

LOVEL THE WIDOWER.

BY W. M. THACKERAY.



CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH I PLAY THE SPY.

THE room to which Bedford conducted me I hold to be the very pleasantest chamber in all the mansion of Shrublands. To lie on that comfortable cool bachelor's bed there, and see the birds hopping about on the lawn; to peep out of the French window at early morning, inhale the sweet air, mark the dewy bloom on the grass, listen to the little warblers performing their chorus, step forth in your dressing-gown and slippers, pick a strawberry from the bed, or an apricot in its season; blow one, two, three, just half a dozen puffs of a cigarette, hear the venerable towers of Putney toll the hour of six (three hours from breakfast, by consequence), and pop back into bed again with a favorite novel or review, to set you off (you see I am not malicious, or I could easily insert here the name of some twaddler against whom I have a grudge-kin): to pop back into bed again, I say, with a book which sets you off into that dear invaluable second sleep, by which health, spirits, appetite are so prodigiously improved: all these I hold to be most cheerful and harmless pleasures, and have partaken of them often at Shrublands with a grateful heart. That heart may have had its griefs, but is yet susceptible of enjoyment and consolation. That bosom may have been lacerated, but is not therefore and henceforward a stranger to comfort. After a certain affair in

Dublin—nay, very soon after, three months after—I recollect remarking to myself: “Well, thank my stars, I still have a relish for 34 claret.” Once at Shrublands I heard steps pacing overhead at night, and the feeble but continued wail of an infant. I wakened from my sleep, was sulky, but turned and slept again. Biddlecombe the barrister I knew was the occupant of the upper chamber. He came down the next morning looking wretchedly yellow about the cheeks, and livid round the eyes. His teething infant had kept him on the march all night, and Mrs. Biddlecombe, I am told, scolds him frightfully besides. He munched a shred of toast, and was off by the omnibus to chambers. I chipped a second egg; I may have tried one or two other nice little things on the table (Strasbourg pâté, I know, I never can resist, and am convinced

it is perfectly wholesome). I could see my own sweet face in the mirror opposite, and my gills were as rosy as any broiled salmon. “Well, well!” I thought, as the barrister disappeared on the roof of the coach, “he has *domus* and *placens uxor*; but is she *placens*? *Placetne* to walk about all night with a roaring baby? Is it pleasing to go to bed after a long hard day's work, and have your wife nagnagging you because she has not been invited to the Lady Chancelloress's *soirée*, or what not? Suppose the Glorvina whom you loved so had been yours? Her eyebrows looked as if they could scowl; her eyes as if they could flash with anger. Remember what a slap she gave the little knife-boy for upsetting the butter-boat over her tabinet. Suppose *parvulus aulâ*, a little Batchelor, your son, who had the toothache all night in your bedroom?” These thoughts passed rapidly through my mind as I helped myself to the comfortable meal before me. “I say, what a lot of muffins you're eating!” cried innocent Master Lovel. Now the married, the wealthy, the prosperous Biddlecombe only took his wretched scrap of dry toast. “Aha!” you say, “this man is consoling himself after his misfortune.” O churl! and do you grudge me consolation? “Thank you, dear Miss Prior. Another cup, and plenty of cream, if you please.” Of course, Lady Baker was not at table when I said, “Dear Miss Prior,” at breakfast. Before her ladyship I was as mum as a mouse. Elizabeth found occasion

to whisper to me during the day in her demure way: "This is a very rare occasion. Lady B. never allows me to breakfast alone with Mr. Lovel, but has taken her extra nap, I suppose, because you and Mr. and Mrs. Biddlecombe were here."

Now it may be that one of the double doors of the room which I inhabited was occasionally open, and that Mr. Batchelor's eyes and ears are uncommonly quick, and note a number of things which less observant persons would never regard or discover; but out of this room, which I occupied for some few days, now and subsequently, I looked out as from a little ambush upon the proceedings of the house, and got a queer little insight into the history and characters of the personages round about me. The two grandmothers of Lovel's children were domineering over that easy gentleman, as women—not grandmothers merely, but sisters, wives, aunts, daughters, when the chance is given them—will domineer. Ah! Glorvina, what a gray mare you might have become had you chosen Mr. Batchelor for your consort! (But this I only remark with a parenthetic sigh.) The two children had taken each the side of a grandmamma, and while Master Pop was declared by his maternal grandmother to be a Baker all over, and taught to despise sugar-baking and trade, little Cecilia was Mrs. Bonnington's favorite, repeated Watts's hymns with fervent precocity, declared that she would marry none but a clergyman, preached infantine sermons to her brother and maid about worldliness, and somewhat wearied me, if the truth must be told, by the intense self-respect with which she regarded her own virtues. The old ladies had that love for each other which one may imagine that their relative positions would engender. Over the bleeding and helpless bodies of Lovel and his worthy and kind step-father, Mr. Bonnington, they skirmished, and fired shots at each other. Lady B. would give hints about second marriages, and second families, and so forth, which of course made Mrs. Bonnington wince. Mrs. B. had the better of Lady Baker, in consequence of the latter's notorious pecuniary irregularities. *She* had never had recourse to her son's purse, she could thank Heaven. She was not afraid of meeting any tradesman in Putney or London: she had never been ordered out of the house in the late Cecilia's lifetime: *she* could go to Boulogne and enjoy the *fresh air* there. This was the terrific whip she had over Baker. Lady B., I regret to say, in consequence of the failure of remittances, had been locked up in prison just at a time when she was in a state of violent quarrel with her late daughter, and good Mr. Bonnington had helped her out of du-rance. How did I know this? Bedford, Lovel's factotum, told me: and how the old ladies were fighting like two cats.

