



SIR GEORGE TRESSADY

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V.

THE week which had opened thus for Tressady promised to be one of lively interest for such persons as were either concerned in or took notice of the House of Commons and its doings. Fontenoy's attack upon the administration of the Home Office, and, through the Home Secretary, on the Maxwell group and influence, had been long expected, and was known to be ably prepared. Its possible results were already keenly discussed. Even if it were a damaging attack, it was not supposed that it could have any immediate effect on the state of parties or the strength of the government. But after Easter, Lord Maxwell's factory bill—a special factory act for East London, touching the grown man for the first time, and absolutely prohibiting home work in certain scheduled industries—was to be brought forward, and could not fail to provide Maxwell's adversaries with many chances of red and glorious battle. It was disputable from end to end; it had already broken up one government; it was strongly pressed and fiercely opposed; and on the fate of each clause in committee might hang the life or death of the ministry, not so much because of the intrinsic importance of the matter, as because Maxwell was indispensable to the cabinet, and it was known that neither Maxwell nor his close friend and henchman, Dowson, the Home Secretary, would accept defeat on any of the really vital points of the bill.

The general situation was a curious one. Some two years before this time a strong and long-lived Tory government had come to an end. Since then all had been confusion in

English politics. A weak Liberal government, undermined by Socialist rebellion, had lasted but a short time, to be followed by an equally precarious Tory ministry, in which Lord Maxwell, after an absence from politics of some four years or so, returned to his party, only to break it up. For he succeeded in imposing upon them a measure in which his own deepest convictions and feelings were concerned, and which had behind it the support of all the more important trade-unions. Upon that measure the ministry fell; but during their short administration Maxwell had made so great an impression upon his own side that when they returned, as they did return, with an enlarged majority, the Maxwell bill retained one of the foremost places in their program, and might be said, indeed, at the present moment to hold the center of the political field.

That field, in the eyes of any middle-aged observer, was in strange disarray. The old Liberal party had been almost swept away; only a few waifs and strays remained, the exponents of a program that nobody wanted, and of cries that stirred nobody's blood. A large Independent Labor and Socialist party filled the empty benches of the Liberals—a revolutionary, enthusiastic crew, of whom the country was a little frightened, and who were, if the truth were known, a little frightened at themselves. They had a coherent program, and represented a formidable «domination» in English life. And that English life itself, in all that concerned the advance and transformation of labor, was in a singularly tossed and troubled state. After a long period of stagnation and comparative industrial peace, storms at home, answering to

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storms on the Continent, had been let loose, and forces both of reaction and of revolution were making themselves felt in new forms and under the command of new masters.

At the head of the party of reaction stood Fontenoy. Some four years before the present session the circumstances of a great strike in the Midlands—together, no doubt, with some other influence—had first drawn him into public life, had cut him off from racing and all his natural pleasures. The strike affected his father's vast domain in North Mercia; it was marked by an unusual violence on the part of the men and their leaders; and Fontenoy, driven, sorely against his will, to take a part by the fact that his father, the hard and competent administrator of an enormous fortune, happened at the moment to be struck down by illness, found himself, before many weeks were over, taking it with passion, and emerged from the struggle a changed man. Property must be upheld; low-born disorder and greed must be put down. He sold his race-horses, and proceeded forthwith to throw into the formation of a new party all the doggedness, the astuteness, and the audacity he had been accustomed to lavish upon the intrigues and the triumphs of the turf.

And now in this new Parliament his immense labor was beginning to tell. The men who followed him had grown in number and improved in quality. They abhorred equally a temporizing conservatism and a plundering democracy. They stood frankly for birth and wealth, the Church and the expert. They were the apostles of resistance and negation; they were sworn to oppose any further meddling with trade and the personal liberty of master and workman, and to undo, if they could, some of the meddling that had been already carried through. A certain academic quality prevailed among them, which made them peculiarly sensitive to the absurdities of men who had not been to Oxford or Cambridge; while some, like Tressady, had been travelers, and wore an Imperialist heart upon their sleeve. The group possessed an unusual share of debating and oratorical ability, and they had never attracted so much attention as now that they were about to make the Maxwell bill their prey.

MEANWHILE, for the initiated the situation possessed one or two points of special interest. Lady Maxwell, indeed, was by this time scarcely less of a political force than her husband. Was her position an illustration of some new power in women's hands,

or was it merely an example of something as well known to the Pharaohs as to the nineteenth century—the ability of any woman with a certain physique to get her way? That this particular woman's way happened to be also her husband's way made the case less interesting for some observers. On the other hand, her obvious wifely devotion attracted simple souls to whom the meddling of women in politics would have been otherwise repellent, but that it was recommended to them by the facts that Marcella Maxwell was held to be good as well as beautiful; that she loved her husband, and was the excellent mother of a fine son.

Of her devotion, in the case of this particular bill, there was neither concealment nor doubt. She was known to have given her husband every assistance in the final drafting of the measure; she had seen for herself the working of every trade that it affected; she had innumerable friends among wage-earners of all sorts, to whom she gave half her social life; and both among them and in the drawing-rooms of the rich she fought her husband's cause unceasingly, by the help of beauty, wits, and something else—a broad impulsiveness and charm, which might be vilified or scorned, but could hardly be matched, by the enemy.

Meanwhile Lord Maxwell was a comparatively ineffective speaker, and passed in social life for a reserved and difficult personality. His friends put no one else beside him, and his colleagues in the cabinet were well aware that he represented the key-stone in their arch. But the man in the street, whether of the aristocratic or plebeian sort, knew comparatively little about him. All of which, combined with the special knowledge of an inner circle, helped still more to concentrate public attention on the convictions, the temperament, and the beauty of his wife.

AMID a situation charged with these personal or dramatic elements the Friday so keenly awaited by Fontenoy and his party arrived. He rose immediately after question-time, and, starting from a confused and stiff beginning, presently hurled at the House an oration, rugged and often halting in form, which yet for bitterness, critical ability, undesigned pathos, and a kind of savage force, was in its way a masterpiece. It was followed with strained attention from all sides of the House. The Home Secretary's subsequent defense of the policy of his department was, in the eyes of the experts of his own side at any rate, absolutely convincing. Nevertheless, the effect of the evening lay with Fontenoy.

