimacy with the object of his solicitude. A companionship with one who was Coningsby's relative and most familiar friend, would at the first glance have appeared, independently of all other considerations, a most desirable result for Millbank to accomplish. But, perhaps, this very circumstance afforded additional reasons for the absence of all encouragement with which he received the overtures of Lord Henry. Millbank suspected that Coningsby was not affected in his favour, and his pride recoiled from gaining, by any indirect means, an intimacy which to have obtained in a plain and express manner would have deeply gratified him. However, the urgent invitation of Buckhurst and Henry Sydney, and the fear that a persistence in refusal might be misinterpreted into churlishness, had at length brought Millbank to their breakfast-mess, though, when he accepted their invitation, he did not apprehend that Coningsby would have been present.

It was about an hour before sunset, the day of this very breakfast, and a good number of boys, in lounging groups, were collected in the Long Walk. The sports and matches of the day were over. Criticism had succeeded to action in sculling and in cricket. They talked over the exploits of the morning; canvassed the merits of the competitors, marked the fellow whose play or whose stroke was improving; glanced at another, whose promise had not been fulfilled; discussed the pretensions, and adjudged the palm. Thus public opinion is formed. Some, too, might be seen with their books and exercises, intent on the inevitable and impending tasks. Among these, some unhappy wight in the remove, wandering about with his hat, after parochial fashion, seeking relief in the shape of a verse. A hard lot this, to know that you must be delivered of fourteen verses at least in the twenty-four hours, and to be conscious that you are pregnant of none. The lesser boys, urchins of tender years, clustered like flies round the baskets of certain vendors of sugary delicacies that rested on the Long Walk wall. The pallid countenance, the lacklustre eye, the hoarse voice clogged with accumulated phlegm, indicated too surely the irreclaimable and hopeless votary of lollypop, the opium-eater of schoolboys.

'It is settled, the match to-morrow shall be between Aquatics and Drybobs,' said a senior boy; who was arranging a future match at cricket.

'But what is to be done about Fielding major?' inquired another. 'He has not paid his boating money, and I say he has no right to play among the Aquatics before he has paid his money.'

'Oh! but we must have Fielding major, he is such a devil of a swipe.'

'I declare he shall not play among the Aquatics if he does not pay his boating money. It is an infernal shame.'

'Let us ask Buckhurst. Where is Buckhurst?'

‘Have you got any toffy?’ inquired a dull looking little boy, in a hoarse voice, of one of the vendors of scholastic confectionery.

‘Tom Trot, sir.’

‘No; I want toffy.’

‘Very nice Tom Trot, sir.’

‘No, I want toffy; I have been eating Tom Trot all day.’

‘Where is Buckhurst? We must settle about the Aquatics.’

‘Well, I for one will not play if Fielding major plays amongst the Aquatics. That is settled.’

‘Oh! nonsense; he will pay his money if you ask him.’

‘I shall not ask him again. The captain duns us every day. It is an infernal shame.’

‘I say, Burnham, where can one get some toffy? This fellow never has any.’

‘I will tell you; at Barnes’ on the bridge. The best toffy in the world.’

‘I will go at once. I must have some toffy.’

‘Just help me with this verse, Collins,’ said one boy to another, in an imploring tone, ‘that’s a good fellow.’

‘Well, give it us: first syllable in *fabri* is short; three false quantities in the two first lines! You’re a pretty one. There, I have done it for you.’

‘That’s a good fellow.’

‘Any fellow seen Buckhurst?’

‘Gone up the river with Coningsby and Henry Sydney.’

‘But he must be back by this time. I want him to make the list for the match to-morrow. Where the deuce can Buckhurst be?’

And now, as rumours rise in society we know not how, so there was suddenly a flying report in this multitude, the origin of which no one in his alarm stopped to ascertain, that a boy was drowned.

Every heart was agitated.

What boy? When, where, how? Who was absent? Who had been on the river to-day? Buckhurst. The report ran that Buckhurst was drowned. Great were the trouble and consternation. Buckhurst was ever much liked; and now no one remembered anything but his good qualities.

‘Who heard it was Buckhurst?’ said Sedgwick, captain of the school, coming forward.

‘I heard Bradford tell Palmer it was Buckhurst,’ said a little boy.

‘Where is Bradford?’

‘Here.’

‘What do you know about Buckhurst?’

‘Wentworth told me that he was afraid Buckhurst was drowned. He heard it at the Brocas; a bargeman told him about a quarter of an hour ago.’

‘Here is Wentworth! Here is Wentworth!’ a hundred voices exclaimed, and they formed a circle round him.

‘Well, what did you hear, Wentworth?’ asked Sedgwick.

‘I was at the Brocas, and a bargee told me that an Eton fellow had been drowned above Surley, and the only Eton boat above Surley to-day, as I can learn, is Buckhurst’s four-oar. That is all.’

There was a murmur of hope.

‘Oh! come, come,’ said Sedgwick, ‘there is come chance. Who is with Buckhurst; who knows?’

‘I saw him walk down to the Brocas with Vere,’ said a boy.

‘I hope it is not Vere,’ said a little boy, with a tearful eye; ‘he never lets any fellow bully me.’

‘Here is Maltravers,’ halloed out a boy; ‘he knows something.’

‘Well, what do you know, Maltravers?’

‘I heard Boots at the Christopher say that an Eton fellow was drowned, and that he had seen a person who was there.’

‘Bring Boots here,’ said Sedgwick.

Instantly a band of boys rushed over the way, and in a moment the witness was produced.

'What have you heard, Sam, about this accident?' said Sedgwick.

'Well, sir, I heard a young gentleman was drowned above Monkey Island,' said Boots.

'And no name mentioned?'

'Well, sir, I believe it was Mr. Coningsby.'

A general groan of horror.

'Coningsby, Coningsby! By Heavens I hope not,' said Sedgwick.

'I very much fear so,' said Boots; 'as how the bargeman who told me saw Mr. Coningsby in the Lock House laid out in flannels.'

'I had sooner any fellow had been drowned than Coningsby,' whispered one boy to another.

'I liked him, the best fellow at Eton,' responded his companion, in a smothered tone.

'What a clever fellow he was!'

'And so deuced generous!'

'He would have got the medal if he had lived.'

'And how came he to be drowned? for he was such a fine swimmer!'

'I heerd Mr. Coningsby was saving another's life,' continued Boots in his evidence, 'which makes it in a manner more sorrowful.'

'Poor Coningsby!' exclaimed a boy, bursting into tears: 'I move the whole school goes into mourning.'

'I wish we could get hold of this bargeman,' said Sedgwick. 'Now stop, stop, don't all run away in that mad manner; you frighten the people. Charles Herbert and Palmer, you two go down to the Brocas and inquire.'

But just at this moment, an increased stir and excitement were evident in the Long Walk; the circle round Sedgwick opened, and there appeared Henry Sydney and Buckhurst.

There was a dead silence. It was impossible that suspense could be strained to a higher pitch. The air and countenance of Sydney and Buckhurst were rather excited than mournful or alarmed. They needed no inquiries, for before they had penetrated the circle they had become aware of its cause.

Buckhurst, the most energetic of beings, was of course the first to speak. Henry Sydney indeed looked pale and nervous; but his companion, flushed and resolute, knew exactly how to hit a popular assembly, and at once came to the point.

'It is all a false report, an infernal lie; Coningsby is quite safe, and nobody is drowned.'

There was a cheer that might have been heard at Windsor Castle. Then, turning to Sedgwick, in an undertone Buckhurst added,

'It *is* all right, but, by Jove! we have had a shaver. I will tell you all in a moment, but we want to keep the thing quiet, and so let the fellows disperse, and we will talk afterwards.'

In a few moments the Long Walk had resumed its usual character; but Sedgwick, Herbert, and one or two others turned into the playing fields, where, undisturbed and unnoticed by the multitude, they listened to the promised communication of Buckhurst and Henry Sydney.

'You know we went up the river together,' said Buckhurst. 'Myself, Henry Sydney, Coningsby, Vere, and Millbank. We had breakfasted together, and after twelve agreed to go up to Maidenhead. Well, we went up much higher than we had intended. About a quarter of a mile before we had got to the Lock we pulled up; Coningsby was then steering. Well, we fastened the boat to, and were all of us stretched out on the meadow, when Millbank and Vere said they should go and bathe in the Lock Pool. The rest of us were opposed; but after Millbank and Vere had gone about ten minutes, Coningsby, who was very fresh, said he had changed his mind and should go and bathe too. So he left us. He had scarcely got to the pool when he heard a cry. There was a fellow drowning. He threw off his clothes and was in in a moment. The fact is this, Millbank had plunged in the pool and found himself in some eddies, caused by the meeting of two currents. He called out to Vere not to come,

and tried to swim off. But he was beat, and seeing he was in danger, Vere jumped in. But the stream was so strong, from the great fall of water from the lasher above, that Vere was exhausted before he could reach Millbank, and nearly sank himself. Well, he just saved himself; but Millbank sank as Coningsby jumped in. What do you think of that?'

'By Jove!' exclaimed Sedgwick, Herbert, and all. The favourite oath of schoolboys perpetuates the divinity of Olympus.

'And now comes the worst. Coningsby caught Millbank when he rose, but he found himself in the midst of the same strong current that had before nearly swamped Vere. What a lucky thing that he had taken into his head not to pull to-day! Fresher than Vere, he just managed to land Millbank and himself. The shouts of Vere called us, and we arrived to find the bodies of Millbank and Coningsby apparently lifeless, for Millbank was quite gone, and Coningsby had swooned on landing.'

'If Coningsby had been lost,' said Henry Sydney, 'I never would have shown my face at Eton again.'

'Can you conceive a position more terrible?' said Buckhurst. 'I declare I shall never forget it as long as I live. However, there was the Lock House at hand; and we got blankets and brandy. Coningsby was soon all right; but Millbank, I can tell you, gave us some trouble. I thought it was all up. Didn't you, Henry Sydney?'

'The most fishy thing I ever saw,' said Henry Sydney.

'Well, we were fairly frightened here,' said Sedgwick. 'The first report was, that you had gone, but that seemed without foundation; but Coningsby was quite given up. Where are they now?'

'They are both at their tutors'. I thought they had better keep quiet. Vere is with Millbank, and we are going back to Coningsby directly; but we thought it best to show, finding on our arrival that there were all sorts of rumours about. I think it will be best to report at once to my tutor, for he will be sure to hear something.'

'I would if I were you.'

CHAPTER X

What wonderful things are events! The least are of greater importance than the most sublime and comprehensive speculations! In what fanciful schemes to obtain the friendship of Coningsby had Millbank in his reveries often indulged! What combinations that were to extend over years and influence their lives! But the moment that he entered the world of action, his pride recoiled from the plans and hopes which his sympathy had inspired. His sensibility and his inordinate self-respect were always at variance. And he seldom exchanged a word with the being whose idea engrossed his affection.

And now, suddenly, an event had occurred, like all events, unforeseen, which in a few, brief, agitating, tumultuous moments had singularly and utterly changed the relations that previously subsisted between him and the former object of his concealed tenderness. Millbank now stood with respect to Coningsby in the position of one who owes to another the greatest conceivable obligation; a favour which time could permit him neither to forget nor to repay. Pride was a sentiment that could no longer subsist before the preserver of his life. Devotion to that being, open, almost ostentatious, was now a duty, a paramount and absorbing tie. The sense of past peril, the rapture of escape, a renewed relish for the life so nearly forfeited, a deep sentiment of devout gratitude to the providence that had guarded over him, for Millbank was an eminently religious boy, a thought of home, and the anguish that might have overwhelmed his hearth; all these were powerful and exciting emotions for a young and fervent mind, in addition to the peculiar source of sensibility on which we have already touched. Lord Vere, who lodged in the same house as Millbank, and was sitting by his bedside, observed, as night fell, that his mind wandered.

The illness of Millbank, the character of which soon transpired, and was soon exaggerated, attracted the public attention with increased interest to the circumstances out of which it had arisen, and from which the parties principally concerned had wished to have diverted notice. The sufferer, indeed, had transgressed the rules of the school by bathing at an unlicensed spot, where there were no expert swimmers in attendance, as is customary, to instruct the practice and to guard over the lives of the young adventurers. But the circumstances with which this violation of rules had been accompanied, and the assurance of several of the party that they had not themselves infringed the regulations, combined with the high character of Millbank, made the authorities not over anxious to visit with penalties a breach of observance which, in the case of the only proved offender, had been attended with such impressive consequences. The feat of Coningsby was extolled by all as an act of high gallantry and skill. It confirmed and increased the great reputation which he already enjoyed.

'Millbank is getting quite well,' said Buckhurst to Coningsby a few days after the accident. 'Henry Sydney and I are going to see him. Will you come?'

'I think we shall be too many. I will go another day,' replied Coningsby.

So they went without him. They found Millbank up and reading.

'Well, old fellow,' said Buckhurst, 'how are you? We should have come up before, but they would not let us. And you are quite right now, eh?'

'Quite. Has there been any row about it?'

'All blown over,' said Henry Sydney; 'C*******y behaved like a trump.'

'I have seen nobody yet,' said Millbank; 'they would not let me till to-day. Vere looked in this morning and left me this book, but I was asleep. I hope they will let me out in a day or two. I want to thank Coningsby; I never shall rest till I have thanked Coningsby.'