There was one point on which the two ladies agreed. A very wealthy widower, young still, good-looking and good-tempered, we know can sometimes find a dear woman to console his loneliness and protect his motherless children. From

the neighboring Heath, from Wimbledon, Roehampton, Barnes, Mortlake, Richmond, Esher, Walton, Windsor, nay, Reading, Bath, Exeter, and Penzance itself, or from any other quarter of Britain over which your fancy may please to travel, families would have come ready with dear young girls to take charge of that man's future happiness: but it is a fact that these two dragons kept all women off from their ward. An unmarried woman, with decent good looks, was scarce ever allowed to enter Shrublands gate. If such an one appeared, Lovel's two mothers sallied out, and crunched her hapless bones. Once or twice he dared to dine with his neighbors, but the ladies led him such a life that the poor creature gave up the practice, and faintly announced his preference for home. "My dear Batch," says he, "what do I care for the dinners of the people round about? Has any one of them got a better cook or better wine than mine? When I come home from business it is an intolerable nuisance to have to dress and go out seven or eight miles to cold *entrées*, and loaded claret, and sweet port. I can't stand it, Sir. I *won't* stand it" (and he stamps his foot in a resolute manner). "Give me an easy life, a wine-merchant I can trust, and my own friends, by my own fireside. Shall we have some more? We can manage another bottle between us three, Mr. Bonnington?"

"Well," says Mr. Bonnington, winking at the ruby goblet, "I am sure I have no objection, Frederick, to another bo—"

"Coffee is served, Sir," cries Bedford, entering.

"Well—well, perhaps we have had enough," says worthy Bonnington.

"We *have* had enough; we all drink too much," says Lovel, briskly. "Come into coffee?"

We go to the drawing-room. Fred and I, and the two ladies, sit down to a rubber, while Miss Prior plays a piece of Beethoven to a slight warbling accompaniment from Mr. Bonnington's handsome nose, who has fallen asleep over the newspaper. During our play Bessy glides out of the room—a gray shadow. Bonnington wakens up when the tray is brought in. Lady Baker likes that good old custom: was always the fashion at the Castle, and she takes a good glass of negus, too; and so do we all; and the conversation is pretty merry, and Fred Lovel hopes I shall sleep better to-night, and is very facetious about poor Biddlecombe, and the way in which that eminent Q. C. is henpecked by his wife.

From my bachelor's room, then, on the ground-floor; or from my solitary walks in the garden, whence I could oversee many things in the house; or from Bedford's communications to me, which were very friendly, curious, and unreserved; or from my own observation, which I promise you can see as far into the millstones of life as most folks, I grew to find the mysteries of Shrublands no longer mysterious to me; and like another *Diable Boiteux*, had the roofs of a pretty number of the Shrublands rooms taken off for me.

For instance, on that very first day of my stay, while the family were attiring themselves for dinner, I chanced to find two secret cupboards of the house unlocked, and the contents unveiled to me. Pinhorn, the children's maid, a giddy little flirting thing in a pink ribbon, brought some articles of the toilet into my worship's apartment, and as she retired did not shut the door behind her. I might have thought that pert little head had never been made to ache by any care; but ah! black care sits behind the horseman, as Horace remarks, and not only behind the horseman, but behind the footman; and not only on the footman, but on the buxom shoulders of the lady's maid. So with Pinhorn. You surely have remarked respecting domestic servants that they address you in a tone utterly affected and unnatural—adopting, when they are among each other, voices and gestures entirely different to those which their employers see and hear. Now, this little Pinhorn, in her occasional intercourse with your humble servant, had a brisk, quick, fluttering toss of the head, and a frisky manner, no doubt capable of charming some persons. As for me, ancillary allurements have, I own, had but small temptations. If Venus brought me a bedroom candle and a jug of hot water—I should give her sixpence, and no more. Having, you see, given my all to one woman—Pshaw! never mind *that* old story. Well, I dare say this little creature may have been a flirt, but I took no more notice of her than if she had been a coal-scuttle.