The two speeches were no sooner over than George hurried up-stairs in search of Letty, who, with Miss Tulloch, was in the Speaker's private gallery. As he went his pulses tingled. «Magnificent!» he said to himself; «*magnificent!* We have found a man!»

Letty was eagerly waiting for him, and they walked down the corridor together. «Well?» he said, thrusting his hands deep into his pockets, and looking down upon her with a smile. «Well?»

Letty saw that she was expected to praise, and she did her best, his smile still bent upon her. He was perfectly aware all the time of the fatuity of what she was saying. She had caught up since her engagement a certain number of political phrases, and it amused him to note the cheap and tinkling use she made of them. Nevertheless she was chatting, smiling, gesticulating, for his pleasure. She was posing for him, using her gray eyes in these expressive ways all for him. He thought her the most entertaining plaything, though it did occur to him sometimes that when they were married he would give her instruction.

«Ah, well, you liked it—that's good!» he said at last, interrupting her. «We've begun well, anyway. It'll be rather hard, though, to have to speak after that on Monday.»

«As if you need be afraid! You're not, you know; it's only mock modesty. Do you know that Lady Maxwell was sitting two from me?»

«No. Well, how did she like Fontenoy?»

«She never moved after he got up. She pressed her face against that horrid grating, and stared at him all the time. I thought she was very flushed—but that may have been the heat—and in a very bad temper,» added Letty, maliciously. «I talked to her a little about your adventure.»

«Did she remember my existence?»

«Oh, dear, yes! She said she expected you on Sunday. She never asked *me* to come.» Letty looked arch. «But then one does n't expect her to have pretty manners. People say she is shy. But, of course, that is only your friends' way of saying that you're rude.»

«She was n't rude to you?» said George, outwardly eager, inwardly skeptical. «Shall I not go on Sunday?»

«But of course you must go. We shall have to know them. She's not a woman's woman—that's all. Now, are we going to get some dinner?—for Tully and I are famishing.»

«Come along, then, and I'll collect the party.»

George had asked a few of his acquaintance in the House to meet his betrothed, together with an old General Tressady and

his wife, who were his distant cousins. The party were to assemble in the room of an under-secretary much given to such hospitable functions, and thither, accordingly, George led the way.

The room, when they reached it, was already fairly full of people, and alive with talk.

«Another party!» said George, looking round him. «Benson is great at this sort of thing.»

«Do you see Lady Maxwell?» said Letty in his ear.

George looked to his right, and perceived the lady in question. She also recognized him at once, and bowed, but without rising. She was the center of a group of people who were gathered round her and the small table on which she was leaning, and they were so deeply absorbed in the conversation that had been going on that they hardly noticed the entrance of Tressady and his companion.

«Leven has a party, you see,» said the under-secretary. «Blaythwaite was to have taken them in—could n't at the last moment, so they had to come in here. This is *your* side of the room. But none of your guests have come yet. Dinner at the House in the winter is a poor sort of business, Miss Sewell. We want the Terrace for these occasions.»

He led the young girl to a sofa at the farther end of the room, and made himself agreeable—to him the easiest process in the world. He was a fashionable and charming person, in the most irreproachable of frock-coats; and Letty was soon at her ease with him, and mistress of all her usual arts and graces.

«You know Lady Maxwell?» he said to her, with a slight motion of the head toward the distant group.

Letty replied; and while she and her companion chattered, George, who was standing behind them, watched the other party.

They were apparently in the thick of an argument, and Lady Maxwell, whose hands were lightly clasped on the table in front of her, was leaning forward with the look of one who had just shot her bolt and was waiting to see how it would strike.

It struck, apparently, in the direction of her vis-à-vis, Sir Frank Leven, for he bent over to her, making a quick reply in a half-petulant boy's voice. He had been three years in the House, but had still the air of an Eton «swell» in his last half.

Lady Maxwell listened to what he had to say, a sort of silent passion in her face all the time—a noble passion nobly restrained. When he stopped, George caught her reply.

«He does not *understand*—that is all one can say. He has neither seen nor felt—every sentence showed it. How can one take his judgment?»

George's mouth twitched. He slipped, smiling, into a place beside Letty. «Did you hear that?» he inquired.

«Fontenoy's speech, of course,» said the under-secretary, looking round. «She's pitching into Leven, I suppose. He's as cranky and unsound as he can be. Should n't wonder if you got him before long.»

He nodded good-temperedly to Tressady, then got up to speak to a man on the edge of the farther group.

«How amusing!» said George, his satirical eyes still watching Lady Maxwell. «How much that set has (seen and felt) of sweaters, and white-lead workers, and that ilk! Don't they look like it?»

«Who are they?»

Letty was now using all her eyes to find out, and especially for the purpose of carrying away a mental photograph of Lady Maxwell's black hat and dress.

«Oh, the Maxwells' particular friends in the House—most of them as well provided with family and goods as they make 'em: a philanthropic, idealist lot, that yearns for the people, and will be the first to be kicked down-stairs when the people gets its own. Frank Leven there is, as Benson says, decidedly shaky. If it were n't for his wife, who is Lady Maxwell's bosom friend, he would come over to us—he may as it is. Oh, then, Bennett, is there—do you see?—the little dark man with a frock-coat and spectacles? He was one of the first workman members, has been in the House a long time, and now belongs to the Independents, but rather against the grain. He is one of Lady Maxwell's particular allies. I suppose she hopes to make use of him at critical moments. Gracious—listen!»

There was, indeed, a very storm of discussion sweeping through the rival party. Lady Maxwell's penetrating but not loud voice seemed to pervade it, and her eyes and face, as she glanced from one speaker to another, drew alternately the shafts and the sympathy of the rest.

Tressady made a face.

«I say, Letty, promise me one thing!» His hand stole toward hers. Tully discreetly looked the other way. «Promise me not to be a political woman, there's a dear!»

Letty hastily withdrew her fingers, having no mind at all for caresses in public.