'Oh, he will come to see you,' said Henry Sydney; 'I asked him just now to come with us.'

'Yes!' said Millbank, eagerly; 'and what did he say?'

'He thought we should be too many.'

'I hope I shall see him soon,' said Millbank, 'somehow or other.'

'I will tell him to come,' said Buckhurst.

'Oh! no, no, don't tell him to come,' said Millbank. 'Don't bore him.'

'I know he is going to play a match at fives this afternoon,' said Buckhurst, 'for I am one.'

'And who are the others?' inquired Millbank.

'Herbert and Campbell.'

'Herbert is no match for Coningsby,' said Millbank.

And then they talked over all that had happened since his absence; and Buckhurst gave him a graphic report of the excitement on the afternoon of the accident; at last they were obliged to leave him.

'Well, good-bye, old fellow; we will come and see you every day. What can we do for you? Any books, or anything?'

'If any fellow asks after me,' said Millbank, 'tell him I shall be glad to see him. It is very dull being alone. But do not tell any fellow to come if he does not ask after me.'

Notwithstanding the kind suggestions of Buckhurst and Henry Sydney, Coningsby could not easily bring himself to call on Millbank. He felt a constraint. It seemed as if he went to receive thanks. He would rather have met Millbank again in school, or in the playing fields. Without being able then to analyse his feelings, he shrank unconsciously from that ebullition of sentiment, which in more artificial circles is described as a scene. Not that any dislike of Millbank prompted him to this reserve. On the contrary, since he had conferred a great obligation on Millbank, his prejudice against him had sensibly decreased. How it would have been had Millbank saved Coningsby's life, is quite another affair. Probably, as Coningsby was by nature generous, his sense of justice might have struggled successfully with his painful sense of the overwhelming obligation. But in the present case there was no element to disturb his fair self-satisfaction. He had greatly distinguished himself; he had conferred on his rival an essential service; and the whole world rang with his applause. He began rather to like Millbank; we will not say because Millbank was the unintentional cause of his pleasurable sensations. Really it was that the unusual circumstances had prompted him to a more impartial judgment of his rival's character. In this mood, the day after the visit of Buckhurst and Henry Sydney, Coningsby called on Millbank, but finding his medical attendant with him, Coningsby availed himself of that excuse for going away without seeing him.

The next day he left Millbank a newspaper on his way to school, time not permitting a visit. Two days after, going into his room, he found on his table a letter addressed to 'Harry Coningsby, Esq.'

ETON, May—, 1832.

'DEAR CONINGSBY, I very much fear that you must think me a very ungrateful fellow, because you have not heard from me before; but I was in hopes that I might get out and say to you what I feel; but whether I speak or write, it is quite impossible for me to make you understand the feelings of my heart to you. Now, I will say at once, that I have always liked you better than any fellow in the school, and always thought you the cleverest; indeed, I always thought that there was no one like you; but I never would say this or show this, because you never seemed to care for me, and because I was afraid you would think I merely wanted to con with you, as they used to say of some other fellows, whose names I will not mention, because they always tried to do so with Henry Sydney and you. I do not want this at all; but I want, though we may not speak to each other more than before, that we may be friends; and that you will always know that there is nothing I will not do for you, and that I like you better than any fellow at Eton. And I do not mean that this shall be only at Eton, but afterwards, wherever we may be, that you will always remember that there is nothing I will not do for you. Not because you saved my life, though that is a great thing, but because before that I would have done anything for you; only, for the cause above mentioned, I would not show it. I do not expect that we shall be more together than before; nor can I ever suppose that you could like me as you like Henry Sydney and Buckhurst, or even as you like Vere; but still I hope you will

always think of me with kindness now, and let me sign myself, if ever I do write to you, ‘Your most attached, affectionate, and devoted friend,

‘OSWALD MILLBANK.’

CHAPTER XI

About a fortnight after this nearly fatal adventure on the river, it was Montem. One need hardly remind the reader that this celebrated ceremony, of which the origin is lost in obscurity, and which now occurs triennially, is the tenure by which Eton College holds some of its domains. It consists in the waving of a flag by one of the scholars, on a mount near the village of Salt Hill, which, without doubt, derives its name from the circumstance that on this day every visitor to Eton, and every traveller in its vicinity, from the monarch to the peasant, are stopped on the road by youthful brigands in picturesque costume, and summoned to contribute 'salt,' in the shape of coin of the realm, to the purse collecting for the Captain of Eton, the senior scholar on the Foundation, who is about to repair to King's College, Cambridge.

On this day the Captain of Eton appears in a dress as martial as his title: indeed, each sixth-form boy represents in his uniform, though not perhaps according to the exact rules of the Horse Guards, an officer of the army. One is a marshal, another an ensign. There is a lieutenant, too; and the remainder are sergeants. Each of those who are intrusted with these ephemeral commissions has one or more attendants, the number of these varying according to his rank. These servitors are selected according to the wishes of the several members of the sixth form, out of the ranks of the lower boys, that is, those boys who are below the fifth form; and all these attendants are arrayed in a variety of fancy dresses. The Captain of the Oppidans and the senior Colleger next to the Captain of the school, figure also in fancy costume, and are called 'Saltbearers.' It is their business, together with the twelve senior Collegers of the fifth form, who are called 'Runners,' and whose costume is also determined by the taste of the wearers, to levy the contributions. And all the Oppidans of the fifth form, among whom ranked Coningsby, class as 'Corporals;' and are severally followed by one or more lower boys, who are denominated 'Polemen,' but who appear in their ordinary dress.

It was a fine, bright morning; the bells of Eton and Windsor rang merrily; everybody was astir, and every moment some gay equipage drove into the town. Gaily clustering in the thronged precincts of the College, might be observed many a glistening form: airy Greek or sumptuous Ottoman, heroes of the Holy Sepulchre, Spanish Hidalgos who had fought at Pavia, Highland Chiefs who had charged at Culloden, gay in the tartan of Prince Charlie. The Long Walk was full of busy groups in scarlet coats or fanciful uniforms; some in earnest conversation, some criticising the arriving guests; others encircling some magnificent hero, who astounded them with his slashed doublet or flowing plume.

A knot of boys, sitting on the Long Walk wall, with their feet swinging in the air, watched the arriving guests of the Provost.

'I say, Townshend,' said one, 'there's Grobbleton; he *was* a bully. I wonder if that's his wife? Who's this? The Duke of Agincourt. He wasn't an Eton fellow? Yes, he was. He was called Poictiers then. Oh! ah! his name is in the upper school, very large, under Charles Fox. I say, Townshend, did you see Saville's turban? What was it made of? He says his mother brought it from Grand Cairo. Didn't he just look like the Saracen's Head? Here are some Dons. That's Hallam! We'll give him a cheer. I say, Townshend, look at this fellow. He doesn't think small beer of himself. I wonder who he is? The Duke of Wellington's valet come to say his master is engaged. Oh! by Jove, he heard you! I wonder if the Duke will come? Won't we give him a cheer!'

'By Jove! who is this?' exclaimed Townshend, and he jumped from the wall, and, followed by his companions, rushed towards the road.

Two britskas, each drawn by four grey horses of mettle, and each accompanied by outriders as well mounted, were advancing at a rapid pace along the road that leads from Slough to the College. But they were destined to an irresistible check. About fifty yards before they had reached the gate that leads into Weston's Yard, a ruthless but splendid Albanian, in crimson and gold embroidered jacket, and snowy camise, started forward, and holding out his silver-sheathed yataghan commanded

the postilions to stop. A Peruvian Inca on the other side of the road gave a simultaneous command, and would infallibly have transfixed the outriders with an arrow from his unerring bow, had they for an instant hesitated. The Albanian Chief then advanced to the door of the carriage, which he opened, and in a tone of great courtesy, announced that he was under the necessity of troubling its inmates for 'salt.' There was no delay. The Lord of the equipage, with the amiable condescension of a 'grand monarque,' expressed his hope that the collection would be an ample one, and as an old Etonian, placed in the hands of the Albanian his contribution, a magnificent purse, furnished for the occasion, and heavy with gold.

'Don't be alarmed, ladies,' said a very handsome young officer, laughing, and taking off his cocked hat.

'Ah!' exclaimed one of the ladies, turning at the voice, and starting a little. 'Ah! it is Mr. Coningsby.'

Lord Eskdale paid the salt for the next carriage. 'Do they come down pretty stiff?' he inquired, and then, pulling forth a roll of bank-notes from the pocket of his pea-jacket, he wished them good morning.

The courtly Provost, then the benignant Goodall, a man who, though his experience of life was confined to the colleges in which he had passed his days, was naturally gifted with the rarest of all endowments, the talent of reception; and whose happy bearing and gracious manner, a smile ever in his eye and a lively word ever on his lip, must be recalled by all with pleasant recollections, welcomed Lord Monmouth and his friends to an assemblage of the noble, the beautiful, and the celebrated gathered together in rooms not unworthy of them, as you looked upon their interesting walls, breathing with the portraits of the heroes whom Eton boasts, from Wotton to Wellesley. Music sounded in the quadrangle of the College, in which the boys were already quickly assembling. The Duke of Wellington had arrived, and the boys were cheering a hero, who was an Eton field-marshal. From an oriel window in one of the Provost's rooms, Lord Monmouth, surrounded by every circumstance that could make life delightful, watched with some intentness the scene in the quadrangle beneath.

'I would give his fame,' said Lord Monmouth, 'if I had it, and my wealth, to be sixteen.'

Five hundred of the youth of England, sparkling with health, high spirits, and fancy dresses, were now assembled in the quadrangle. They formed into rank, and headed by a band of the Guards, thrice they marched round the court. Then quitting the College, they commenced their progress 'ad Montem.' It was a brilliant spectacle to see them defiling through the playing fields, those bowery meads; the river sparkling in the sun, the castled heights of Windsor, their glorious landscape; behind them, the pinnacles of their College.

The road from Eton to Salt Hill was clogged with carriages; the broad fields as far as eye could range were covered with human beings. Amid the burst of martial music and the shouts of the multitude, the band of heroes, as if they were marching from Athens, or Thebes, or Sparta, to some heroic deed, encircled the mount; the ensign reaches its summit, and then, amid a deafening cry of 'Floreat Etona!' he unfurls, and thrice waves the consecrated standard.

'Lord Monmouth,' said Mr. Rigby to Coningsby, 'wishes that you should beg your friends to dine with him. Of course you will ask Lord Henry and your friend Sir Charles Buckhurst; and is there any one else that you would like to invite?'

'Why, there is Vere,' said Coningsby, hesitating, 'and—'

'Vere! What Lord Vere?' said Rigby. 'Hum! He is one of your friends, is he? His father has done a great deal of mischief, but still he is Lord Vere. Well, of course, you can invite Vere.'

'There is another fellow I should like to ask very much,' said Coningsby, 'if Lord Monmouth would not think I was asking too many.'

'Never fear that; he sent me particularly to tell you to invite as many as you liked.'

'Well, then, I should like to ask Millbank.'

'Millbank!' said Mr. Rigby, a little excited, and then he added, 'Is that a son of Lady Albinia Millbank?'

'No; his mother is not a Lady Albinia, but he is a great friend of mine. His father is a Lancashire manufacturer.'

'By no means,' exclaimed Mr. Rigby, quite agitated. 'There is nothing in the world that Lord Monmouth dislikes so much as Manchester manufacturers, and particularly if they bear the name of Millbank. It must not be thought of, my dear Harry. I hope you have not spoken to the young man on the subject. I assure you it is out of the question. It would make Lord Monmouth quite ill. It would spoil everything, quite upset him.'

It was, of course, impossible for Coningsby to urge his wishes against such representations. He was disappointed, rather amazed; but Madame Colonna having sent for him to introduce her to some of the scenes and details of Eton life, his vexation was soon absorbed in the pride of acting in the face of his companions as the cavalier of a beautiful lady, and becoming the cicerone of the most brilliant party that had attended Montem. He presented his friends, too, to Lord. Monmouth, who gave them a cordial invitation to dine with him at his hotel at Windsor, which they warmly accepted. Buckhurst delighted the Marquess by his reckless genius. Even Lucretia deigned to appear amused; especially when, on visiting the upper school, the name of CARDIFF, the title Lord Monmouth bore in his youthful days, was pointed out to her by Coningsby, cut with his grandfather's own knife on the classic panels of that memorable wall in which scarcely a name that has flourished in our history, since the commencement of the eighteenth century, may not be observed with curious admiration.

It was the humour of Lord Monmouth that the boys should be entertained with the most various and delicious banquet that luxury could devise or money could command. For some days beforehand orders had been given for the preparation of this festival. Our friends did full justice to their Lucullus; Buckhurst especially, who gave his opinion on the most refined dishes with all the intrepidity of saucy ignorance, and occasionally shook his head over a glass of Hermitage or Côte Rôtie with a dissatisfaction which a satiated Sybarite could not have exceeded. Considering all things, Coningsby and his friends exhibited a great deal of self-command; but they were gay, even to the verge of frolic. But then the occasion justified it, as much as their youth. All were in high spirits. Madame Colonna declared that she had met nothing in England equal to Montem; that it was a Protestant Carnival; and that its only fault was that it did not last forty days. The Prince himself was all animation, and took wine with every one of the Etonians several times. All went on flowingly until Mr. Rigby contradicted Buckhurst on some point of Eton discipline, which Buckhurst would not stand. He rallied Mr. Rigby roundly, and Coningsby, full of champagne, and owing Rigby several years of contradiction, followed up the assault. Lord Monmouth, who liked a butt, and had a weakness for boisterous gaiety, slily encouraged the boys, till Rigby began to lose his temper and get noisy.