Now suppose she *was* a flirt. Suppose, under a mask of levity, she hid a profound sorrow. Do you suppose she was the first woman who ever has done so? Do you suppose because she has fifteen pounds a year, her tea, sugar, and beer, and told fibs to her masters and mistresses, she had not a heart? She went out of the room, absolutely coaxing and leering at me as she departed, with a great counterpane over her arm; but in the next apartment I heard her voice quite changed, and another changed voice too—though not so much altered—interrogating her. My friend Dick Bedford's voice, in addressing those whom Fortune had pleased to make his superiors, was gruff and brief. He seemed to be anxious to deliver himself of his speech to you as quickly as possible; and his tone always seemed to hint, "There—there is my message, and I have delivered it; but you know perfectly well that I am as good as you." And so he was, and so I always admitted: so even the trembling, believing, flustering, suspicious Lady Baker herself admitted when she came into communication with this man. I have thought of this little Dick as of Swift at Sheen hard by, with Sir William Temple: or Spartacus when he was as yet the servant of the fortunate Roman gentleman who owned him. Now if Dick was intelligent, obedient, useful, only not rebellious, with his superiors, I should fancy that among his equals he was by no means pleasant company, and that most of them hated him for his arrogance, his honesty, and his scorn of them all.

But women do not always hate a man for scorning and despising them. Women do not revolt at the rudeness and arrogance of us their natural superiors. Women, if properly trained, come down to heel at the master's bidding, and lick the hand that has been often raised to hit them. I do not say the brave little Dick Bedford ever raised an actual hand to this poor serving girl, but his tongue whipped her, his behavior trampled on her, and she cried, and came to him whenever he lifted a finger. Pshaw! Don't tell *me*. If you want a quiet, contented, orderly home, and things comfortable about you, that is the way you must manage your women.

Well, Bedford happens to be in the next room. It is the morning-room at Shrublands. You enter the dining-room from it, and they are in the habit of laying out the dessert there, before taking it in for dinner. Bedford is laying out his dessert as Pinhorn enters from my chamber, and he begins upon her with a sarcastic sort of grunt, and a "Ho! suppose you've been making up to B., have you?"

"Oh, Mr. Bedford, you know very well who it is I cares for!" she says, with a sigh.

"Bother!" Mr. B. remarks.

"Well, Richard, then!" (Here she weeps.)

"Leave go my 'and!—leave go my a-hand, I say!" (What *could* she have been doing to cause this exclamation?)

"Oh, Richard, it's not your 'and I want—it's your ah-ah-art, Richard!"

"Mary Pinhorn," exclaims the other, "what's the use of going on with this game? You know we couldn't be a-happy together—you know your ideers ain't no good, Mary. It ain't your fault. I don't blame you for it, my dear. Some people are born clever, some are born tall: I ain't tall."

"Oh, you're tall enough for me, Richard!"

Here Richard again found occasion to cry out: "Don't, I say! Suppose Baker was to come in and find you squeezing of my hand in this way? I say, some people are born with big brains, Miss Pinhorn, and some with big figures. Look at that ass Bulkeley, Lady B.'s man! He is as big as a Life-guardsmen, and he has no more education, nor no more ideas, than the beef he feeds on."

"La! Richard, whatever do you mean?"

"Pooh! How should *you* know what I mean? Lay them books straight. Put the volumes together, stupid! and the papers, and get the table ready for nursery tea, and don't go on there mopping your eyes and making a fool of yourself, Mary Pinhorn!"

"Oh, your heart is a stone—a stone—a stone!" cries Mary, in a burst of tears. "And I wish it was hung round my neck, and I was at the bottom of the well, and—there's the hupstairs bell!" with which signal I suppose Mary disappeared, for I only heard a sort of grunt from Mr. Bedford; then the clatter of a dish or two, the wheeling of chairs and furniture, and then came a brief silence, which lasted until the entry of

Dick's subordinate Buttons, who laid the table for the children's and Miss Prior's tea.