«But I *must* be a political woman—I shall

have to be! I know heaps of girls and married women who get up everything in the papers—all the stupidest things—not because they know anything about it, or because they care a rap, but because some of their men friends happen to be members; and when they come to see you, you must know what to talk to them about.»

«Must you?» said George. «How odd! As though one went to tea with a woman for the sake of talking about the very same things you have been doing all day, and are probably sick to death of already.»

«Never mind,» said Letty, with her little air of sharp wisdom. «I *know* they do it, and I shall have to do it, too. I shall pick it up.»

«Will you? Of course you will! Only, when I've got a big bill on, let me do a little of it for myself—give me some of the credit.»

Letty laughed maliciously.

«I don't know why you've taken such a dislike to her,» she said, but in rather a contented tone, as her eye once more traveled across to Lady Maxwell. «Does she trample on her husband, after all?»

Tressady gave an impatient shrug.

«Trample on him? Goodness, no! That's all part of the play, too—wifely affection, and the rest of it. Why can't she keep out of sight a little? We don't want the women meddling.»

«Thank you, my domestic tyrant!» said Letty, making him a little bow.

«How much tyranny will you want before you accept those sentiments?» he asked her, smiling tenderly into her eyes. Both had a moment's pleasant thrill; then George sprang up.

«Ah, here they are at last!—the general, and all the lot. Now, I hope, we shall get some dinner.»

TRESSADY had, of course, to introduce his elderly cousins and his three or four political friends to his future wife; and amid the small flutter of the performance, the break-up and disappearance of the rival party passed unnoticed. When Tressady's guests entered the dining-room which looks on the Terrace, and made their way to the top table reserved for them, the Leven dinner, near the door, was already half through.

George's little banquet passed merrily enough. The gray-haired general and his wife turned out to be agreeable and well-bred people, quite able to repay George's hospitality by the dropping of little compliments on the subject of Letty into his half-yielded ear. For his way of taking such things was always a trifle cynical. He believed that people say habitually twice what

they mean, whether in praise or blame; and he did not feel that his own view of Letty was much affected by what other people thought of her.

So, at least, he would have said. In reality he got a good deal of pleasure out of his fiancée's success. Letty, indeed, was enjoying herself greatly. This political world, as she had expected, satisfied her instinct for social importance better than any world she had yet known. She was determined to get on in it; nor, apparently, was there likely to be any difficulty in the matter. George's friends thought her a pretty, lively creature, and showed the usual inclination of the male sex to linger in her society. She mostly wanted to be informed as to the House and its ways. It was all so new to her, she said. But her ignorance was not insipid; her questions had flavor. There was much talk and laughter. Letty felt herself the mistress of the table, and her social ambitions swelled within her.

Suddenly George's attention was recalled to the Maxwell table by the break-up of the group around it. He saw Lady Maxwell rise and look round her, as though in search of some one. Her eyes fell upon him, and he involuntarily rose at the same instant to meet the step she made toward him.

"I must say another word of thanks to you"—she held out her hand. "That girl and her grandmother were most grateful to you."

"Ah, well!—I must come and make my report. Sunday, I think you said?"

She assented. Then her expression altered:

"When do you speak?"

The question fell out abruptly, and took George by surprise.

"I? On Monday, I believe, if I get my turn. But I fear the British Empire will go on if I don't!"

She threw a glance of scrutiny at his thin, whimsical face, with its fair mustache and sunburned skin.

"I hear you are a good speaker," she said simply. "And you are entirely with Lord Fontenoy?"

He bowed lightly, his hands on his sides.

"You'll agree our case was well put? The worst of it—"

Then he stopped. He saw that Lady Maxwell had ceased to listen to him. She turned her head toward the door, and, without even saying good-by to him, she hurried away from him toward the farther end of the room.

"Maxwell, I see!" said Tressady to himself, with a shrug, as he returned to his seat. "Not flattering—but rather pretty, all the same."

He was thinking of the quick change that

had remade the face while he was talking to her—a change as lovely as it was unconscious.

Lord Maxwell, indeed, had just entered the dining-room in search of his wife, and he and she now left it together, while the rest of the Leven party gradually dispersed. Letty also announced that she must go home.

"Let me just go back into the House and see what is going on," said George. "Ten to one I sha'n't be wanted, and I could see you home."

He hurried off, only to return in a minute with the news that the debate was given up to a succession of superfluous people, and he was free, at any rate for an hour. Letty, Miss Tulloch, and he accordingly made their way to Palace Yard. A bright moon shone in their faces as they emerged into the open air, which was still mild and spring-like, as it had been all the week.

"I say—send Miss Tulloch home in a cab," George pleaded in Letty's ear, "and walk with me a bit. Come and look at the moon over the river. I will bring you back to the bridge and put you in a cab."

Letty looked astonished and demure. "Aunt Charlotte would be shocked," she said.

George grew impatient, and Letty, pleased with his impatience, at last yielded. Tully, the most complaisant of chaperons, was put into a hansom and despatched.

As the pair reached the entrance of Palace Yard they were overtaken by a brougham, which drew up an instant in the gateway itself, till it should find an opening in the traffic outside.

"Look!" said George, pressing Letty's arm.

She looked round hurriedly, and as the lamps of the gateway shone into the carriage she caught a vivid glimpse of the people inside it. Their faces were turned toward each other, as though in intimate conversation—that was all. The lady's hands were crossed on her knee; the man held a despatch-box. In a minute they were gone; but both Letty and George were left with the same impression—the sense of something exquisite surprised. It had already visited George that evening, only a few minutes earlier, in connection with the same woman's face.

Letty laughed rather consciously.

George looked down upon her as he guided her through the gate.

"Some people seem to find it pleasant to be together!" he said, with a vibration in his voice. "But why did we look?" he added discontentedly.

"How could we help it, you silly boy?"

They walked toward the bridge and down the steps, happy in each other, and freshened by the night breeze. Over the river the moon hung full and white, and beneath it everything—the silver tracks on the water, the blaze of light at Charing Cross Station, the lamps on Westminster Bridge and in the passing steamers, a train of barges, even the darkness of the Surrey shore—had a gentle and poetic air. The vast city had, as it were, veiled her greatness and her tragedy; she offered herself kindly and protectingly to these two—to their happiness and their youth.