The lads had the best of it; they said a great many funny things, and delivered themselves of several sharp retorts; whereas there was something ridiculous in Rigby putting forth his 'slashing' talents against such younkers. However, he brought the infliction on himself by his strange habit of deciding on subjects of which he knew nothing, and of always contradicting persons on the very subjects of which they were necessarily masters.

To see Rigby baited was more amusement to Lord Monmouth even than Montem. Lucian Gay, however, when the affair was getting troublesome, came forward as a diversion. He sang an extemporaneous song on the ceremony of the day, and introduced the names of all the guests at the dinner, and of a great many other persons besides. This was capital! The boys were in raptures, but when the singer threw forth a verse about Dr. Keate, the applause became uproarious.

'Good-bye, my dear Harry,' said Lord Monmouth, when he bade his grandson farewell. 'I am going abroad again; I cannot remain in this Radical-ridden country. Remember, though I am away, Monmouth House is your home, at least so long as it belongs to me. I understand my tailor has turned

Liberal, and is going to stand for one of the metropolitan districts, a friend of Lord Durham; perhaps I shall find him in it when I return. I fear there are evil days for the NEW GENERATION!'

END OF BOOK I

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

It was early in November, 1834, and a large shooting party was assembled at Beaumanoir, the seat of that great nobleman, who was the father of Henry Sydney. England is unrivalled for two things, sporting and politics. They were combined at Beaumanoir; for the guests came not merely to slaughter the Duke's pheasants, but to hold council on the prospects of the party, which it was supposed by the initiated, began at this time to indicate some symptoms of brightening.

The success of the Reform Ministry on their first appeal to the new constituency which they had created, had been fatally complete. But the triumph was as destructive to the victors as to the vanquished.

'We are too strong,' prophetically exclaimed one of the fortunate cabinet, which found itself supported by an inconceivable majority of three hundred. It is to be hoped that some future publisher of private memoirs may have preserved some of the traits of that crude and short-lived parliament, when old Cobbett insolently thrust Sir Robert from the prescriptive seat of the chief of opposition, and treasury understrappers sneered at the 'queer lot' that had arrived from Ireland, little foreseeing what a high bidding that 'queer lot' would eventually command. Gratitude to Lord Grey was the hustings-cry at the end of 1832, the pretext that was to return to the new-modelled House of Commons none but men devoted to the Whig cause. The successful simulation, like everything that is false, carried within it the seeds of its own dissolution. Ingratitude to Lord Grey was more the fashion at the commencement of 1834, and before the close of that eventful year, the once popular Reform Ministry was upset, and the eagerly-sought Reformed Parliament dissolved!

It can scarcely be alleged that the public was altogether unprepared for this catastrophe. Many deemed it inevitable; few thought it imminent. The career of the Ministry, and the existence of the Parliament, had indeed from the first been turbulent and fitful. It was known, from authority, that there were dissensions in the cabinet, while a House of Commons which passed votes on subjects not less important than the repeal of a tax, or the impeachment of a judge, on one night, and rescinded its resolutions on the following, certainly established no increased claims to the confidence of its constituents in its discretion. Nevertheless, there existed at this period a prevalent conviction that the Whig party, by a great stroke of state, similar in magnitude and effect to that which in the preceding century had changed the dynasty, had secured to themselves the government of this country for, at least, the lives of the present generation. And even the well-informed in such matters were inclined to look upon the perplexing circumstances to which we have alluded rather as symptoms of a want of discipline in a new system of tactics, than as evidences of any essential and deeply-rooted disorder.

The startling rapidity, however, of the strange incidents of 1834; the indignant, soon to become vituperative, secession of a considerable section of the cabinet, some of them esteemed too at that time among its most efficient members; the piteous deprecation of 'pressure from without,' from lips hitherto deemed too stately for entreaty, followed by the Trades' Union, thirty thousand strong, parading in procession to Downing-street; the Irish negotiations of Lord Hatherton, strange blending of complex intrigue and almost infantile ingenuousness; the still inexplicable resignation of Lord Althorp, hurriedly followed by his still more mysterious resumption of power, the only result of his precipitate movements being the fall of Lord Grey himself, attended by circumstances which even a friendly historian could scarcely describe as honourable to his party or dignified to himself; latterly, the extemporaneous address of King William to the Bishops; the vagrant and grotesque apocalypse of the Lord Chancellor; and the fierce recrimination and memorable defiance of the Edinburgh banquet, all these impressive instances of public affairs and public conduct had combined

to create a predominant opinion that, whatever might be the consequences, the prolonged continuance of the present party in power was a clear impossibility.

It is evident that the suicidal career of what was then styled the Liberal party had been occasioned and stimulated by its unnatural excess of strength. The apoplectic plethora of 1834 was not less fatal than the paralytic tenuity of 1841. It was not feasible to gratify so many ambitions, or to satisfy so many expectations. Every man had his double; the heels of every placeman were dogged by friendly rivals ready to trip them up. There were even two cabinets; the one that met in council, and the one that met in cabal. The consequence of destroying the legitimate Opposition of the country was, that a moiety of the supporters of Government had to discharge the duties of Opposition.

Herein, then, we detect the real cause of all that irregular and unsettled carriage of public men which so perplexed the nation after the passing of the Reform Act. No government can be long secure without a formidable Opposition. It reduces their supporters to that tractable number which can be managed by the joint influences of fruition and of hope. It offers vengeance to the discontented, and distinction to the ambitious; and employs the energies of aspiring spirits, who otherwise may prove traitors in a division or assassins in a debate.

The general election of 1832 abrogated the Parliamentary Opposition of England, which had practically existed for more than a century and a half. And what a series of equivocal transactions and mortifying adventures did the withdrawal of this salutary restraint entail on the party which then so loudly congratulated themselves and the country that they were at length relieved from its odious repression! In the hurry of existence one is apt too generally to pass over the political history of the times in which we ourselves live. The two years that followed the Reform of the House of Commons are full of instruction, on which a young man would do well to ponder. It is hardly possible that he could rise from the study of these annals without a confirmed disgust for political intrigue; a dazzling practice, apt at first to fascinate youth, for it appeals at once to our invention and our courage, but one which really should only be the resource of the second-rate. Great minds must trust to great truths and great talents for their rise, and nothing else.

While, however, as the autumn of 1834 advanced, the people of this country became gradually sensible of the necessity of some change in the councils of their Sovereign, no man felt capable of predicting by what means it was to be accomplished, or from what quarry the new materials were to be extracted. The Tory party, according to those perverted views of Toryism unhappily too long prevalent in this country, was held to be literally defunct, except by a few old battered crones of office, crouched round the embers of faction which they were fanning, and muttering ‘reaction’ in mystic whispers. It cannot be supposed indeed for a moment, that the distinguished personage who had led that party in the House of Commons previously to the passing of the act of 1832, ever despaired in consequence of his own career. His then time of life, the perfection, almost the prime, of manhood; his parliamentary practice, doubly estimable in an inexperienced assembly; his political knowledge; his fair character and reputable position; his talents and tone as a public speaker, which he had always aimed to adapt to the habits and culture of that middle class from which it was concluded the benches of the new Parliament were mainly to be recruited, all these were qualities the possession of which must have assured a mind not apt to be disturbed in its calculations by any intemperate heats, that with time and patience the game was yet for him.

Unquestionably, whatever may have been insinuated, this distinguished person had no inkling that his services in 1834 might be claimed by his Sovereign. At the close of the session of that year he had quitted England with his family, and had arrived at Rome, where it was his intention to pass the winter. The party charges that have imputed to him a previous and sinister knowledge of the intentions of the Court, appear to have been made not only in ignorance of the personal character, but of the real position, of the future minister.

It had been the misfortune of this eminent gentleman when he first entered public life, to become identified with a political connection which, having arrogated to itself the name of an

illustrious historical party, pursued a policy which was either founded on no principle whatever, or on principles exactly contrary to those which had always guided the conduct of the great Tory leaders. The chief members of this official confederacy were men distinguished by none of the conspicuous qualities of statesmen. They had none of the divine gifts that govern senates and guide councils. They were not orators; they were not men of deep thought or happy resource, or of penetrative and sagacious minds. Their political ken was essentially dull and contracted. They expended some energy in obtaining a defective, blundering acquaintance with foreign affairs; they knew as little of the real state of their own country as savages of an approaching eclipse. This factious league had shuffled themselves into power by clinging to the skirts of a great minister, the last of Tory statesmen, but who, in the unparalleled and confounding emergencies of his latter years, had been forced, unfortunately for England, to relinquish Toryism. His successors inherited all his errors without the latent genius, which in him might have still rallied and extricated him from the consequences of his disasters. His successors did not merely inherit his errors; they exaggerated, they caricatured them. They rode into power on a springtide of all the rampant prejudices and rancorous passions of their time. From the King to the boor their policy was a mere pandering to public ignorance. Impudently usurping the name of that party of which nationality, and therefore universality, is the essence, these pseudo-Tories made Exclusion the principle of their political constitution, and Restriction the genius of their commercial code.

The blind goddess that plays with human fortunes has mixed up the memory of these men with traditions of national glory. They conducted to a prosperous conclusion the most renowned war in which England has ever been engaged. Yet every military conception that emanated from their cabinet was branded by their characteristic want of grandeur. Chance, however, sent them a great military genius, whom they treated for a long time with indifference, and whom they never heartily supported until his career had made him their master. His transcendent exploits, and European events even greater than his achievements, placed in the manikin grasp of the English ministry, the settlement of Europe.

The act of the Congress of Vienna remains the eternal monument of their diplomatic knowledge and political sagacity. Their capital feats were the creation of two kingdoms, both of which are already erased from the map of Europe. They made no single preparation for the inevitable, almost impending, conjunctures of the East. All that remains of the pragmatic arrangements of the mighty Congress of Vienna is the mediatisation of the petty German princes.

But the settlement of Europe by the pseudo-Tories was the dictate of inspiration compared with their settlement of England. The peace of Paris found the government of this country in the hands of a body of men of whom it is no exaggeration to say that they were ignorant of every principle of every branch of political science. So long as our domestic administration was confined merely to the raising of a revenue, they levied taxes with gross facility from the industry of a country too busy to criticise or complain. But when the excitement and distraction of war had ceased, and they were forced to survey the social elements that surrounded them, they seemed, for the first time, to have become conscious of their own incapacity. These men, indeed, were the mere children of routine. They prided themselves on being practical men. In the language of this defunct school of statesmen, a practical man is a man who practises the blunders of his predecessors.

Now commenced that Condition-of-England Question of which our generation hears so much. During five-and-twenty years every influence that can develop the energies and resources of a nation had been acting with concentrated stimulation on the British Isles. National peril and national glory; the perpetual menace of invasion, the continual triumph of conquest; the most extensive foreign commerce that was ever conducted by a single nation; an illimitable currency; an internal trade supported by swarming millions whom manufacturers and inclosure-bills summoned into existence; above all, the supreme control obtained by man over mechanic power, these are some of the causes of that rapid advance of material civilisation in England, to which the annals of the world can afford

no parallel. But there was no proportionate advance in our moral civilisation. In the hurry-skurry of money-making, men-making, and machine-making, we had altogether outgrown, not the spirit, but the organisation, of our institutions.

The peace came; the stimulating influences suddenly ceased; the people, in a novel and painful position, found themselves without guides. They went to the ministry; they asked to be guided; they asked to be governed. Commerce requested a code; trade required a currency; the unfranchised subject solicited his equal privilege; suffering labour clamoured for its rights; a new race demanded education. What did the ministry do?

They fell into a panic. Having fulfilled during their lives the duties of administration, they were frightened because they were called upon, for the first time, to perform the functions of government. Like all weak men, they had recourse to what they called strong measures. They determined to put down the multitude. They thought they were imitating Mr. Pitt, because they mistook disorganisation for sedition.

Their projects of relief were as ridiculous as their system of coercion was ruthless; both were alike founded in intense ignorance. When we recall Mr. Vansittart with his currency resolutions; Lord Castlereagh with his plans for the employment of labour; and Lord Sidmouth with his plots for ensnaring the laborious; we are tempted to imagine that the present epoch has been one of peculiar advances in political ability, and marvel how England could have attained her present pitch under a series of such governors.

We should, however, be labouring under a very erroneous impression. Run over the statesmen that have figured in England since the accession of the present family, and we may doubt whether there be one, with the exception perhaps of the Duke of Newcastle, who would have been a worthy colleague of the council of Mr. Perceval, or the early cabinet of Lord Liverpool. Assuredly the genius of Bolingbroke and the sagacity of Walpole would have alike recoiled from such men and such measures. And if we take the individuals who were governing England immediately before the French Revolution, one need only refer to the speeches of Mr. Pitt, and especially to those of that profound statesman and most instructed man, Lord Shelburne, to find that we can boast no remarkable superiority either in political justice or in political economy. One must attribute this degeneracy, therefore, to the long war and our insular position, acting upon men naturally of inferior abilities, and unfortunately, in addition, of illiterate habits.