So here was an old story told over again. Here was love unrequited, and a little passionate heart wounded and unhappy. My poor little Mary! As I am a sinner, I will give thee a crown when I go away, and not a couple of shillings, as my wont has been. Five shillings will not console thee much, but they will console thee a little. Thou wilt not imagine that I bribe thee with any privy thought of evil? Away! *Ich habe genossen das irdische Glück—ich habe geliebt!*

At this juncture I suppose Mrs. Prior must have entered the apartment, for though I could not hear her noiseless step, her little cracked voice came pretty clearly to me with a "Good-afternoon, Mr. Bedford! Oh dear me! what a many—many years we have been acquainted. To think of the pretty little printer's boy who used to come to Mr. Batchelor, and see you grown such a fine man!"

BEDFORD. "How? I'm only five foot four."

MRS. P. "But such a fine figure, Bedford! You are—now indeed you are! Well, you are strong and I am weak. You are well, and I am weary and faint."

BEDFORD. "The tea's a-coming directly, Mrs. Prior."

MRS. P. "Could you give me a glass of water first—and perhaps a little sherry in it, please. Oh, thank you. How good it is! How it revives a poor old wretch!—And your cough, Bedford? How is your cough? I have brought you some lozenges for it—some of Sir Henry Halford's own prescribing for my dear husband, and—"

BEDFORD (*abruptly*). "I must go—never mind the cough now, Mrs. P."

MRS. P. "What's here? almonds and raisins, macaroons, preserved apricots, biscuits for dessert—and—la bless the man! how you sta—artled me!"

BEDFORD. "DON'T! Mrs. Prior: I beg and implore of you, keep your 'ands out of the dessert. I can't stand it. I must tell the governor if this game goes on."

MRS. P. "Ah! Mr. Bedford, it is for my poor—poor child at home: the doctor recommended her apricots. Ay, indeed, dear Bedford, he did, for her poor chest!"

BEDFORD. "And I'm blest if you haven't been at the sherry-bottle again! Oh, Mrs. P., you drive me wild—you do. I can't see Lovel put upon in this way. You know it's only last week I whopped the boy for stealing the sherry, and 'twas you done it."

MRS. PRIOR (*passionately*). "For a sick child, Bedford. What won't a mother do for her sick child!"

BEDFORD. "Your children's always sick. You're always taking things for 'em. I tell you, by the laws, I won't and mustn't stand it, Mrs. P."

MRS. PRIOR (*with much spirit*). "Go and tell your master, Bedford! Go and tell tales of me,

Sir. Go and have me dismissed out of this house. Go and have my daughter dismissed out of this house, and her poor mother brought to disgrace."

BEDFORD. "Mrs. Prior—Mrs. Prior! you have been a-taking the sherry. A glass I don't mind: but you've been a-bringing that bottle again."

MRS. P. (*whimpering*). "It's for Charlotte, Bedford! my poor delicate angel of a Shatty! She's ordered it, indeed she is!"

BEDFORD. "Confound your Shatty! I can't stand it, I mustn't, and won't, Mrs. P.!"

Here a noise and clatter of other persons arriving interrupted the conversation between Lovel's major-domo and the mother of the children's governess, and I presently heard Master Pop's voice saying, "You're going to tea with us, Mrs. Prior?"

MRS. P. "Your kind, dear grandmamas have asked me, dear Master Popham."

POP. "But you'd like to go to dinner best, wouldn't you? I dare say you have doocid bad dinners at your house. Haven't you, Mrs. Prior?"

CISSY. "Don't say doocid. It's a naughty word, Popham!"

POP. "I *will* say doocid. Doo-oo-ooocid! There! And I'll say worse words too, if I please, and you hold *your* tongue. What's there for tea? jam for tea? strawberries for tea? muffins for tea? That's it: strawberries and muffins for tea! And we'll go into dessert besides: that's prime! I say, Miss Prior?"

MISS PRIOR. "What do you say, Popham?"

POP. "Shouldn't you like to go into dessert?—there's lots of good things there—and have wine? Only when grandmamma tells her story about—about my grandfather and King George the what-d'ye-call-'em: King George the Fourth—"

CIS. "Ascended the throne 1820; died at Windsor 1830."

POP. "Bother Windsor! Well, when she tells that story, I can tell you *that* ain't very good fun."

CIS. "And it's rude of you to speak in that way of your grandmamma, Pop!"

POP. "And you'll hold *your* tongue, Miss! And I shall speak as I like. And I'm a man, and I don't want any of your stuff and nonsense. I say, Mary, give us the marmalade!"

CIS. "You have had plenty to eat, and boys oughtn't to have so much."

POP. "Boys may have what they like. Boys can eat twice as much as women. There, I don't want any more. Any body may have the rest."

MRS. PRIOR. "What nice marmalade! I know some children, my dears, who—"

MISS P. (*imploringly*). "Mamma, I beseech you—"

MRS. P. "I know three dear children who very—very seldom have nice marmalade and delicious cake."