George made his companion wait beside the parapet and look, while he himself drew in the air with a sort of hunger.

«To think of the hours we spend in this climate,» he said, «caged up in abominable places like the House of Commons!»

The traveler's distaste for the monotony of town and indoor life spoke in his vehemence. Letty raised her eyebrows.

«I am very glad of my furs, thank you. You seem to forget that it is February.»

«Never mind—since Monday it has had the feel of April. Did you see my mother-to-day?»

«Yes. She caught me just after luncheon, and we talked for an hour.»

«Poor darling! I ought to have been there to protect you. But she vowed she would have her say about that house.»

He looked down upon her, trying to see her expression in the shifting light. He had gone through a disagreeable little scene with his mother at breakfast. She had actually lectured him on the rashness of taking the Brook street house, he understanding the whole time that what the odd performance really meant was, that if he took it he would have a smaller margin of income wherefrom to supplement her allowance.

«Oh, it was all right,» said Letty, composedly. «She declared we should get into difficulties at once, that I could have no idea of the value of money, that you always *had* been extravagant, that everybody would be astonished at our doing such a thing, etcetera, etcetera. I *think*—you don't mind?—I think she cried a little. But she was n't really very unhappy.»

«What did you say?»

«Well, I suggested that when we were married, we and she should both set up account-books; and I promised faithfully that if she would let us see hers we would let her see ours.»

George threw back his head with a gurgle of laughter.

«Well?»

«She was afraid,» said Letty, demurely, «that I did n't take things seriously enough. Then I asked her to come and see my gowns.»

«And that, I suppose, appeased her?»

«Not at all. She turned up her nose at everything, by way of punishing me. You see, she had on a new Worth—the third since Christmas. My poor little trousseau rags had no chance.»

«H'm!» said George, meditatively. «I wonder how my mama is going to manage when we are married?» he added, after a pause.

Letty made no reply. She was walking firmly and briskly; her eyes, full of a sparkling decision, looked straight before her; her little mouth was close set. Meanwhile through George's mind there passed a number of fragmentary answers to his own question. His feeling toward his mother was wholly abnormal; he had no sense of any unseemliness in the conversation about her which was gradually growing common between himself and Letty, and he meant to draw strict lines in the future. At the same time there was the tie of old habit, and of that uneasy and unwelcome responsibility with regard to her which had descended upon him at the time of his father's death. He could not honestly regard himself as an affectionate son; but the filial relationship, even in its most imperfect aspect, has a way of imposing itself.

«Ah, well, I dare say we shall pull through,» he said, dismissing the familiar worry with a long breath. «Why, how far we have come!» he added, looking back at Charing Cross and the Westminster towers. «And how extraordinarily mild it is! We can't turn back yet, and you'll be tired if I race you on in this way. Look, Letty; there's a seat. Would you be afraid—just five minutes?»

Letty looked doubtful.

«It's so absurdly late. George, you *are* funny! Suppose somebody came by who knew us?»

He opened his eyes.

«And why not? But see! there is n't a carriage, and hardly a person, in sight. Just a minute!»

Most unwillingly, Letty let herself be persuaded. It seemed to her a foolish and extravagant thing to do, and there was now no need for either folly or extravagance. Since her engagement she had dropped a good many of the small audacities of the social sort she had so freely allowed herself before it. It was as though, indeed, now that these audacities had served their purpose, some stronger

and perhaps inherited features emerged in her, and suppressed them. George was sometimes astonished by an ultra-conventional note, of which certainly he had heard nothing in their first days of intimacy at Malford.

Just as they sat down, a figure suddenly passed them on the road—the gray and stooping figure of an oldish woman in a tattered shawl.

George looked at her in astonishment. «Where did she come from?»

Neither of them had noticed her before. Probably she had emerged from some patch of shadow on the sidewalk. Now, as they watched her, she walked on till she reached a seat some fifty yards from their own. There she sat down, drew her rags about her, and dropped her head on her breast.

«Poor soul!» said George, looking at her curiously. «She will sleep there, probably. On any tolerable night, even at this time of year, there are always people on these seats, they say.»

«Do let 's go!» said Letty, sharply, and half rising; «I don't like it.»

She looked at the woman with disgust.

But George held her.

«No—just a minute. Aunt Charlotte will say nothing; she thinks you are still at the House. And *she*, poor wretch, will do us no harm. Very likely she's one of the people Dowson described. He gave us some horrors.»

In the moonlight Letty saw a dark, absent look creep over his face. He still held her hand, but she saw that he was not thinking of her. Generally she accepted his lovemaking very coolly—just as it came, or did not come. But to-night a sudden pique rose in her. For what had he led her into his silly escapade but to make love to her? And now he could hark back to the House and to politics!

«George, I really *must* go,» she began, flushing, and dragging at her hand. But he interrupted her.

«I wish one's opinions had n't been muddled by coming home! Everything was straight and simple out in India. But Dowson's stories of those beastly trades—I knew them all before, too—come back upon me, and turn me sick. Perhaps that woman's one of the victims—who knows? She looks a decent elderly body.»

He nodded toward the distant bench.

«Well, I don't understand—I really *don't*!» said Letty, rather sharply. «I thought you were all against the government!»

He laughed.

«The difference between them and us, darling, is only that *they* think the world

can be mended by act of Parliament, and *we* think it can't. Do what you will, we say, the world *is*, and must be, a wretched hole for the majority of those that live in it, and these quack meddlings and tyrannies only make it worse.»

Letty sat silent. Her breath came quickly. She did n't know why he should have kept her here to talk this kind of talk to her. He looked straight before him, absorbed, and she was struck with the harsh melancholy of his face.

Then suddenly he turned to her, his look brightening and melting.

«But it sha'n't be a wretched hole for us, shall it, darling? We'll make a little nest in it; we'll forget what we can't help; we'll be happy as long as the fates let us—won't we, Letty?»

His arm slipped round behind her. He caught her hands.

Letty had a disagreeable consciousness that it was all very absurd, this sitting on a seat in a public thoroughfare late at night, and behaving like any 'Arry and 'Arriet. At the same time she felt insecure and restless, and the touch of his hand excited her.