In the meantime, notwithstanding all the efforts of the political Panglosses who, in evening Journals and Quarterly Reviews were continually proving that this was the best of all possible governments, it was evident to the ministry itself that the machine must stop. The class of Rigbys indeed at this period, one eminently favourable to that fungous tribe, greatly distinguished themselves. They demonstrated in a manner absolutely convincing, that it was impossible for any person to possess any ability, knowledge, or virtue, any capacity of reasoning, any ray of fancy or faculty of imagination, who was not a supporter of the existing administration. If any one impeached the management of a department, the public was assured that the accuser had embezzled; if any one complained of the conduct of a colonial governor, the complainant was announced as a returned convict. An amelioration of the criminal code was discountenanced because a search in the parish register of an obscure village proved that the proposer had not been born in wedlock. A relaxation of the commercial system was denounced because one of its principal advocates was a Socinian. The inutility of Parliamentary Reform was ever obvious since Mr. Rigby was a member of the House of Commons.

To us, with our *Times* newspaper every morning on our breakfast-table, bringing, on every subject which can interest the public mind, a degree of information and intelligence which must form a security against any prolonged public misconception, it seems incredible that only five-and-twenty years ago the English mind could have been so ridden and hoodwinked, and that, too, by men of mean attainments and moderate abilities. But the war had directed the energies of the English people into channels by no means favourable to political education. Conquerors of the world, with their ports

filled with the shipping of every clime, and their manufactories supplying the European continent, in the art of self-government, that art in which their fathers excelled, they had become literally children; and Rigby and his brother hirelings were the nurses that frightened them with hideous fables and ugly words.

Notwithstanding, however, all this successful mystification, the Arch-Mediocrity who presided, rather than ruled, over this Cabinet of Mediocrities, became hourly more conscious that the inevitable transition from fulfilling the duties of an administration to performing the functions of a government could not be conducted without talents and knowledge. The Arch-Mediocrity had himself some glimmering traditions of political science. He was sprung from a laborious stock, had received some training, and though not a statesman, might be classed among those whom the Lord Keeper Williams used to call 'statemongers.' In a subordinate position his meagre diligence and his frigid method might not have been without value; but the qualities that he possessed were misplaced; nor can any character be conceived less invested with the happy properties of a leader. In the conduct of public affairs his disposition was exactly the reverse of that which is the characteristic of great men. He was peremptory in little questions, and great ones he left open.

In the natural course of events, in 1819 there ought to have been a change of government, and another party in the state should have entered into office; but the Whigs, though they counted in their ranks at that period an unusual number of men of great ability, and formed, indeed, a compact and spirited opposition, were unable to contend against the new adjustment of borough influence which had occurred during the war, and under the protracted administration by which that war had been conducted. New families had arisen on the Tory side that almost rivalled old Newcastle himself in their electioneering management; and it was evident that, unless some reconstruction of the House of Commons could be effected, the Whig party could never obtain a permanent hold of official power. Hence, from that period, the Whigs became Parliamentary Reformers.

It was inevitable, therefore, that the country should be governed by the same party; indispensable that the ministry should be renovated by new brains and blood. Accordingly, a Mediocrity, not without repugnance, was induced to withdraw, and the great name of Wellington supplied his place in council. The talents of the Duke, as they were then understood, were not exactly of the kind most required by the cabinet, and his colleagues were careful that he should not occupy too prominent a post; but still it was an impressive acquisition, and imparted to the ministry a semblance of renown.

There was an individual who had not long entered public life, but who had already filled considerable, though still subordinate offices. Having acquired a certain experience of the duties of administration, and distinction for his mode of fulfilling them, he had withdrawn from his public charge; perhaps because he found it a barrier to the attainment of that parliamentary reputation for which he had already shown both a desire and a capacity; perhaps because, being young and independent, he was not over-anxious irremediably to identify his career with a school of politics of the infallibility of which his experience might have already made him a little sceptical. But he possessed the talents that were absolutely wanted, and the terms were at his own dictation. Another, and a very distinguished Mediocrity, who would not resign, was thrust out, and Mr. Peel became Secretary of State.

From this moment dates that intimate connection between the Duke of Wellington and the present First Minister, which has exercised a considerable influence over the career of individuals and the course of affairs. It was the sympathetic result of superior minds placed among inferior intelligences, and was, doubtless, assisted by a then mutual conviction, that the difference of age, the circumstance of sitting in different houses, and the general contrast of their previous pursuits and accomplishments, rendered personal rivalry out of the question. From this moment, too, the domestic government of the country assumed a new character, and one universally admitted to have been distinguished by a spirit of enlightened progress and comprehensive amelioration.

A short time after this, a third and most distinguished Mediocrity died; and Canning, whom they had twice worried out of the cabinet, where they had tolerated him some time in an obscure and ambiguous position, was recalled just in time from his impending banishment, installed in the first post in the Lower House, and intrusted with the seals of the Foreign Office. The Duke of Wellington had coveted them, nor could Lord Liverpool have been insensible to his Grace's peculiar fitness for such duties; but strength was required in the House of Commons, where they had only one Secretary of State, a young man already distinguished, yet untried as a leader, and surrounded by colleagues notoriously incapable to assist him in debate.

The accession of Mr. Canning to the cabinet, in a position, too, of surpassing influence, soon led to a further weeding of the Mediocrities, and, among other introductions, to the memorable entrance of Mr. Huskisson. In this wise did that cabinet, once notable only for the absence of all those qualities which authorise the possession of power, come to be generally esteemed as a body of men, who, for parliamentary eloquence, official practice, political information, sagacity in council, and a due understanding of their epoch, were inferior to none that had directed the policy of the empire since the Revolution.

If we survey the tenor of the policy of the Liverpool Cabinet during the latter moiety of its continuance, we shall find its characteristic to be a partial recurrence to those frank principles of government which Mr. Pitt had revived during the latter part of the last century from precedents that had been set us, either in practice or in dogma, during its earlier period, by statesmen who then not only bore the title, but professed the opinions, of Tories. Exclusive principles in the constitution, and restrictive principles in commerce, have grown up together; and have really nothing in common with the ancient character of our political settlement, or the manners and customs of the English people. Confidence in the loyalty of the nation, testified by munificent grants of rights and franchises, and favour to an expansive system of traffic, were distinctive qualities of the English sovereignty, until the House of Commons usurped the better portion of its prerogatives. A widening of our electoral scheme, great facilities to commerce, and the rescue of our Roman Catholic fellow-subjects from the Puritanic yoke, from fetters which have been fastened on them by English Parliaments in spite of the protests and exertions of English Sovereigns; these were the three great elements and fundamental truths of the real Pitt system, a system founded on the traditions of our monarchy, and caught from the writings, the speeches, the councils of those who, for the sake of these and analogous benefits, had ever been anxious that the Sovereign of England should never be degraded into the position of a Venetian Doge.

It is in the plunder of the Church that we must seek for the primary cause of our political exclusion, and our commercial restraint. That unhallowed booty created a factitious aristocracy, ever fearful that they might be called upon to regorge their sacrilegious spoil. To prevent this they took refuge in political religionism, and paltering with the disturbed consciences, or the pious fantasies, of a portion of the people, they organised them into religious sects. These became the unconscious Praetorians of their ill-gotten domains. At the head of these religionists, they have continued ever since to govern, or powerfully to influence this country. They have in that time pulled down thrones and churches, changed dynasties, abrogated and remodelled parliaments; they have disfranchised Scotland and confiscated Ireland. One may admire the vigour and consistency of the Whig party, and recognise in their career that unity of purpose that can only spring from a great principle; but the Whigs introduced sectarian religion, sectarian religion led to political exclusion, and political exclusion was soon accompanied by commercial restraint.

It would be fanciful to assume that the Liverpool Cabinet, in their ameliorating career, was directed by any desire to recur to the primordial tenets of the Tory party. That was not an epoch when statesmen cared to prosecute the investigation of principles. It was a period of happy and enlightened practice. A profounder policy is the offspring of a time like the present, when the original postulates of institutions are called in question. The Liverpool Cabinet unconsciously approximated to these

opinions, because from careful experiment they were convinced of their beneficial tendency, and they thus bore an unintentional and impartial testimony to their truth. Like many men, who think they are inventors, they were only reproducing ancient wisdom.

But one must ever deplore that this ministry, with all their talents and generous ardour, did not advance to principles. It is always perilous to adopt expediency as a guide; but the choice may be sometimes imperative. These statesmen, however, took expediency for their director, when principle would have given them all that expediency ensured, and much more.

This ministry, strong in the confidence of the sovereign, the parliament, and the people, might, by the courageous promulgation of great historical truths, have gradually formed a public opinion, that would have permitted them to organise the Tory party on a broad, a permanent, and national basis. They might have nobly effected a complete settlement of Ireland, which a shattered section of this very cabinet was forced a few years after to do partially, and in an equivocating and equivocal manner. They might have concluded a satisfactory reconstruction of the third estate, without producing that convulsion with which, from its violent fabrication, our social system still vibrates. Lastly, they might have adjusted the rights and properties of our national industries in a manner which would have prevented that fierce and fatal rivalry that is now disturbing every hearth of the United Kingdom.

We may, therefore, visit on the *laches* of this ministry the introduction of that new principle and power into our constitution which ultimately may absorb all, AGITATION. This cabinet, then, with so much brilliancy on its surface, is the real parent of the Roman Catholic Association, the Political Unions, the Anti-Corn-Law League.

There is no influence at the same time so powerful and so singular as that of individual character. It arises as often from the weakness of the character as from its strength. The dispersion of this clever and showy ministry is a fine illustration of this truth. One morning the Arch-Mediocrity himself died. At the first blush, it would seem that little difficulties could be experienced in finding his substitute. His long occupation of the post proved, at any rate, that the qualification was not excessive. But this cabinet, with its serene and blooming visage, had been all this time charged with fierce and emulous ambitions. They waited the signal, but they waited in grim repose. The death of the nominal leader, whose formal superiority, wounding no vanity, and offending no pride, secured in their councils equality among the able, was the tocsin of their anarchy. There existed in this cabinet two men, who were resolved immediately to be prime ministers; a third who was resolved eventually to be prime minister, but would at any rate occupy no ministerial post without the lead of a House of Parliament; and a fourth, who felt himself capable of being prime minister, but despaired of the revolution which could alone make him one; and who found an untimely end when that revolution had arrived.

Had Mr. Secretary Canning remained leader of the House of Commons under the Duke of Wellington, all that he would have gained by the death of Lord Liverpool was a master. Had the Duke of Wellington become Secretary of State under Mr. Canning he would have materially advanced his political position, not only by holding the seals of a high department in which he was calculated to excel, but by becoming leader of the House of Lords. But his Grace was induced by certain court intriguers to believe that the King would send for him, and he was also aware that Mr. Peel would no longer serve under any ministry in the House of Commons. Under any circumstances it would have been impossible to keep the Liverpool Cabinet together. The struggle, therefore, between the Duke of Wellington and 'my dear Mr. Canning' was internecine, and ended somewhat unexpectedly.

And here we must stop to do justice to our friend Mr. Rigby, whose conduct on this occasion was distinguished by a bustling dexterity which was quite charming. He had, as we have before intimated, on the credit of some clever lampoons written during the Queen's trial, which were, in fact, the effusions of Lucian Gay, wriggled himself into a sort of occasional unworthy favour at the palace, where he was half butt and half buffoon. Here, during the interregnum occasioned by the death, or rather inevitable retirement, of Lord Liverpool, Mr. Rigby contrived to scrape up a conviction that

the Duke was the winning horse, and in consequence there appeared a series of leading articles in a notorious evening newspaper, in which it was, as Tadpole and Taper declared, most 'slashingly' shown, that the son of an actress could never be tolerated as a Prime Minister of England. Not content with this, and never doubting for a moment the authentic basis of his persuasion, Mr. Rigby poured forth his coarse volubility on the subject at several of the new clubs which he was getting up in order to revenge himself for having been black-balled at White's.

What with arrangements about Lord Monmouth's boroughs, and the lucky bottling of some claret which the Duke had imported on Mr. Rigby's recommendation, this distinguished gentleman contrived to pay almost hourly visits at Apsley House, and so bullied Tadpole and Taper that they scarcely dared address him. About four-and-twenty hours before the result, and when it was generally supposed that the Duke was in, Mr. Rigby, who had gone down to Windsor to ask his Majesty the date of some obscure historical incident, which Rigby, of course, very well knew, found that audiences were impossible, that Majesty was agitated, and learned, from an humble but secure authority, that in spite of all his slashing articles, and Lucian Gay's parodies of the Irish melodies, Canning was to be Prime Minister.