POP. "I know whom you mean: you mean

Augustus, and Frederick, and Fanny—your children? Well, they shall have marmalade and cake."

Cis. "Oh yes, I will give them all mine."

POP. (*who speaks, I think, as if his mouth was full*). "I won't give 'em mine: but they can have another pot, you know. You have always got a basket with you; you know you have, Mrs. Prior. You had it the day you took the cold fowl."

MRS. P. "For the poor blind black man! Oh, how thankful he was to his dear young benefactors! He is a man and a brother, and to help him was most kind of you, dear Master Popham!"

POP. "That black beggar my brother? He ain't my brother!"

MRS. P. "No, dears, you have both the most lovely complexions in the world."

POP. "Bother complexions! I say, Mary, another pot of marmalade."

MARY. "I don't know, Master Pop—"

POP. "I *will* have it, I say. If you don't, I'll smash every thing, I will."

Cis. "Oh you naughty, rude boy!"

POP. "Hold your tongue, stupid! I will have it, I say."

MRS. P. "Do humor him, Mary, please. And I'm sure my dear children at home will be better for it."

POP. "There's your basket. Now put this cake in, and this bit of butter, and this sugar on the top of the butter. Hurray! hurray! Oh, what jolly fun! Here's some cake—no, I think I'll keep that; and, Mrs. Prior, tell Gus, and Fanny, and Fred, I sent it to 'em, and they shall never want for any thing as long as Frederick Popham Baker Lovel, Esquire, can give it them. Did Gus like my gray great-coat that I didn't want?"

MISS P. "You did not give him your new great-coat?"

POP. "It was beastly ugly, and I did give it him; and I'll give him this if I choose. And don't you speak to me; I'm going to school, and I ain't going to have no governesses soon."

MRS. PRIOR. "Ah, dear child! what a nice coat it is; and how well my poor boy looks in it!"

MISS PRIOR. "Mother, mother! I implore you—mother!"

MR. LOVEL *enters*. "So the children at high tea! How d'ye do, Mrs. Prior? I think we shall be able to manage that little matter for your second boy, Mrs. Prior."

MRS. PRIOR. "Heaven bless you—bless you, my dear, kind benefactor! Don't prevent me, Elizabeth: I *must* kiss his hand. There!"

And here the second bell rings, and I enter the morning-room, and can see Mrs. Prior's great basket popped cunningly under the table-cloth. Her basket?—her *porte-manteau*, her *porte-bouteille*, her *porte-gâteau*, her *porte-pantalon*, her *porte-bûtin* in general. Thus I could see that every day Mrs. Prior visited Shrublands she gleaned greedily of the harvest. Well, Boaz

was rich, and this ruthless Ruth was hungry and poor.

At the welcome summons of the second bell Mr. and Mrs. Bonnington also made their appearance; the latter in the new cap which Mrs. Prior had admired, and which she saluted with a nod of smiling recognition: "Dear madam, it is lovely—I told you it was," whispers Mrs. P., and the wearer of the blue ribbons turned her bonny, good-natured face toward the looking-glass, and I hope saw no reason to doubt Mrs. Prior's sincerity. As for Bonnington, I could perceive that he had been taking a little nap before dinner—a practice by which the appetite is improved, I think, and the intellect prepared for the bland prandial conversation.

"Have the children been quite good?" asks papa of the governess.

"There are worse children, Sir," says Miss Prior, meekly.

"Make haste and have your dinner; we are coming into dessert!" cries Pop.

"You would not have us go to dine without your grandmother?" papa asks. Dine without Lady Baker, indeed! I should have liked to see him go to dinner without Lady Baker.

Pending her ladyship's arrival, papa and Mr. Bonnington walk to the open window, and gaze on the lawn and the towers of Putney rising over the wall.

"Ah, my good Mrs. Prior," cries Mrs. Bonnington, "those grand-children of mine are sadly spoiled."

"Not by *you*, dear madam," says Mrs. Prior, with a look of commiseration. "Your dear children at home are, I am sure, perfect models of goodness. Is Master Edward well, ma'am? and Master Robert, and Master Richard, and dear, funny little Master William? Ah, what blessings those children are to you! If a certain willful little nephew of theirs took after them!"

"The little naughty wretch!" cried Mrs. Bonnington; "do you know, Prior, my grandson Frederick—(I don't know why they call him Popham in this house, or why he should be ashamed of his father's name)—do you know that Popham spilt the ink over my dear husband's bands, which he keeps in his great dictionary, and fought with my Richard, who is three years older than Popham, and actually beat his own uncle!"