«Why, of course we shall be happy,» she said; «only somehow I don't always understand you, George. I wish I knew what you were really thinking about.»

«*You!*» he said, laughing, and drawing her to him. «Tell me, Letty, did you have a good time when you were a child? I had such an awfully bad one—I have n't got over it yet. Tell me how you got on.»

She smiled, and pursed her pretty lips.

«I *always* had a good time. I suppose I *took* it, if other people would n't give it. I was n't a good child, you know—not a bit. I did n't think that paid. I always teased my governesses, and ordered mother about; I made her dress me as I liked from the time I was nine. No; I am afraid I used to despise Elsie because she did n't have ripping times like me.»

George was charmed with her mischievous look, and would have liked to kiss her there and then. But a policeman on his beat was slowly advancing toward him, and Letty at last insisted upon getting up and going on.

«Elsie!» he said, as they walked along, «poor Elsie! Why don't we sometimes talk of her? When we are settled, dearest, we must have her to stay with us in town a bit—don't you think so? She looks a fragile little thing, as though she wanted cheering up.»

He spoke kindly, as he felt. From his first and, so far, only visit to Letty's home, he had carried away a compassionate feeling toward

Letty's pale and retiring sister. Evidently she was delicate in health, and he had been struck by the dependence of the household upon her, in spite of her apparent weakness.

His suggestion to-night, however, was not received with any eagerness. Letty's face fell.

«Oh, I don't know,» she said doubtfully. «Elsie's best at home. She's very difficult to get on with—for strangers. You don't know. She hardly ever makes a good impression. I should feel her terribly on my mind.»

George felt a momentary shock, then adjusted himself with his usual coolness. How absurd to expect a bride to endanger any of her first prerogatives of pleasure!

But when he had put her safely into a hansom at the corner of the bridge, and smiled good-by to her, he turned to walk back to the House in much sudden flatness of mood. Had Fontenoy's speech been so fine, after all? Were politics—was anything—quite worth while? It seemed to him that all emotions were small, all crises disappointing.

VI.

THE following Sunday, somewhere toward five o'clock, George rang the bell of the Maxwells' house in St. James's Square. It was a very fine house, and George's eye, as he stood waiting, ran over the façade with an amused, investigating look.

He allowed himself the same expression once or twice in the hall, as one mute and splendid person relieved him of his coat, and another, equally mute and equally unsurpassable, waited for him on the stairs, while across a passage beyond the hall he saw two red-liveried footmen carrying tea.

«When one is a friend of the people,» he pondered as he went up-stairs, «is one limited in horses, but not in flunkies? These things are obscure.»

He was ushered first into a stately outer drawing-room, filled with old French furniture and fine pictures; then the butler lifted a velvet curtain, pronounced the visitor's name with a voice and emphasis as perfectly trained as the rest of him, and stood aside for George to enter.

He found himself on the threshold of a charming room looking west, and lighted by some last beams of February sun. The pale-green walls were covered with a medley of prints and sketches. A large writing-table, untidily heaped with papers, stood conspicuous on the blue self-colored carpet, which over a great part of the floor was pleasantly void

and bare. Flat earthenware pans, planted with hyacinths and narcissus, stood here and there, and filled the air with spring scents. Books ran round the lower walls, or lay piled wherever there was a space for them; while about the fire at the farther end was gathered a circle of chintz-covered chairs—chairs of all shapes and sizes, meant for talking. The whole impression of the pretty, disorderly place, compared with the stately drawing-room behind it, was one of intimacy and freedom; the room made a friend of you as you entered.

Half a dozen people were sitting with Lady Maxwell when Tressady was announced. She rose to meet him with great cordiality, introduced him to little Lady Leven, an elfish creature in a cloud of fair hair, and with a pleasant «You know all the rest,» offered him a chair beside herself and the tea-table.

«The rest» were Frank Leven, Edward Watton, Bayle, the Foreign Office private secretary, who had been staying at Malford House at the time of Tressady's election, and Bennett, the «small, dark man» whom George had pointed out to Letty in the House as a Labor member, and one of the Maxwells' particular friends.

«Well,» said Lady Maxwell, turning to her new visitor as she handed him some tea, «were you as much taken with the grandmother as the grandmother was taken with you? She told me she had never seen a more haffable gentleman, nor one as she'd 'a' been more willin' to ha' done for!»

George laughed. «I see,» he said, «that my report has been anticipated.»

«Yes; I have been there. I have found a (case) in them indeed—alack! The granny—I am afraid she is an unseemly old woman—and the elder girl both work for the Jew son-in-law on the first floor—home work of the most abominable kind. That girl will be dead in a year if it goes on.»

George was rapidly conscious of two contradictory impressions—one of pleasure, one of annoyance: pleasure in her tall, slim presence, her white hand, and all the other flashing points of a beauty not to be denied; and irritation that she should have talked «shop» to him with her first breath. Could one never escape this altruistic chatter?

But he was not left to grapple with it alone, for Lady Leven looked up quickly.

«Mr. Watton, will you please take Lady Maxwell's tea away if she mentions the word (case) again? We gave her fair warning.»

Lady Maxwell hastily clasped both her hands round her tea-cup.

«Betty, we have discussed the opera for at least twenty minutes.»

«Yes, at peril of our lives!» said Lady Leven. «I never talked so fast before. One felt as though one *must* say everything one had to say about Melba and the De Reszkes all in one breath—before one's poor little subject was torn from one; one would never have such a chance again.»

Lady Maxwell laughed, but colored too.

«Am I such a nuisance?» she said, dropping her hands on her knee with a little sigh. Then she turned to Tressady.

«But Lady Leven really makes it out worse than it is. We have n't even *approached* a factory act all the afternoon.»

Lady Leven sprang forward in her chair. «Because, *because*, my dear, we simply declined to let you. We made a league—did n't we, Mr. Bennett? Even you joined it.»

Bennett smiled.

«Lady Maxwell overworks herself—we all know that,» he said, his look, at once kind, honest, and perennially embarrassed, passing from Lady Leven to his hostess.

«Oh, don't sympathize, for heaven's sake!» cried Betty. «Wage war upon her—it's our only hope.»