This would seem something of a predicament! To common minds; there are no such things as scrapes for gentlemen with Mr. Rigby's talents for action. He had indeed, in the world, the credit of being an adept in machinations, and was supposed ever to be involved in profound and complicated contrivances. This was quite a mistake. There was nothing profound about Mr. Rigby; and his intellect was totally incapable of devising or sustaining an intricate or continuous scheme. He was, in short, a man who neither felt nor thought; but who possessed, in a very remarkable degree, a restless instinct for adroit baseness. On the present occasion he got into his carriage, and drove at the utmost speed from Windsor to the Foreign Office. The Secretary of State was engaged when he arrived; but Mr. Rigby would listen to no difficulties. He rushed upstairs, flung open the door, and with agitated countenance, and eyes suffused with tears, threw himself into the arms of the astonished Mr. Canning.

'All is right,' exclaimed the devoted Rigby, in broken tones; 'I have convinced the King that the First Minister must be in the House of Commons. No one knows it but myself; but it is certain.'

We have seen that at an early period of his career, Mr. Peel withdrew from official life. His course had been one of unbroken prosperity; the hero of the University had become the favourite of the House of Commons. His retreat, therefore, was not prompted by chagrin. Nor need it have been suggested by a calculating ambition, for the ordinary course of events was fast bearing to him all to which man could aspire. One might rather suppose, that he had already gained sufficient experience, perhaps in his Irish Secretaryship, to make him pause in that career of superficial success which education and custom had hitherto chalked out for him, rather than the creative energies of his own mind. A thoughtful intellect may have already detected elements in our social system which required a finer observation, and a more unbroken study, than the gyves and trammels of office would permit. He may have discovered that the representation of the University, looked upon in those days as the blue ribbon of the House of Commons, was a sufficient fetter without unnecessarily adding to its restraint. He may have wished to reserve himself for a happier occasion, and a more progressive period. He may have felt the strong necessity of arresting himself in his rapid career of felicitous routine, to survey his position in calmness, and to comprehend the stirring age that was approaching.

For that, he could not but be conscious that the education which he had consummated, however ornate and refined, was not sufficient. That age of economical statesmanship which Lord Shelburne had predicted in 1787, when he demolished, in the House of Lords, Bishop Watson and the Balance of Trade, which Mr. Pitt had comprehended; and for which he was preparing the nation when the French Revolution diverted the public mind into a stronger and more turbulent current, was again impending, while the intervening history of the country had been prolific in events which had aggravated the necessity of investigating the sources of the wealth of nations. The time had arrived when parliamentary preeminence could no longer be achieved or maintained by gorgeous abstractions

borrowed from Burke, or shallow systems purloined from De Lolme, adorned with Horatian points, or varied with Virgilian passages. It was to be an age of abstruse disquisition, that required a compact and sinewy intellect, nurtured in a class of learning not yet honoured in colleges, and which might arrive at conclusions conflicting with predominant prejudices.

Adopting this view of the position of Mr. Peel, strengthened as it is by his early withdrawal for a while from the direction of public affairs, it may not only be a charitable but a true estimate of the motives which influenced him in his conduct towards Mr. Canning, to conclude that he was not guided in that transaction by the disingenuous rivalry usually imputed to him. His statement in Parliament of the determining circumstances of his conduct, coupled with his subsequent and almost immediate policy, may perhaps always leave this a painful and ambiguous passage in his career; but in passing judgment on public men, it behoves us ever to take large and extended views of their conduct; and previous incidents will often satisfactorily explain subsequent events, which, without their illustrating aid, are involved in misapprehension or mystery.

It would seem, therefore, that Sir Robert Peel, from an early period, meditated his emancipation from the political confederacy in which he was implicated, and that he has been continually baffled in this project. He broke loose from Lord Liverpool; he retired from Mr. Canning. Forced again into becoming the subordinate leader of the weakest government in parliamentary annals, he believed he had at length achieved his emancipation, when he declared to his late colleagues, after the overthrow of 1830, that he would never again accept a secondary position in office. But the Duke of Wellington was too old a tactician to lose so valuable an ally. So his Grace declared after the Reform Bill was passed, as its inevitable result, that thenceforth the Prime Minister must be a member of the House of Commons; and this aphorism, cited as usual by the Duke's parasites as demonstration of his supreme sagacity, was a graceful mode of resigning the preeminence which had been productive of such great party disasters. It is remarkable that the party who devised and passed the Reform Bill, and who, in consequence, governed the nation for ten years, never once had their Prime Minister in the House of Commons: but that does not signify; the Duke's maxim is still quoted as an oracle almost equal in prescience to his famous query, 'How is the King's government to be carried on?' a question to which his Grace by this time has contrived to give a tolerably practical answer.

Sir Robert Peel, who had escaped from Lord Liverpool, escaped from Mr. Canning, escaped even from the Duke of Wellington in 1832, was at length caught in 1834; the victim of ceaseless intriguers, who neither comprehended his position, nor that of their country.

CHAPTER II

Beaumanoir was one of those Palladian palaces, vast and ornate, such as the genius of Kent and Campbell delighted in at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Placed on a noble elevation, yet screened from the northern blast, its sumptuous front, connected with its far-spreading wings by Corinthian colonnades, was the boast and pride of the midland counties. The surrounding gardens, equalling in extent the size of ordinary parks, were crowded with temples dedicated to abstract virtues and to departed friends. Occasionally a triumphal arch celebrated a general whom the family still esteemed a hero; and sometimes a votive column commemorated the great statesman who had advanced the family a step in the peerage. Beyond the limits of this pleasance the hart and hind wandered in a wilderness abounding in ferny coverts and green and stately trees.

The noble proprietor of this demesne had many of the virtues of his class; a few of their failings. He had that public spirit which became his station. He was not one of those who avoided the exertions and the sacrifices which should be inseparable from high position, by the hollow pretext of a taste for privacy, and a devotion to domestic joys. He was munificent, tender, and bounteous to the poor, and loved a flowing hospitality. A keen sportsman, he was not untinctured by letters, and had indeed a cultivated taste for the fine arts. Though an ardent politician, he was tolerant to adverse opinions, and full of amenity to his opponents. A firm supporter of the corn-laws, he never refused a lease. Notwithstanding there ran through his whole demeanour and the habit of his mind, a vein of native simplicity that was full of charm, his manner was finished. He never offended any one's self-love. His good breeding, indeed, sprang from the only sure source of gentle manners, a kind heart. To have pained others would have pained himself. Perhaps, too, this noble sympathy may have been in some degree prompted by the ancient blood in his veins, an accident of lineage rather rare with the English nobility. One could hardly praise him for the strong affections that bound him to his hearth, for fortune had given him the most pleasing family in the world; but, above all, a peerless wife.

The Duchess was one of those women who are the delight of existence. She was sprung from a house not inferior to that with which she had blended, and was gifted with that rare beauty which time ever spares, so that she seemed now only the elder sister of her own beautiful daughters. She, too, was distinguished by that perfect good breeding which is the result of nature and not of education: for it may be found in a cottage, and may be missed in a palace. 'Tis a genial regard for the feelings of others that springs from an absence of selfishness. The Duchess, indeed, was in every sense a fine lady; her manners were refined and full of dignity; but nothing in the world could have induced her to appear bored when another was addressing or attempting to amuse her. She was not one of those vulgar fine ladies who meet you one day with a vacant stare, as if unconscious of your existence, and address you on another in a tone of impertinent familiarity. Her temper, perhaps, was somewhat quick, which made this consideration for the feelings of others still more admirable, for it was the result of a strict moral discipline acting on a good heart. Although the best of wives and mothers, she had some charity for her neighbours. Needing herself no indulgence, she could be indulgent; and would by no means favour that strait-laced morality that would constrain the innocent play of the social body. She was accomplished, well read, and had a lively fancy. Add to this that sunbeam of a happy home, a gay and cheerful spirit in its mistress, and one might form some faint idea of this gracious personage.

The eldest son of this house was now on the continent; of his two younger brothers, one was with his regiment and the other was Coningsby's friend at Eton, our Henry Sydney. The two eldest daughters had just married, on the same day, and at the same altar; and the remaining one, Theresa, was still a child.

The Duke had occupied a chief post in the Household under the late administration, and his present guests chiefly consisted of his former colleagues in office. There were several members of

the late cabinet, several members for his Grace's late boroughs, looking very much like martyrs, full of suffering and of hope. Mr. Tadpole and Mr. Taper were also there; they too had lost their seats since 1832; but being men of business, and accustomed from early life to look about them, they had already commenced the combinations which on a future occasion were to bear them back to the assembly where they were so missed.

Taper had his eye on a small constituency which had escaped the fatal schedules, and where he had what they called a 'connection;' that is to say, a section of the suffrages who had a lively remembrance of Treasury favours once bestowed by Mr. Taper, and who had not been so liberally dealt with by the existing powers. This connection of Taper was in time to leaven the whole mass of the constituent body, and make it rise in full rebellion against its present liberal representative, who being one of a majority of three hundred, could get nothing when he called at Whitehall or Downing Street.

Tadpole, on the contrary, who was of a larger grasp of mind than Taper, with more of imagination and device but not so safe a man, was coquetting with a manufacturing town and a large constituency, where he was to succeed by the aid of the Wesleyans, of which pious body he had suddenly become a fervent admirer. The great Mr. Rigby, too, was a guest out of Parliament, nor caring to be in; but hearing that his friends had some hopes, he thought he would just come down to dash them.

The political grapes were sour for Mr. Rigby; a prophet of evil, he preached only mortification and repentance and despair to his late colleagues. It was the only satisfaction left Mr. Rigby, except assuring the Duke that the finest pictures in his gallery were copies, and recommending him to pull down Beaumanoir, and rebuild it on a design with which Mr. Rigby would furnish him.

The battue and the banquet were over; the ladies had withdrawn; and the butler placed fresh claret on the table.

'And you really think you could give us a majority, Tadpole?' said the Duke.

Mr. Tadpole, with some ceremony, took a memorandum-book out of his pocket, amid the smiles and the faint well-bred merriment of his friends.

'Tadpole is nothing without his book,' whispered Lord Fitz-Booby.

'It is here,' said Mr. Tadpole, emphatically patting his volume, 'a clear working majority of twenty-two.'

'Near sailing that!' cried the Duke.

'A far better majority than the present Government have,' said Mr. Tadpole.

'There is nothing like a good small majority,' said Mr. Taper, 'and a good registration.'

'Ay! register, register, register!' said the Duke. 'Those were immortal words.'

'I can tell your Grace three far better ones,' said Mr. Tadpole, with a self-complacent air. 'Object, object, object!'

'You may register, and you may object,' said Mr. Rigby, 'but you will never get rid of Schedule A and Schedule B.'

'But who could have supposed two years ago that affairs would be in their present position?' said Mr. Taper, deferentially.

'I foretold it,' said Mr. Rigby. 'Every one knows that no government now can last twelve months.'

'We may make fresh boroughs,' said Taper. 'We have reduced Shabbyton at the last registration under three hundred.'

'And the Wesleyans!' said Tadpole. 'We never counted on the Wesleyans!'

'I am told these Wesleyans are really a respectable body,' said Lord Fitz-Booby. 'I believe there is no material difference between their tenets and those of the Establishment. I never heard of them much till lately. We have too long confounded them with the mass of Dissenters, but their conduct at several of the later elections proves that they are far from being unreasonable and disloyal individuals. When we come in, something should be done for the Wesleyans, eh, Rigby?'

‘All that your Lordship can do for the Wesleyans is what they will very shortly do for themselves, appropriate a portion of the Church Revenues to their own use.’

‘Nay, nay,’ said Mr. Tadpole with a chuckle, ‘I don’t think we shall find the Church attacked again in a hurry. I only wish they would try! A good Church cry before a registration,’ he continued, rubbing his hands; ‘eh, my Lord, I think that would do.’

‘But how are we to turn them out?’ said the Duke.

‘Ah!’ said Mr. Taper, ‘that is a great question.’

‘What do you think of a repeal of the Malt Tax?’ said Lord Fitz-Booby. ‘They have been trying it on in –shire, and I am told it goes down very well.’

‘No repeal of any tax,’ said Taper, sincerely shocked, and shaking his head; ‘and the Malt Tax of all others. I am all against that.’

‘It is a very good cry though, if there be no other,’ said Tadpole.

‘I am all for a religious cry,’ said Taper. ‘It means nothing, and, if successful, does not interfere with business when we are in.’

‘You will have religious cries enough in a short time,’ said Mr. Rigby, rather wearied of any one speaking but himself, and thereat he commenced a discourse, which was, in fact, one of his ‘slashing’ articles in petto on Church Reform, and which abounded in parallels between the present affairs and those of the reign of Charles I. Tadpole, who did not pretend to know anything but the state of the registration, and Taper, whose political reading was confined to an intimate acquaintance with the Red Book and Beatson’s Political Index, which he could repeat backwards, were silenced. The Duke, who was well instructed and liked to be talked to, sipped his claret, and was rather amused by Rigby’s lecture, particularly by one or two statements characterised by Rigby’s happy audacity, but which the Duke was too indolent to question. Lord Fitz-Booby listened with his mouth open, but rather bored. At length, when there was a momentary pause, he said:

‘In my time, the regular thing was to move an amendment on the address.’

‘Quite out of the question,’ exclaimed Tadpole, with a scoff.

‘Entirely given up,’ said Taper, with a sneer.

‘If you will drink no more claret, we will go and hear some music,’ said the Duke.