"Gracious goodness!" I cried; "you don't mean to say, ma'am, that Pop has been laying violent hands upon his venerable relative?" I feel ever so gentle a pull at my coat. Was it Miss Prior who warned me not to indulge in the sarcastic method with good Mrs. Bonnington?

"I don't know why you call my poor child a venerable relative," Mrs. B. remarks. "I know that Popham was very rude to him; and then Robert came to his brother, and that graceless little Popham took a stick, and my husband came out, and do you know Popham Lovel actually kicked Mr. Bonnington on the shins, and butted him like a little naughty ram; and if you think

such conduct is a subject for ridicule—I *don't*, Mr. Batchelor!"

"My dear—dear lady!" I cried, seizing her hand; for she was going to cry, and in woman's eye the unanswerable tear always raises a deuce of a commotion in my mind. "I would not for the world say a word that should willingly vex you; and as for Popham, I give you my honor, I think nothing would do that child so much good as a good whipping."

"He is spoiled, madam; we know by *whom*," says Mrs. Prior. "Dear Lady Baker! how that red does become your ladyship." In fact, Lady B. sailed in at this juncture, arrayed in ribbons of scarlet; with many brooches, bangles, and other gimeracks ornamenting her plenteous person. And now her ladyship having arrived, Bedford announced that dinner was served, and Lovel gave his mother-in-law an arm, while I offered mine to Mrs. Bonnington to lead her to the adjoining dining-room. And the pacable kind soul speedily made peace with me. And we ate and drank of Lovel's best. And Lady Baker told us her celebrated anecdote of George the Fourth's compliment to her late dear husband, Sir George, when his Majesty visited Ireland. Mrs. Prior and her basket were gone when we repaired to the drawing-room: having been hunting all day, the hungry mother had returned with her prey to her wide-mouthed birdkins. Elizabeth looked very pale and handsome, reading at her lamp. And whist and the little tray finished the second day at Shrublands.

I paced the moonlit walk alone when the family had gone to rest; and smoked my cigar under the tranquil stars. I had been some thirty hours in the house, and what a queer little drama was unfolding itself before me! What struggles and passions were going on here—what *certamina* and *motus animorum*! Here was Lovel, this willing horse; and what a crowd of relations, what a heap of luggage had the honest fellow to carry! How that little Mrs. Prior was working, and scheming, and tacking, and flattering, and fawning, and plundering, to be sure! And that serene Elizabeth, with what consummate skill, art, and prudence had she to act, to keep her place with two such rivals reigning over her! And Elizabeth not only kept her place but she actually was liked by those two women! Why, Elizabeth Prior, my wonder and respect for thee increase with every hour during which I contemplate thy character! How is it that you live with those lionesses, and are not torn to pieces? What sops of flattery do you cast to them to appease them? Perhaps I do not think my Elizabeth brings up her two children very well, and, indeed, have seldom become acquainted with young people more odious. But is the fault hers, or is it Fortune's spite? How, with these two grandmothers spoiling the children alternately, can the governess do better than she does? How has she managed to lull their natural jealousy? I will work out that intricate problem, that I will, ere many days are over. And there are other mysteries which I perceive. There is

VOL. XX.—No. 119.—X x

poor Mary breaking her heart for the butler. That butler, why does he connive at the rogueries of Mrs. Prior? Ha! herein lies a mystery, too; and I vow I will penetrate it ere long. So saying, I fling away the butt-end of the fragrant companion of my solitude, and enter into my room by the open French window just as Bedford walks in at the door. I had heard the voice of that worthy domestic warbling a grave melody from his pantry window as I paced the lawn. When the family goes to rest, Bedford passes a couple of hours in study in his pantry, perusing the newspapers and the new works, and forming his opinion on books and politics. Indeed I have reason to believe that the letters in the *Putney Herald* and *Mortlake Monitor*, signed "A Voice from the Basement," were Mr. Bedford's composition.

"Come to see all safe for the night, Sir, and the windows closed before you turn in," Mr. Dick remarks. "Best not leave 'em open, even if you are asleep inside—catch cold—many bad people about. Remember Bromley murder!—Enter at French windows—you cry out—cut your throat—and there's a fine paragraph for papers next morning!"

"What a good voice you have, Bedford," I say; "I heard you warbling just now—a famous bass, on my word!"

"Always fond of music—sing when I'm cleaning my plate—learned in Old Beak Street. *She* used to teach me," and he points toward the upper floors.

"What a little chap you were then!—when you came for my proofs for the *Museum*," I remark.

"I ain't a very big one now, Sir; but it ain't the big ones that do the best work," remarks the butler.

"I remember Miss Prior saying that you were as old as she was."

"Hm! and I scarce came up to her—eh—elbow." (Bedford had constantly to do battle with the aspirates. He conquered them, but you could see there was a struggle.)