«Don't you think Sunday at least ought to be frivolous?» said Tressady, smiling, to Lady Maxwell.

«Well, personally, I like to talk about what interests me on Sunday as well as on other days,» she said, with a frank simplicity; «but I know I ought to be kept in order—I become a terrible bore.»

Frank Leven roused himself from the sofa on which he had languidly subsided.

«Bores?» he said indignantly; «we're all bores. We all have been bores since people began to think about what they're pleased to call (social work.) Why should I love my neighbor? I'd much rather hate him. I generally do.»

«Does n't it all depend,» said Tressady, «on whether he happens to be able to make it disagreeable for you in return?»

«That's just it,» said Betty Leven, eagerly. «I agree with Frank—it's all so stupid, this (loving) everybody. It makes one positively hot. We sit under a clergyman, Frank and I, who talks of nothing every Sunday but love—*love*—like that, long drawn out—how our politics should be (love,) and our shopping should be (love,) till we long simply to bastinado somebody. I want to have a little real nice cruelty—something sharp and interesting. I should like to stick pins into my maid, only, unfortunately, as she has more

than once pointed out to me, it would be so much easier for her to stick them into me.»

«You want the time of Miss Austen's novels back again,» said young Bayle, stooping to her, with his measured and agreeable smile—«before even the clergy had a mission.»

«Ah! but it would be no good,» said Lady Leven, sighing, «if *she* were there!»

She threw out her small hand toward her hostess, and everybody laughed.

Up to the moment of the laugh Lady Maxwell had been lying back in her chair listening, the beautiful mouth absently merry, and the eyes speaking, Tressady thought, of quite other things, of some hidden converse of her own going on in the brain behind the eyes. A certain prophetic air seemed natural to her. Nevertheless, that first impression of her he had carried away from the hospital scene was being somehow blurred and broken up.

She joined in the laugh against herself; then, with a little nod toward her assailant, she said to Edward Watton, who was sitting on her right hand:

«You're not taken in, I know.»

«Oh, if you mean that I go in for (cases) and (causes) too,» cried Lady Leven, interrupting, «of course I do. I can't be left alone. I must dance as my generation pipes.»

«Which means,» said her husband, dryly, «that she went for two days filling soda-water bottles the week before last, and a day's shirt-making last week. From the first I was told that she would probably return to me with an eye knocked out, she being totally inexperienced and absurdly rash. As to the second, to judge from the description she gave me of the den she had been sitting in when she came home, and the headache she had next day, I still expect typhoid. The fortnight is n't up till Wednesday.»

There was a shout of mingled laughter and inquiry.

«How did you do it, and whom did you bribe?» said Bayle to Lady Leven.

«I did n't bribe anybody,» she said indignantly. «You don't understand. My friends introduced me.»

Then, drawn out by him, she plunged into a lively account of her workshop experiences, interrupted every now and then by the sarcastic comments of her husband, and the amusement of the two younger men, who had brought their chairs close to her. Betty Leven ranked high among the lively chatter-boxes of her day and set.

Lady Maxwell, however, had not laughed at Frank Leven's speech. Rather, as he

spoke of his wife's experiences, her face had clouded, as though the blight of some too familiar image, some sad, ever-present vision, had descended upon her.

Bennett also did not laugh. He watched the Levens indulgently for a few minutes, then insensibly he, Lady Maxwell, Edward Watton, and Tressady drew together into a circle of their own.

«Do you gather that Lord Fontenoy's speech on Friday has been much taken up in the country?» said Bennett, bending forward and addressing Lady Maxwell. Tressady, who was observing him, noticed that his dress was precisely the «Sunday best» of the respectable workman, and was, moreover, reminded by the expression of the eyes and brow that Bennett was said to have been a well-known «local preacher» in his north-country youth.

Lady Maxwell smiled, and pointed to Tressady.

«Here,» she said, «is Lord Fontenoy's first lieutenant.»

Bennett looked at George.

«I should be glad,» he said, «to know what Sir George thinks.»

«Why, certainly. We think it has been very warmly taken up,» said George, promptly, «to judge from the newspapers, the letters that have been pouring in, and the petitions that seem to be preparing.»

Lady Maxwell's eyes gleamed. She looked at Bennett silently a moment, then she said:

«Is n't it amazing to you how strong an impossible case can be made to look?»

«It is inevitable,» said Bennett, with a little shrug—«quite inevitable. These social experiments of ours are so young, there is always a strong case to be made out against any of them, and there will be for years to come.»

«Well and good,» said George; «then we cavaliers are inevitable too. Don't attack us—praise us, rather; by your own confession we are as much a part of the game as you are.»

Bennett smiled slightly, but did not in reality quite follow. Lady Maxwell bent forward.

«Yes, of course there must be critics,» she said; «of course there must be opposition. But it is so hard to take the game, as you call it, with good temper when one is in touch with the lives at stake upon it. Do you know whether Lord Fontenoy has any *personal* knowledge of the trades he was speaking about? That is what I want so much to find out.»

George was nettled by both the question and the manner.

«I regard Fontenoy as a very competent person,» he said dryly. «I imagine he did his

best to inform himself. But there was not much need; the persons concerned—whom you think you are protecting—were so very eager to inform us.»

Lady Maxwell flushed.

«And you think that settles it—the eagerness of the cheap life to be allowed to maim and waste itself? But again and again English law has stepped in to prevent it, and again and again everybody has been thankful.»

«It is all a question of balance, of course,» said George. «Must a few unwise people be allowed to kill themselves—or thousands lose their liberty?»

His blue eyes scanned her beautiful, impetuous face with a certain cool hardness. Internally he was more and more in revolt against a «monstrous regiment of women,» and the influence upon the most complex economic problems of such a personality as that before him.

But his word «liberty» pricked her.

The look of feeling passed away. Her eyes kindled as sharply and dryly as his own.

«Freedom? Let me quote you Cromwell! «Every sectary saith, «O give me liberty!» But give it him, and to the best of his power he will yield it to no one else.» So with your careless or brutal employer; give him liberty, and no one else shall get it.»