CHAPTER III

A breakfast at Beaumanoir was a meal of some ceremony. Every guest was expected to attend, and at a somewhat early hour. Their host and hostess set them the example of punctuality. 'Tis an old form rigidly adhered to in some great houses, but, it must be confessed, does not contrast very agreeably with the easier arrangements of establishments of less pretension and of more modern order.

The morning after the dinner to which we have been recently introduced, there was one individual absent from the breakfast-table whose non-appearance could scarcely be passed over without notice; and several inquired with some anxiety, whether their host were indisposed.

'The Duke has received some letters from London which detain him,' replied the Duchess. 'He will join us.'

'Your Grace will be glad to hear that your son Henry is very well,' said Mr. Rigby; 'I heard of him this morning. Harry Coningsby enclosed me a letter for his grandfather, and tells me that he and Henry Sydney had just had a capital run with the King's hounds.'

'It is three years since we have seen Mr. Coningsby,' said the Duchess. 'Once he was often here. He was a great favourite of mine. I hardly ever knew a more interesting boy.'

'Yes, I have done a great deal for him,' said Mr. Rigby. 'Lord Monmouth is fond of him, and wishes that he should make a figure; but how any one is to distinguish himself now, I am really at a loss to comprehend.'

'But are affairs so very bad?' said the Duchess, smiling. 'I thought that we were all regaining our good sense and good temper.'

'I believe all the good sense and all the good temper in England are concentrated in your Grace,' said Mr. Rigby, gallantly.

'I should be sorry to be such a monopolist. But Lord Fitz-Booby was giving me last night quite a glowing report of Mr. Tadpole's prospects for the nation. We were all to have our own again; and Percy to carry the county.'

'My dear Madam, before twelve months are past, there will not be a county in England. Why should there be? If boroughs are to be disfranchised, why should not counties be destroyed?'

At this moment the Duke entered, apparently agitated. He bowed to his guests, and apologised for his unusual absence. 'The truth is,' he continued, 'I have just received a very important despatch. An event has occurred which may materially affect affairs. Lord Spencer is dead.'

A thunderbolt in a summer sky, as Sir William Temple says, could not have produced a greater sensation. The business of the repast ceased in a moment. The knives and forks were suddenly silent. All was still.

'It is an immense event,' said Tadpole.

'I don't see my way,' said Taper.

'When did he die?' said Lord Fitz-Booby.

'I don't believe it,' said Mr. Rigby.

'They have got their man ready,' said Tadpole.

'It is impossible to say what will happen,' said Taper.

'Now is the time for an amendment on the address,' said Fitz-Booby.

'There are two reasons which convince me that Lord Spencer is not dead,' said Mr. Rigby.

'I fear there is no doubt of it,' said the Duke, shaking his head.

'Lord Althorp was the only man who could keep them together,' said Lord Fitz-Booby.

'On the contrary,' said Tadpole. 'If I be right in my man, and I have no doubt of it, you will have a radical programme, and they will be stronger than ever.'

'Do you think they can get the steam up again?' said Taper, musingly.

‘They will bid high,’ replied Tadpole. ‘Nothing could be more unfortunate than this death. Things were going on so well and so quietly! The Wesleyans almost with us!’

‘And Shabbyton too!’ mournfully exclaimed Taper. ‘Another registration and quiet times, and I could have reduced the constituency to two hundred and fifty.’

‘If Lord Spencer had died on the 10th,’ said Rigby, ‘it must have been known to Henry Rivers. And I have a letter from Henry Rivers by this post. Now, Althorp is in Northamptonshire, mark that, and Northampton is a county—’

‘My dear Rigby,’ said the Duke, ‘pardon me for interrupting you. Unhappily, there is no doubt Lord Spencer is dead, for I am one of his executors.’

This announcement silenced even Mr. Rigby, and the conversation now entirely merged in speculations on what would occur. Numerous were the conjectures hazarded, but the prevailing impression was, that this unforeseen event might embarrass those secret expectations of Court succour in which a certain section of the party had for some time reason to indulge.

From the moment, however, of the announcement of Lord Spencer’s death, a change might be visibly observed in the tone of the party at Beaumanoir. They became silent, moody, and restless. There seemed a general, though not avowed, conviction that a crisis of some kind or other was at hand. The post, too, brought letters every day from town teeming with fanciful speculations, and occasionally mysterious hopes.

‘I kept this cover for Peel,’ said the Duke pensively, as he loaded his gun on the morning of the 14th. ‘Do you know, I was always against his going to Rome.’

‘It is very odd,’ said Tadpole, ‘but I was thinking of the very same thing.’

‘It will be fifteen years before England will see a Tory Government,’ said Mr. Rigby, drawing his ramrod, ‘and then it will only last five months.’

‘Melbourne, Althorp, and Durham, all in the Lords,’ said Taper. ‘Three leaders! They must quarrel.’

‘If Durham come in, mark me, he will dissolve on Household Suffrage and the Ballot,’ said Tadpole.

‘Not nearly so good a cry as Church,’ replied Taper.

‘With the Malt Tax,’ said Tadpole. ‘Church, without the Malt Tax, will not do against Household Suffrage and Ballot.’

‘Malt Tax is madness,’ said Taper. ‘A good farmer’s friend cry without Malt Tax would work just as well.’

‘They will never dissolve,’ said the Duke. ‘They are so strong.’

‘They cannot go on with three hundred majority,’ said Taper. ‘Forty is as much as can be managed with open constituencies.’

‘If he had only gone to Paris instead of Rome!’ said the Duke.

‘Yes,’ said Mr. Rigby, ‘I could have written to him then by every post, and undeceived him as to his position.’

‘After all he is the only man,’ said the Duke; ‘and I really believe the country thinks so.’

‘Pray, what is the country?’ inquired Mr. Rigby. ‘The country is nothing; it is the constituency you have to deal with.’

‘And to manage them you must have a good cry,’ said Taper. ‘All now depends upon a good cry.’

‘So much for the science of politics,’ said the Duke, bringing down a pheasant. ‘How Peel would have enjoyed this cover!’

‘He will have plenty of time for sport during his life,’ said Mr. Rigby.

On the evening of the 15th of November, a despatch arrived at Beaumanoir, informing his Grace that the King had dismissed the Whig Ministry, and sent for the Duke of Wellington. Thus the first agitating suspense was over; to be succeeded, however, by expectation still more anxious. It was remarkable that every individual suddenly found that he had particular business in London which

could not be neglected. The Duke very properly pleaded his executorial duties; but begged his guests on no account to be disturbed by his inevitable absence. Lord Fitz-Booby had just received a letter from his daughter, who was indisposed at Brighton, and he was most anxious to reach her. Tadpole had to receive deputations from Wesleyans, and well-registered boroughs anxious to receive well-principled candidates. Taper was off to get the first job at the contingent Treasury, in favour of the Borough of Shabbyton. Mr. Rigby alone was silent; but he quietly ordered a post-chaise at daybreak, and long before his fellow guests were roused from their slumbers, he was halfway to London, ready to give advice, either at the pavilion or at Apsley House.

CHAPTER IV

Although it is far from improbable that, had Sir Robert Peel been in England in the autumn of 1834, the Whig government would not have been dismissed; nevertheless, whatever may now be the opinion of the policy of that measure; whether it be looked on as a premature movement which necessarily led to the compact reorganisation of the Liberal party, or as a great stroke of State, which, by securing at all events a dissolution of the Parliament of 1832, restored the healthy balance of parties in the Legislature, questions into which we do not now wish to enter, it must be generally admitted, that the conduct of every individual eminently concerned in that great historical transaction was characterised by the rarest and most admirable quality of public life, moral courage. The Sovereign who dismissed a Ministry apparently supported by an overwhelming majority in the Parliament and the nation, and called to his councils the absent chief of a parliamentary section, scarcely numbering at that moment one hundred and forty individuals, and of a party in the country supposed to be utterly discomfited by a recent revolution; the two ministers who in this absence provisionally administered the affairs of the kingdom in the teeth of an enraged and unscrupulous Opposition, and perhaps themselves not sustained by a profound conviction, that the arrival of their expected leader would convert their provisional into a permanent position; above all the statesman who accepted the great charge at a time and under circumstances which marred probably the deep projects of his own prescient sagacity and maturing ambition; were all men gifted with a high spirit of enterprise, and animated by that active fortitude which is the soul of free governments.

It was a lively season, that winter of 1834! What hopes, what fears, and what bets! From the day on which Mr. Hudson was to arrive at Rome to the election of the Speaker, not a contingency that was not the subject of a wager! People sprang up like mushrooms; town suddenly became full. Everybody who had been in office, and everybody who wished to be in office; everybody who had ever had anything, and everybody who ever expected to have anything, were alike visible. All of course by mere accident; one might meet the same men regularly every day for a month, who were only ‘passing through town.’

Now was the time for men to come forward who had never despaired of their country. True they had voted for the Reform Bill, but that was to prevent a revolution. And now they were quite ready to vote against the Reform Bill, but this was to prevent a dissolution. These are the true patriots, whose confidence in the good sense of their countrymen and in their own selfishness is about equal. In the meantime, the hundred and forty threw a grim glance on the numerous waiters on Providence, and amiable trimmers, who affectionately enquired every day when news might be expected of Sir Robert. Though too weak to form a government, and having contributed in no wise by their exertions to the fall of the late, the cohort of Parliamentary Tories felt all the alarm of men who have accidentally stumbled on some treasure-trove, at the suspicious sympathy of new allies. But, after all, who were to form the government, and what was the government to be? Was it to be a Tory government, or an Enlightened-Spirit-of-the-Age Liberal-Moderate-Reform government; was it to be a government of high philosophy or of low practice; of principle or of expediency; of great measures or of little men? A government of statesmen or of clerks? Of Humbug or of Humdrum? Great questions these, but unfortunately there was nobody to answer them. They tried the Duke; but nothing could be pumped out of him. All that he knew, which he told in his curt, husky manner, was, that he had to carry on the King’s government. As for his solitary colleague, he listened and smiled, and then in his musical voice asked them questions in return, which is the best possible mode of avoiding awkward inquiries. It was very unfair this; for no one knew what tone to take; whether they should go down to their public dinners and denounce the Reform Act or praise it; whether the Church was to be re-modelled or only admonished; whether Ireland was to be conquered or conciliated.

'This can't go on much longer,' said Taper to Tadpole, as they reviewed together their electioneering correspondence on the 1st of December; 'we have no cry.'

'He is half way by this time,' said Tadpole; 'send an extract from a private letter to the *Standard*, dated Augsburg, and say he will be here in four days.'

At last he came; the great man in a great position, summoned from Rome to govern England. The very day that he arrived he had his audience with the King.

It was two days after this audience; the town, though November, in a state of excitement; clubs crowded, not only morning rooms, but halls and staircases swarming with members eager to give and to receive rumours equally vain; streets lined with cabs and chariots, grooms and horses; it was two days after this audience that Mr. Ormsby, celebrated for his political dinners, gave one to a numerous party. Indeed his saloons to-day, during the half-hour of gathering which precedes dinner, offered in the various groups, the anxious countenances, the inquiring voices, and the mysterious whispers, rather the character of an Exchange or Bourse than the tone of a festive society.

Here might be marked a murmuring knot of greyheaded privy-councillors, who had held fat offices under Perceval and Liverpool, and who looked back to the Reform Act as to a hideous dream; there some middle-aged aspirants might be observed who had lost their seats in the convulsion, but who flattered themselves they had done something for the party in the interval, by spending nothing except their breath in fighting hopeless boroughs, and occasionally publishing a pamphlet, which really produced less effect than chalking the walls. Light as air, and proud as a young peacock, tripped on his toes a young Tory, who had contrived to keep his seat in a Parliament where he had done nothing, but who thought an Under-Secretaryship was now secure, particularly as he was the son of a noble Lord who had also in a public capacity plundered and blundered in the good old time. The true political adventurer, who with dull desperation had stuck at nothing, had never neglected a treasury note, had been present at every division, never spoke when he was asked to be silent, and was always ready on any subject when they wanted him to open his mouth; who had treated his leaders with servility even behind their backs, and was happy for the day if a future Secretary of the Treasury bowed to him; who had not only discountenanced discontent in the party, but had regularly reported in strict confidence every instance of insubordination which came to his knowledge; might there too be detected under all the agonies of the crisis; just beginning to feel the dread misgiving, whether being a slave and a sneak were sufficient qualifications for office, without family or connection. Poor fellow! half the industry he had wasted on his cheerless craft might have made his fortune in some decent trade!

In dazzling contrast with these throes of low ambition, were some brilliant personages who had just scampered up from Melton, thinking it probable that Sir Robert might want some moral lords of the bed-chamber. Whatever may have been their private fears or feelings, all however seemed smiling and significant, as if they knew something if they chose to tell it, and that something very much to their own satisfaction. The only grave countenance that was occasionally ushered into the room belonged to some individual whose destiny was not in doubt, and who was already practising the official air that was in future to repress the familiarity of his former fellow-stragglers.

'Do you hear anything?' said a great noble who wanted something in the general scramble, but what he knew not; only he had a vague feeling he ought to have something, having made such great sacrifices.

'There is a report that Clifford is to be Secretary to the Board of Control,' said Mr. Earwig, whose whole soul was in this subaltern arrangement, of which the Minister of course had not even thought; 'but I cannot trace it to any authority.'