"And it was Miss Prior taught you to sing?" I say, looking him full in the face.

He dropped his eyes—he could not bear my scrutiny. I knew the whole story now.

"When Mrs. Lovel died at Naples, Miss Prior brought home the children, and you acted as courier to the whole party?"

"Yes, Sir," says Bedford. "We had the carriage, and of course poor Mrs. L. was sent home by sea, and I brought home the young ones, and—and the rest of the family. I could say, *Avanti! avanti!* to the Italian postillions, and ask for *des chevaux* when we crossed the Halps—the Alps—I beg your pardon, Sir."

"And you used to see the party to their rooms at the inns, and call them up in the morning, and you had a blunderbuss in the rumble to shoot the robbers?"

"Yes," says Bedford.

"And it was a pleasant time?"

"Yes," says Bedford, groaning, and hanging

down his miserable head. "Oh yes, it was a pleasant time."

He turned away; he stamped his foot; he gave a sort of imprecation; he pretended to look at some books, and dust them with a napkin which he carried. I saw the matter at once. "Poor Dick!" says I.

"It's the old—old story," says Dick. "It's you and the Irish girl over again, Sir. I'm only a servant, I know; but I'm a—. Confound it!" And here he stuck his fists into his eyes.

"And this is the reason you allow old Mrs. Prior to steal the sherry and the sugar?" I ask.

"How do you know that?—you remember how she priggled in Beak Street?" asks Bedford, fiercely.

"I overheard you and her just before dinner," I said.

"You had better go and tell Lovel—have me turned out of the house. That's the best thing that can be done," cries Bedford again, fiercely, stamping his feet.

"It is always my custom to do as much mischief as I possibly can, Dick Bedford," I say, with fine irony.

He seizes my hand. "No, you're a trump—every body knows that; beg pardon, Sir; but you see I'm so—so—dash!—miserable, that I hardly know whether I'm walking on my head or my heels."

"You haven't succeeded in touching her heart, then, my poor Dick?" I said.

Dick shook his head. "She has no heart," he said. "If she ever had any that fellar in India took it away with him. She don't care for any body alive. She likes me as well as any one. I think she appreciates me, you see, Sir; she can't 'elp it—I'm blest if she can. She knows I am a better man than most of the chaps that come down here—I am, if I wasn't a servant. If I were only an apothecary—like that grinning jackass who comes here from Barnes in his gig, and wants to marry her—she'd have me. She keeps him on, and encourages him—she can do that cleverly enough. And the old dragon fancies she is fond of him. Pshaw! Why am I making a fool of myself?—I am only a servant. Mary's good enough for me; *she'll* have me fast enough. I beg your pardon, Sir; I am making a fool of myself; I ain't the first, Sir. Good-night, Sir; hope you'll sleep well." And Dick departs to his pantry and his private cares, and I think, "Here is another victim who is writhing under the merciless arrows of the universal torturer."

"He is a very singular person," Miss Prior remarked to me, as, next day, I happened to be walking on Putney Heath by her side, while her young charges trotted on and quarreled in the distance. "I wonder where the world will stop next, dear Mr. Batchelor, and how far the march of intellect will proceed! Any one so free, and easy, and cool as this Mr. Bedford I never saw. When we were abroad with poor Mrs. Lovel, he picked up French and Italian in quite a surprising way. He takes books down from the library

now: the most abstruse works—works that I couldn't pretend to read, I'm sure. Mr. Bonnington says he has taught himself history, and Horace in Latin, and algebra, and I don't know what besides. He talked to the servants and tradespeople at Naples much better than I could, I assure you." And Elizabeth tosses up her head heavenward, as if she would ask of yonder skies how such a man could possibly be as good as herself.

She stepped along the Heath—slim, stately, healthy, tall—her firm, neat foot treading swiftly over the grass. She wore her blue spectacles, but I think she could have looked at the sun without the glasses and without wincing. That sun was playing with her tawny, wavy ringlets, and scattering gold dust over them.

"It is wonderful," said I, admiring her, "how these people give themselves airs, and try to imitate their betters!"

"Most extraordinary!" says Bessy. She had not one particle of humor in all her composition. I think Dick Bedford was right; and she had no heart. Well, she had famous lungs, health, appetite; and with these one may get through life not uncomfortably.

"You and Saint Cecilia got on pretty well, Bessy?" I ask.

"Saint who?"

"The late Mrs. L."

"Oh, Mrs. Lovel—yes. What an odd person you are! I did not understand whom you meant," says Elizabeth the downright.

"Not a good temper, I should think? She and Fred fought?"

"He never fought."

"I think a little bird has told me that she was not averse to the admiration of our sex?"