«Only by metaphor—not legally,» said George, stubbornly. «So long as men are not slaves by law there is always a chance for freedom. Anyway, *we* stand for freedom—as an end, not a means. It is not the business of the state to make people happy—not at all! At least that is our view. But it *is* the business of the state to keep them free.»

«Ah!» said Bennett, with a long breath, «there you've hit the nail—the whole difference between you and us.»

George nodded. Lady Maxwell did not speak immediately. But George was aware that he was being observed, closely considered. Their glances crossed an instant, in antagonism, certainly, if not in dislike.

«How long is it since you came home from India?» she asked him suddenly.

«About six months.»

«And you were, I think, a long time abroad?»

«Nearly four years. Does that make you think I have not had much time to get up the things I am going to vote about?» said the young man, laughing. «I don't know. On the broadest issues of politics one makes up one's mind as well in Asia as in Europe—better, perhaps.»

«On the Empire, I suppose—and England's

place in the world? That's a side which, I know, I remember much too little. You think our life depends on a governing class, and that *we* and democracy are weakening that class too much?»

«That's about it. And for democracy it is all right. But *you*—you are the traitors!»

His thrust, however, did not rouse her to any corresponding rhetoric. She smiled merely, and began to question him about his travels. She did it with great deftness, so that after an answer or two both his temper and manner insensibly softened, and he found himself talking with ease and success. His mixed personality revealed itself—his capacity for certain veiled enthusiasms, his respect for power, for knowledge, his pessimist beliefs as to the average lot of men.

Bennett, who listened easily, was glad to help her make her guest talk. Frank Leven left the group near the sofa and came to listen too. Tressady was more and more spurred, carried out of himself. Lady Maxwell's fine eyes and stately ways were humanized, after all, by a quick responsiveness, which for most people, however critical, made conversation with her draw like a magnet. Her intelligence, too, was competent—left the mere feminine behind in these connections that Tressady offered her, no less than in others. She had not lived in the world of high politics for nearly five years for nothing; so that unconsciously, and, indeed, quite against his will, Tressady found himself talking to her, after a while, as though she had been a man and an equal, while at the same time taking more pains than he would ever have taken for a man.

«Well, you *have* seen a lot!» said Frank Leven at last, with a rather envious sigh.

Bennett's modest face suddenly reddened.

«If only Sir George will use his eyes to as good purpose at home—» he said involuntarily, then stopped. Few men were more unready and awkward in conversation; yet when roused he was one of the best platform speakers of his day.

George laughed.

«One sees best what appeals to one, I am afraid,» he said, only to be instantly aware that he had made a rather stupid admission in face of the enemy.

Lady Maxwell's lip twitched. He saw the flash of some quick thought cross her face. But she said nothing.

Only when he got up to go she bade him notice that she was always at home on Sundays, and would be glad that he should remember it. He made a rather cold and per-

functory reply. Inwardly he said to himself, «Why does she say nothing of Letty, whom she knows, and of our marriage, if she wants to make friends?»

Nevertheless, he left the house with the feeling of one who has passed an hour not of the common sort. He had done himself justice, made his mark. And as for her, in spite of his flashes of dislike he carried away a strong impression of something passionate and vivid that clung to the memory. Or was it merely eyes and pose, that astonishingly beautiful color, and touch of classic dignity which she got, so the world said, from some remote strain of Italian blood? Most probably! All the same, she had fewer of the ordinary womanly arts than he had imagined. How easy it would have been to send that message to Letty she had not sent! He thought simply that for a clever woman she might have been more adroit.

THE door had no sooner closed behind Tressady than Betty Leven, with a quick look after him, bent across to her hostess, and said in a stage whisper:

«Who? Post me up, please.»

«One of Fontenoy's gang,» said her husband, before Lady Maxwell could answer. «A new member, and as sharp as needles. He's been exactly to all the places where I want to go, Betty, and you won't let me.»

He glanced at his wife with a certain sharpness. Betty merely held out a white child's wrist.

«Button my glove, please, and don't talk. I have got ever so many questions to ask Marcella.»

Leven applied himself rather sulkily to his task while Betty pursued her inquiries.

«Is n't he going to marry Letty Sewell?»

«Yes,» said Lady Maxwell, opening her eyes rather wide. «Do you know her?»

«Why, my dear, she's Mr. Watton's cousin—is n't she?» said Betty, turning toward that young man. «I saw her once at your mother's.»

«Certainly she is my cousin,» said that young man, smiling, «and she's going to marry Tressady at Easter. So much I can vouch for, though I don't know her so well, perhaps, as the rest of my family do.»

«Oh!» said Betty, dryly, releasing her husband, and crossing her small hands upon her knee. «That means Miss Sewell is n't one of Mr. Watton's *favorite* cousins. You don't mind talking about your cousins, do you? You may blacken the character of all mine. Is she nice?»

«Who—Letty? Why, of course she is

nice," said Edward Watton, laughing. «All young ladies are.»

«Oh, goodness!» said Betty, shaking her halo of gold hair. «Commend me to cousins for letting one down easy.»

«Too bad, Lady Leven!» said Watton, getting up to escape. «Why not ask Bayle? He knows all things. Let me hand you over to him. He will sing you all my cousin's charms.»

«Delighted," said Bayle, as he too rose—«only unfortunately I ought at this moment to be at Wimbledon.»

He had the air of the typical official, well dressed, suave, and infinitely self-possessed, as he held out his hand, deprecatingly, to Lady Leven.

«Oh, you private secretaries!» said Betty, pouting and turning away from him.

«Don't abolish us," he said, pleading. «We must live.»

«*Je ne vois pas la nécessité!*» said Betty over her shoulder.

«Betty, what a babe you are!» cried her husband, as Bayle, Watton, and Bennett all disappeared together.

«Not at all!» cried Betty. «I wanted to get some truth out of somebody. For, of course, the real truth is that this Miss Sewell is—»

«Is what?» said Leven, lost in admiration all the time, as Lady Maxwell saw, of his wife's dainty grace and rose-leaf color.

«Well—a—*minx!*» said Betty, with innocent slowness, opening her blue eyes very wide; «a mischievous—rather pretty—hard-hearted—flirting—little minx!»

«Really, Betty!» cried Lady Maxwell. «Where have you seen her?»