'I wonder who will be their Master of the Horse,' said the great noble, loving gossip though he despised the gossiper.

'Clifford has done nothing for the party,' said Mr. Earwig.

'I dare say Rambrooke will have the Buckhounds,' said the great noble, musingly.

'Your Lordship has not heard Clifford's name mentioned?' continued Mr. Earwig.

'I should think they had not come to that sort of thing,' said the great noble, with ill-disguised contempt.' The first thing after the Cabinet is formed is the Household: the things you talk of are done last;' and he turned upon his heel, and met the imperturbable countenance and clear sarcastic eye of Lord Eskdale.

'You have not heard anything?' asked the great noble of his brother patrician.

'Yes, a great deal since I have been in this room; but unfortunately it is all untrue.'

'There is a report that Rambrooke is to have the Buck-hounds; but I cannot trace it to any authority.'

'Pooh!' said Lord Eskdale.

'I don't see that Rambrooke should have the Buckhounds any more than anybody else. What sacrifices has he made?'

'Past sacrifices are nothing,' said Lord Eskdale. 'Present sacrifices are the thing we want: men who will sacrifice their principles and join us.'

'You have not heard Rambrooke's name mentioned?'

'When a Minister has no Cabinet, and only one hundred and forty supporters in the House of Commons, he has something else to think of than places at Court,' said Lord Eskdale, as he slowly turned away to ask Lucian Gay whether it were true that Jenny Colon was coming over.

Shortly after this, Henry Sydney's father, who dined with Mr. Ornisby, drew Lord Eskdale into a window, and said in an undertone:

'So there is to be a kind of programme: something is to be written.'

'Well, we want a cue,' said Lord Eskdale. 'I heard of this last night: Rigby has written something.'

The Duke shook his head.

'No; Peel means to do it himself.'

But at this moment Mr. Ornisby begged his Grace to lead them to dinner.

'Something is to be written.' It is curious to recall the vague terms in which the first projection of documents, that are to exercise a vast influence on the course of affairs or the minds of nations, is often mentioned. This 'something to be written' was written; and speedily; and has ever since been talked of.

We believe we may venture to assume that at no period during the movements of 1834-5 did Sir Robert Peel ever believe in the success of his administration. Its mere failure could occasion him little dissatisfaction; he was compensated for it by the noble opportunity afforded to him for the display of those great qualities, both moral and intellectual, which the swaddling-clothes of a routine prosperity had long repressed, but of which his opposition to the Reform Bill had given to the nation a significant intimation. The brief administration elevated him in public opinion, and even in the eye of Europe; and it is probable that a much longer term of power would not have contributed more to his fame.

The probable effect of the premature effort of his party on his future position as a Minister was, however, far from being so satisfactory. At the lowest ebb of his political fortunes, it cannot be doubted that Sir Robert Peel looked forward, perhaps through the vista of many years, to a period when the national mind, arrived by reflection and experience at certain conclusions, would seek in him a powerful expositor of its convictions. His time of life permitted him to be tranquil in adversity, and to profit by its salutary uses. He would then have acceded to power as the representative of a Creed, instead of being the leader of a Confederacy, and he would have been supported by earnest and enduring enthusiasm, instead of by that churlish sufferance which is the result of a supposed balance of advantages in his favour. This is the consequence of the tactics of those short-sighted intriguers, who persisted in looking upon a revolution as a mere party struggle, and would not permit the mind of the nation to work through the inevitable phases that awaited it. In 1834, England, though frightened at the reality of Reform, still adhered to its phrases; it was inclined, as practical England, to maintain existing institutions; but, as theoretical England, it was suspicious that they were indefensible.

No one had arisen either in Parliament, the Universities, or the Press, to lead the public mind to the investigation of principles; and not to mistake, in their reformations, the corruption of practice for fundamental ideas. It was this perplexed, ill-informed, jaded, shallow generation, repeating cries which they did not comprehend, and wearied with the endless ebullitions of their own barren conceit, that Sir Robert Peel was summoned to govern. It was from such materials, ample in quantity, but in all spiritual qualities most deficient; with great numbers, largely acred, consoled up to their chins, but without knowledge, genius, thought, truth, or faith, that Sir Robert Peel was to form a 'great Conservative party on a comprehensive basis.' That he did this like a dexterous politician, who can deny? Whether he realised those prescient views of a great statesman in which he had doubtless indulged, and in which, though still clogged by the leadership of 1834, he may yet find fame for himself and salvation for his country, is altogether another question. His difficult attempt was expressed in an address to his constituents, which now ranks among state papers. We shall attempt briefly to consider it with the impartiality of the future.

CHAPTER V

The Tamworth Manifesto of 1834 was an attempt to construct a party without principles; its basis therefore was necessarily Latitudinarianism; and its inevitable consequence has been Political Infidelity.

At an epoch of political perplexity and social alarm, the confederation was convenient, and was calculated by aggregation to encourage the timid and confused. But when the perturbation was a little subsided, and men began to inquire why they were banded together, the difficulty of defining their purpose proved that the league, however respectable, was not a party. The leaders indeed might profit by their eminent position to obtain power for their individual gratification, but it was impossible to secure their followers that which, after all, must be the great recompense of a political party, the putting in practice of their opinions; for they had none.

There was indeed a considerable shouting about what they called Conservative principles; but the awkward question naturally arose, what will you conserve? The prerogatives of the Crown, provided they are not exercised; the independence of the House of Lords, provided it is not asserted; the Ecclesiastical estate, provided it is regulated by a commission of laymen. Everything, in short, that is established, as long as it is a phrase and not a fact.

In the meantime, while forms and phrases are religiously cherished in order to make the semblance of a creed, the rule of practice is to bend to the passion or combination of the hour. Conservatism assumes in theory that everything established should be maintained; but adopts in practice that everything that is established is indefensible. To reconcile this theory and this practice, they produce what they call ‘the best bargain;’ some arrangement which has no principle and no purpose, except to obtain a temporary lull of agitation, until the mind of the Conservatives, without a guide and without an aim, distracted, tempted, and bewildered, is prepared for another arrangement, equally statesmanlike with the preceding one.

Conservatism was an attempt to carry on affairs by substituting the fulfilment of the duties of office for the performance of the functions of government; and to maintain this negative system by the mere influence of property, reputable private conduct, and what are called good connections. Conservatism discards Prescription, shrinks from Principle, disavows Progress; having rejected all respect for Antiquity, it offers no redress for the Present, and makes no preparation for the Future. It is obvious that for a time, under favourable circumstances, such a confederation might succeed; but it is equally clear, that on the arrival of one of those critical conjunctures that will periodically occur in all states, and which such an unimpassioned system is even calculated ultimately to create, all power of resistance will be wanting: the barren curse of political infidelity will paralyse all action; and the Conservative Constitution will be discovered to be a Caput Mortuum.

CHAPTER VI

In the meantime, after dinner, Tadpole and Taper, who were among the guests of Mr. Ormsby, withdrew to a distant sofa, out of earshot, and indulged in confidential talk.

'Such a strength in debate was never before found on a Treasury bench,' said Mr. Tadpole; 'the other side will be dumbfounded.'

'And what do you put our numbers at now?' inquired Mr. Taper.

'Would you take fifty-five for our majority?' rejoined Mr. Tadpole.

'It is not so much the tail they have, as the excuse their junction will be for the moderate, sensible men to come over,' said Taper. 'Our friend Sir Everard for example, it would settle him.'

'He is a solemn impostor,' rejoined Mr. Tadpole; 'but he is a baronet and a county member, and very much looked up to by the Wesleyans. The other men, I know, have refused him a peerage.'

'And we might hold out judicious hopes,' said Taper.

'No one can do that better than you,' said Tadpole. 'I am apt to say too much about those things.'

'I make it a rule never to open my mouth on such subjects,' said Taper. 'A nod or a wink will speak volumes. An affectionate pressure of the hand will sometimes do a great deal; and I have promised many a peerage without committing myself, by an ingenious habit of deference which cannot be mistaken by the future noble.'

'I wonder what they will do with Rigby,' said Tadpole.

'He wants a good deal,' said Taper.

'I tell you what, Mr. Taper, the time is gone by when a Marquess of Monmouth was Letter A, No. 1.'

'Very true, Mr. Tadpole. A wise man would do well now to look to the great middle class, as I said the other day to the electors of Shabbyton.'

'I had sooner be supported by the Wesleyans,' said Mr. Tadpole, 'than by all the marquesses in the peerage.'

'At the same time,' said Mr. Taper, 'Rigby is a considerable man. If we want a slashing article—'

'Pooh!' said Mr. Tadpole. 'He is quite gone by. He takes three months for his slashing articles. Give me the man who can write a leader. Rigby can't write a leader.'

'Very few can,' said Mr. Taper. 'However, I don't think much of the press. Its power is gone by. They overdid it.'

'There is Tom Chudleigh,' said Tadpole. 'What is he to have?'

'Nothing, I hope,' said Taper. 'I hate him. A coxcomb! Cracking his jokes and laughing at us.'

'He has done a good deal for the party, though,' said Tadpole. 'That, to be sure, is only an additional reason for throwing him over, as he is too far committed to venture to oppose us. But I am afraid from something that dropped to-day, that Sir Robert thinks he has claims.'

'We must stop them,' said Taper, growing pale. 'Fellows like Chudleigh, when they once get in, are always in one's way. I have no objection to young noblemen being put forward, for they are preferred so rapidly, and then their fathers die, that in the long run they do not practically interfere with us.'

'Well, his name was mentioned,' said Tadpole. 'There is no concealing that.'

'I will speak to Earwig,' said Taper. 'He shall just drop into Sir Robert's ear by chance, that Chudleigh used to quiz him in the smoking-room. Those little bits of information do a great deal of good.'

'Well, I leave him to you,' said Tadpole. 'I am heartily with you in keeping out all fellows like Chudleigh. They are very well for opposition; but in office we don't want wits.'

'And when shall we have the answer from Knowsley?' inquired Taper. 'You anticipate no possible difficulty?'

'I tell you it is "carte blanche,"' replied Tadpole. 'Four places in the cabinet. Two secretaryships at the least. Do you happen to know any gentleman of your acquaintance, Mr. Taper, who refuses Secretaryships of State so easily, that you can for an instant doubt of the present arrangement?'

'I know none indeed,' said Mr. Taper, with a grim smile.

'The thing is done,' said Mr. Tadpole.

'And now for our cry,' said Mr. Taper.

'It is not a Cabinet for a good cry,' said Tadpole; 'but then, on the other hand, it is a Cabinet that will sow dissension in the opposite ranks, and prevent them having a good cry.'

'Ancient institutions and modern improvements, I suppose, Mr. Tadpole?'

'Ameliorations is the better word, ameliorations. Nobody knows exactly what it means.'

'We go strong on the Church?' said Mr. Taper.

'And no repeal of the Malt Tax; you were right, Taper. It can't be listened to for a moment.'

'Something might be done with prerogative,' said Mr. Taper; 'the King's constitutional choice.'

'Not too much,' replied Mr. Tadpole. 'It is a raw time yet for prerogative.'

'Ah! Tadpole,' said Mr. Taper, getting a little maudlin; 'I often think, if the time should ever come, when you and I should be joint Secretaries of the Treasury!'

'We shall see, we shall see. All we have to do is to get into Parliament, work well together, and keep other men down.'

'We will do our best,' said Taper. 'A dissolution you hold inevitable?'

'How are you and I to get into Parliament if there be not one? We must make it inevitable. I tell you what, Taper, the lists must prove a dissolution inevitable. You understand me? If the present Parliament goes on, where shall we be? We shall have new men cropping up every session.'

'True, terribly true,' said Mr. Taper. 'That we should ever live to see a Tory government again! We have reason to be very thankful.'

'Hush!' said Mr. Tadpole. 'The time has gone by for Tory governments; what the country requires is a sound Conservative government.'

'A sound Conservative government,' said Taper, musingly. 'I understand: Tory men and Whig measures.'

CHAPTER VII

Amid the contentions of party, the fierce struggles of ambition, and the intricacies of political intrigue, let us not forget our Eton friends. During the period which elapsed from the failure of the Duke of Wellington to form a government in 1832, to the failure of Sir Robert Peel to carry on a government in 1835, the boys had entered, and advanced in youth. The ties of friendship which then united several of them had only been confirmed by continued companionship. Coningsby and Henry Sydney, and Buckhurst and Vere, were still bound together by entire sympathy, and by the affection of which sympathy is the only sure spring. But their intimacies had been increased by another familiar friend. There had risen up between Coningsby and Millbank mutual sentiments of deep, and even ardent, regard. Acquaintance had developed the superior qualities of Millbank. His thoughtful and inquiring mind, his inflexible integrity, his stern independence, and yet the engaging union of extreme tenderness of heart with all this strength of character, had won the goodwill, and often excited the admiration, of Coningsby. Our hero, too, was gratified by the affectionate deference that was often shown to him by one who condescended to no other individual; he was proud of having saved the life of a member of their community whom masters and boys alike considered; and he ended by loving the being on whom he had conferred a great obligation.

The friends of Coningsby, the sweet-tempered and intelligent Henry Sydney, the fiery and generous Buckhurst, and the calm and sagacious Vere, had ever been favourably inclined to Millbank, and had they not been, the example of Coningsby would soon have influenced them. He had obtained over his intimates the ascendant power, which is the destiny of genius. Nor was this submission of such spirits to be held cheap. Although they were willing to take the colour of their minds from him, they were in intellect and attainments, in personal accomplishments and general character, the leaders of the school; an authority not to be won from five hundred high-spirited boys without the possession of great virtues and great talents.

As for the dominion of Coningsby himself, it was not limited to the immediate circle of his friends. He had become the hero of Eton; the being of whose existence everybody was proud, and in whose career every boy took an interest. They talked of him, they quoted him, they imitated him. Fame and power are the objects of all men. Even their partial fruition is gained by very few; and that too at the expense of social pleasure, health, conscience, life. Yet what power of manhood in passionate intenseness, appealing at the same time to the subject and the votary, can rival that which is exercised by the idolised chieftain of a great public school? What fame of after days equals the rapture of celebrity that thrills the youthful poet, as in tones of rare emotion he recites his triumphant verses amid the devoted plaudits of the flower of England? That's fame, that's power; real, unquestioned, undoubted, catholic. Alas! the schoolboy, when he becomes a man, finds that power, even fame, like everything else, is an affair of party.

Coningsby liked very much to talk politics with Millbank. He heard things from Millbank which were new to him. Himself, as he supposed, a high Tory, which he was according to the revelation of the Rigbys, he was also sufficiently familiar with the hereditary tenets of his Whig friend, Lord Vere. Politics had as yet appeared to him a struggle whether the country was to be governed by Whig nobles or Tory nobles; and he thought it very unfortunate that he should probably have to enter life with his friends out of power, and his family boroughs destroyed. But in conversing with Millbank, he heard for the first time of influential classes in the country who were not noble, and were yet determined to acquire power. And although Millbank's views, which were of course merely caught up from his father, without the intervention of his own intelligence, were doubtless crude enough, and were often very acutely canvassed and satisfactorily demolished by the clever prejudices of another school, which Coningsby had at command, still they were, unconsciously to the recipient, materials

for thought, and insensibly provoked in his mind a spirit of inquiry into political questions, for which he had a predisposition.

It may be said, indeed, that generally among the upper boys there might be observed at this time, at Eton, a reigning inclination for political discussion. The school truly had at all times been proud of its statesmen and its parliamentary heroes, but this was merely a superficial feeling in comparison with the sentiment which now first became prevalent. The great public questions that were the consequence of the Reform of the House of Commons, had also agitated their young hearts. And especially the controversies that were now rife respecting the nature and character of ecclesiastical establishments, wonderfully addressed themselves to their excited intelligence. They read their newspapers with a keen relish, canvassed debates, and criticised speeches; and although in their debating society, which had been instituted more than a quarter of a century, discussion on topics of the day was prohibited, still by fixing on periods of our history when affairs were analogous to the present, many a youthful orator contrived very effectively to reply to Lord John, or to refute the fallacies of his rival.

As the political opinions predominant in the school were what in ordinary parlance are styled Tory, and indeed were far better entitled to that glorious epithet than the flimsy shifts which their fathers were professing in Parliament and the country; the formation and the fall of Sir Robert Peel's government had been watched by Etonians with great interest, and even excitement. The memorable efforts which the Minister himself made, supported only by the silent votes of his numerous adherents, and contending alone against the multiplied assaults of his able and determined foes, with a spirit equal to the great occasion, and with resources of parliamentary contest which seemed to increase with every exigency; these great and unsupported struggles alone were calculated to gain the sympathy of youthful and generous spirits. The assault on the revenues of the Church; the subsequent crusade against the House of Lords; the display of intellect and courage exhibited by Lord Lyndhurst in that assembly, when all seemed cowed and faint-hearted; all these were incidents or personal traits apt to stir the passions, and create in breasts not yet schooled to repress emotion, a sentiment even of enthusiasm. It is the personal that interests mankind, that fires their imagination, and wins their hearts. A cause is a great abstraction, and fit only for students; embodied in a party, it stirs men to action; but place at the head of that party a leader who can inspire enthusiasm, lie commands the world. Divine faculty! Rare and incomparable privilege! A parliamentary leader who possesses it, doubles his majority; and he who has it not, may shroud himself in artificial reserve, and study with undignified arrogance an awkward haughtiness, but he will nevertheless be as far from controlling the spirit as from captivating the hearts of his sullen followers.

However, notwithstanding this general feeling at Eton, in 1835, in favour of 'Conservative principles,' which was, in fact, nothing more than a confused and mingled sympathy with some great political truths, which were at the bottom of every boy's heart, but nowhere else; and with the personal achievements and distinction of the chieftains of the party; when all this hubbub had subsided, and retrospection, in the course of a year, had exercised its moralising influence over the more thoughtful part of the nation, inquiries, at first faint and unpretending, and confined indeed for a long period to limited, though inquisitive, circles, began gently to circulate, what Conservative principles were.

These inquiries, urged indeed with a sort of hesitating scepticism, early reached Eton. They came, no doubt, from the Universities. They were of a character, however, far too subtile and refined to exercise any immediate influence over the minds of youth. To pursue them required previous knowledge and habitual thought. They were not yet publicly prosecuted by any school of politicians, or any section of the public press. They had not a local habitation or a name. They were whispered in conversation by a few. A tutor would speak of them in an esoteric vein to a favourite pupil, in whose abilities he had confidence, and whose future position in life would afford him the opportunity of influencing opinion. Among others, they fell upon the ear of Coningsby. They were addressed to a mind which was prepared for such researches.

There is a Library at Eton formed by the boys and governed by the boys; one of those free institutions which are the just pride of that noble school, which shows the capacity of the boys for self-government, and which has sprung from the large freedom that has been wisely conceded them, the prudence of which confidence has been proved by their rarely abusing it. This Library has been formed by subscriptions of the present and still more by the gifts of old Etonians. Among the honoured names of these donors may be remarked those of the Grenvilles and Lord Wellesley; nor should we forget George IV., who enriched the collection with a magnificent copy of the Delphin Classics. The Institution is governed by six directors, the three first Collegers and the three first Oppidans for the time being; and the subscribers are limited to the one hundred senior members of the school.

It is only to be regretted that the collection is not so extensive at it is interesting and choice. Perhaps its existence is not so generally known as it deserves to be. One would think that every Eton man would be as proud of his name being registered as a donor in the Catalogue of this Library, as a Venetian of his name being inscribed in the Golden Book. Indeed an old Etonian, who still remembers with tenderness the sacred scene of youth, could scarcely do better than build a Gothic apartment for the reception of the collection. It cannot be doubted that the Provost and fellows would be gratified in granting a piece of ground for the purpose.

Great were the obligations of Coningsby to this Eton Library. It introduced him to that historic lore, that accumulation of facts and incidents illustrative of political conduct, for which he had imbibed an early relish. His study was especially directed to the annals of his own country, in which youth, and not youth alone, is frequently so deficient. This collection could afford him Clarendon and Burnet, and the authentic volumes of Coxe: these were rich materials for one anxious to be versed in the great parliamentary story of his country. During the last year of his stay at Eton, when he had completed his eighteenth year, Coningsby led a more retired life than previously; he read much, and pondered with all the pride of acquisition over his increasing knowledge.

And now the hour has come when this youth is to be launched into a world more vast than that in which he has hitherto sojourned, yet for which this microcosm has been no ill preparation. He will become more wise; will he remain as generous? His ambition may be as great; will it be as noble? What, indeed, is to be the future of this existence that is now to be sent forth into the great aggregate of entities? Is it an ordinary organisation that will jostle among the crowd, and be jostled? Is it a finer temperament, susceptible of receiving the impressions and imbibing the inspirations of superior yet sympathising spirits? Or is it a primordial and creative mind; one that will say to his fellows, 'Behold, God has given me thought; I have discovered truth, and you shall believe?'

The night before Coningsby left Eton, alone in his room, before he retired to rest, he opened the lattice and looked for the last time upon the landscape before him; the stately keep of Windsor, the bowery meads of Eton, soft in the summer moon and still in the summer night. He gazed upon them; his countenance had none of the exultation, that under such circumstances might have distinguished a more careless glance, eager for fancied emancipation and passionate for a novel existence. Its expression was serious, even sad; and he covered his brow with his hand.

END OF BOOK II

BOOK III

CHAPTER I

There are few things more full of delight and splendour, than to travel during the heat of a refulgent summer in the green district of some ancient forest.

In one of our midland counties there is a region of this character, to which, during a season of peculiar lustre, we would introduce the reader.

It was a fragment of one of those vast sylvan tracts wherein Norman kings once hunted, and Saxon outlaws plundered; and although the plough had for centuries successfully invaded brake and bower, the relics retained all their original character of wildness and seclusion. Sometimes the green earth was thickly studded with groves of huge and vigorous oaks, intersected with those smooth and sunny glades, that seem as if they must be cut for dames and knights to saunter on. Then again the undulating ground spread on all sides, far as the eye could range, covered with copse and fern of immense growth. Anon you found yourself in a turfy wilderness, girt in apparently by dark woods. And when you had wound your way a little through this gloomy belt, the landscape still strictly sylvan, would beautifully expand with every combination and variety of woodland; while in its centre, the wildfowl covered the waters of a lake, and the deer basked on the knolls that abounded on its banks.

It was in the month of August, some six or seven years ago, that a traveller on foot, touched, as he emerged from the dark wood, by the beauty of this scene, threw himself under the shade of a spreading tree, and stretched his limbs on the turf for enjoyment rather than repose. The sky was deep-coloured and without a cloud, save here and there a minute, sultry, burnished vapour, almost as glossy as the heavens. Everything was still as it was bright; all seemed brooding and basking; the bee upon its wing was the only stirring sight, and its song the only sound.

The traveller fell into a reverie. He was young, and therefore his musings were of the future. He had felt the pride of learning, so ennobling to youth; he was not a stranger to the stirring impulses of a high ambition, though the world to him was as yet only a world of books, and all that he knew of the schemes of statesmen and the passions of the people, were to be found in their annals. Often had his fitful fancy dwelt with fascination on visions of personal distinction, of future celebrity, perhaps even of enduring fame. But his dreams were of another colour now. The surrounding scene, so fair, so still, and sweet; so abstracted from all the tumult of the world, its strife, its passions, and its cares: had fallen on his heart with its soft and subduing spirit; had fallen on a heart still pure and innocent, the heart of one who, notwithstanding all his high resolves and daring thoughts, was blessed with that tenderness of soul which is sometimes linked with an ardent imagination and a strong will. The traveller was an orphan, more than that, a solitary orphan. The sweet sedulousness of a mother's love, a sister's mystical affection, had not cultivated his early susceptibility. No soft pathos of expression had appealed to his childish ear. He was alone, among strangers calmly and coldly kind. It must indeed have been a truly gentle disposition that could have withstood such hard neglect. All that he knew of the power of the softer passions might be found in the fanciful and romantic annals of schoolboy friendship.

And those friends too, so fond, so sympathising, so devoted, where were they now? Already they were dispersed; the first great separation of life had been experienced; the former schoolboy had planted his foot on the threshold of manhood. True, many of them might meet again; many of them the University must again unite, but never with the same feelings. The space of time, passed in the world before they again met, would be an age of sensation, passion, experience to all of them. They would meet again with altered mien, with different manners, different voices. Their eyes would not shine with the same light; they would not speak the same words. The favourite phrases of their

intimacy, the mystic sounds that spoke only to their initiated ear, they would be ashamed to use them. Yes, they might meet again, but the gushing and secret tenderness was gone for ever.

Nor could our pensive youth conceal it from himself that it was affection, and mainly affection, that had bound him to these dear companions. They could not be to him what he had been to them. His had been the inspiring mind that had guided their opinions, formed their tastes, directed the bent and tenor of their lives and thoughts. Often, indeed, had he needed, sometimes he had even sighed for, the companionship of an equal or superior mind; one who, by the comprehension of his thought, and the richness of his knowledge, and the advantage of his experience, might strengthen and illuminate and guide his obscure or hesitating or unpractised intelligence. He had scarcely been fortunate in this respect, and he deeply regretted it; for he was one of those who was not content with excelling in his own circle, if he thought there was one superior to it. Absolute, not relative distinction, was his noble aim.

Alone, in a lonely scene, he doubly felt the solitude of his life and mind. His heart and his intellect seemed both to need a companion. Books, and action, and deep thought, might in time supply the want of that intellectual guide; but for the heart, where was he to find solace?

Ah! if she would but come forth from that shining lake like a beautiful Ondine! Ah, if she would but step out from the green shade of that secret grove like a Dryad of sylvan Greece! O mystery of mysteries, when youth dreams his first dream over some imaginary heroine!

Suddenly the brooding wildfowl rose from the bosom of the lake, soared in the air, and, uttering mournful shrieks, whirled in agitated tumult. The deer started from their knolls, no longer sunny, stared around, and rushed into the woods. Coningsby raised his eyes from the turf on which they had been long fixed in abstraction, and he observed that the azure sky had vanished, a thin white film had suddenly spread itself over the heavens, and the wind moaned with a sad and fitful gust.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.