«Oh, I saw her last year several times at the Wattons', and other places," said Betty, composedly. «And so did you too, please, madam. I remember very well one day Mrs. Watton brought her into the Winterbournes' when you and I were there, and she chattered a great deal.»

«Oh, yes. I had forgotten.»

«Well, my dear, you'll soon have to remember her, so you need n't talk in that lofty tone; for they're going to be married at Easter, and if you want to make friends with the young man, you'll have to realize the wife.»

«Married at Easter? How do you know?»

«In the first place, Mr. Watton said so; in the next, there are such things as newspapers. But of course you did n't notice such trifles—you never do.»

«Betty, you're very cross with me to-day!» Lady Maxwell looked up at her friend with a little pleading air.

«Oh, no; only for your good. I know you're thinking of nothing in the world but how to make that man take a reasonable view of Maxwell's bill. And I want to impress upon you that *he's* probably thinking a great deal more about getting married than about factory bills. You see, *your* getting married was a kind of accident. But other people are different. And oh, dear, you do know so little about them when they don't live in four-pair backs! There, don't defend yourself—you sha'n't!»

And, stooping, Betty stifled her friend's possible protest by kissing her.

«Now, then, come along, Frank; you've got your speech to write, and I've got to copy it out. Don't swear! You know you're going to have two whole days' golfing next week. Good-by, Marcella! My love to Aldous—and tell him not to be so late next time I come to tea. By-by!»

And off she swept, pausing, however, on the landing to open the door again, and put in an eager face.

«Oh, and by the way, the young man has a mother—Frank reminded me. His womenkind don't seem to be his strong point; but as she does n't earn *even* four and sixpence a week—very sadly the contrary—I won't tell you any more now, or you'll forget. Next time!»

WHEN Marcella Maxwell was at last left alone, she began to pace slowly up and down the large, bare room, as it was very much her wont to do.

She was thinking of George Tressady, and of the personality his talk had seemed to reveal.

«His heart is all in *power*, in what he takes for magnificence," she said to herself. «He talks as if he had no humanity, and did not care a rap for anybody. But it is a pose—I *think* it is a pose. He is interesting; he will develop. One would like—to show him things.»

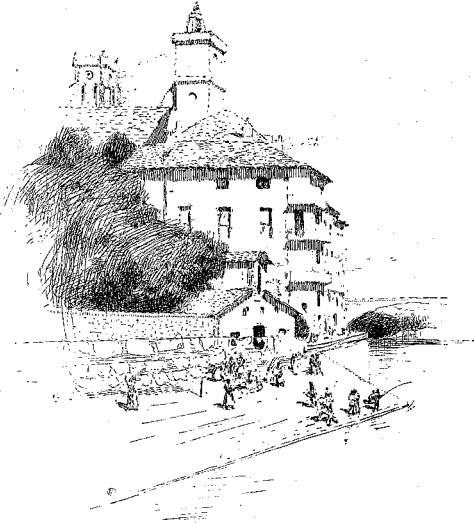
After another pensive turn or two she stopped beside a photograph that stood upon her writing-table. It was a photograph of her husband—a tall, smooth-faced man, with pleasant eyes, features of no particular emphasis, and the free carriage of the country-bred Englishman. As she looked at it her face relaxed unconsciously, inevitably, under the stimulus of some habitual and secret joy.

(To be continued.)

Mary A. Ward.

A FEAST-DAY ON THE RHÔNE.

WITH PICTURES BY LOUIS LOEB.



A FLYING GLIMPSE OF FONT SAINT ESPRIT.

I.

THIS water feast-day was a part of the bien-nial pilgrimage to the Sainte Estelle of the Félibrige and the Cigaliers, the two Félibrien societies maintained in Paris by the children of the South of France. Through twenty-three dreary months these expatriated ones exist in the chill North; in the blessed twenty-fourth month—always in burning August, when the melons are luscious ripe and the grapes are ripening, when the sun they love so well is blazing his best and the whole land is a-quiver with a thrilling, stimulating heat—they go joyously southward upon an excursion which has for its climax the great Félibrien festival: and then, in their own gloriously hot Midi, they really live!

By a semi-right and by a large courtesy, we of America were of this gay party. Four years earlier, as the official representatives of an American troubadour, we had come upon an embassy to the troubadours of Provence; and such warm relations had sprung up between ourselves and the poets to whom we were accredited that they had ended by making us members of their own elect body, the Society of the Félibrige—wherein are united the troubadours of these modern times. As Félibres, therefore, it was not merely our right but our duty to attend the

festival of the Sainte Estelle; and our official notification in regard to this meeting—received in New York on a chill day in the early springtime—announced also that we were privileged to journey on the special steamboat chartered by our brethren of Paris for the run from Lyons to Avignon down the Rhône.

II.

WE were called at five o'clock in the morning. Even the little birds of Lyons were drowsy at that untoward and melancholy hour. As I slowly roused myself I heard their sleepy twitterings out in the trees on the Cours du Midi—and my sympathies were with them. There are natures which are quickened and strengthened by the early day. Mine is not such. I know of nothing that so numbs what I am pleased to term my faculties as to be *particeps criminis* in the rising of the sun.

But life was several shades less cheerless by the time, an hour or so later, that we got down to the waterside. Already the mists of morning had risen, and in their place was the radiant sunshine of the Midi: that penetrating, tingling sunshine which sets the blood to dancing, and thence gets into the brain and breeds extravagant fancies there which straightway are uttered as substantial truths—as M. Daudet so often has told us; and so often, when writing about his birthland, has demonstrated in his own text.

Yet even had we come to the boat while still in the lowering mood begotten of our intemperate palterings with the dawn, we must have yielded quickly to the infectious cheerfulness which obtained on board the *Gladiateur*. From end to end the big steamboat was bright with bunting; and the company thronging on board of her was living up to the brightness of the sunshine and the flags.

For they were going home—home to their dear South, these poet-exiles; and their joy was so strong within them that it almost touched the edge of tears. I could understand their feeling because of a talk that I had had three days before, in Paris, with Baptiste Bonnet, up in his little apartment under the mansard, with an outlook over the