"I don't speak ill of my friends, Mr. Batchelor!" replies Elizabeth the prudent.

"You must have difficult work with the two old ladies at Shrublands?"

Bessy shrugs her shoulders. "A little management is necessary in all families," she says. "The ladies are naturally a little jealous one of the other; but they are both of them not unkind to me in the main; and I have to bear no more than other women in my situation. It was not all pleasure at St. Boniface, Mr. Batchelor, with my uncle and aunt. I suppose all governesses have their difficulties; and I must get over mine as best I can, and be thankful for the liberal salary which your kindness procured for me, and which enables me to help my poor mother and my brothers and sisters."

"I suppose you give all your money to her?"

"Nearly all. They must have it; poor mamma has so many mouths to feed."

"And *notre petit cœur*, Bessy?" I ask, looking in her fresh face. "Have we replaced the Indian officer?"

Another shrug of the shoulder. "I suppose we all get over those follies, Mr. Batchelor. I remember somebody else was in a sad way too"—and she looks askance at the victim of Glorvina. "*My* folly is dead and buried long ago.

I have to work so hard for mamma, and my brothers and sisters, that I have no time for such nonsense."

Here a gentleman in a natty gig, with a high-trotting horse, came spanking toward us over the common, and with my profound knowledge of human nature I saw at once that the servant by the driver's side was a little doctor's boy, and the gentleman himself was a neat and trim general practitioner.

He stared at me grimly, as he made a bow to Miss Bessy. I saw jealousy and suspicion in his aspect.

"Thank you, dear Mr. Drencher," says Bessy, "for your kindness to mamma and our children. You are going to call at Shrublands? Lady Baker was indisposed this morning. She says, when she can't have Dr. Piper, there's nobody like you." And this artful one smiles blandly on Mr. Drencher.

"I have got the work-house, and a case at Roehampton, and I shall be at Shrublands *about two*, Miss Prior," says that young doctor, whom Bedford had called a grinning jackass. He laid an eager emphasis on the *two*. Go to! I know what two and two mean as well as most people, Mr. Drencher! Glances of rage he shot at me from out his gig. The serpents of that miserable Esculapius unwound themselves from his rod, and were gnawing at his swollen heart!

"He has a good practice, Mr. Drencher?" I ask, sly rogue as I am.

"He is very good to mamma and our children. His practice with *them* does not profit him much," says Bessy.

"And I suppose our walk will be over before two o'clock?" remarks that slyboots who is walking with Miss Prior.

"I hope so. Why, it is our dinner-time; and this walk on the Heath does make one so hungry!" cries the governess.

"Bessy Prior," I said, "it is my belief that you no more want spectacles than a cat in the twilight." To which she replied, that I was such a strange, odd man, she really could not understand me.

We were back at Shrublands at two. Of course we must not keep the children's dinner waiting: and of course Mr. Drencher drove up at five minutes past two, with his gig-horse all in a lather. I who knew the secrets of the house was amused to see the furious glances which Bedford darted from the sideboard, or as he served the doctor with cutlets. Drencher, for his part, scowled at me. I, for my part, was easy, witty, pleasant, and, I trust, profoundly wicked and malicious. I bragged about my aristocratic friends to Lady Baker. I trumped her old-world stories about George the Fourth at Dublin with the latest dandified intelligence I had learned at the club. That the young doctor should be dazzled and disgusted was, I own, my wish; and I enjoyed his rage as I saw him choking with jealousy over his victuals.

But why was Lady Baker sulky with me? How came it my fashionable stories had no ef-

fect upon that polite matron? Yesterday at dinner she had been gracious enough; and turning her back upon those poor simple Bonningtons, who knew nothing of the *beau monde* at all, had condescended to address herself specially to me several times with an "I need not tell *you*, Mr. Batchelor, that the Duchess of Dorsetshire's maiden name was De Bobus;" or, "You know very well that the etiquette at the Lord Lieutenant balls, at Dublin Castle, is for the wives of baronets to—" etc., etc.

Now whence, I say, did it arise that Lady Baker, who had been kind and familiar with me on Sunday, should on Monday turn me a shoulder as cold as that lamb which I offered to carve for the family, and which remained from yesterday's quarter? I had thought of staying but two days at Shrublands. I generally am bored at country-houses. I was going away on Monday morning; but Lovel, when he and I and the children and Miss Prior breakfasted together before he went to business, pressed me to stay so heartily and sincerely that I agreed, gladly enough, to remain. I could finish a scene or two of my tragedy at my leisure; besides, there were one or two little comedies going on in the house which inspired me with no little curiosity.

Lady Baker growled at me, then, during lunch-time. She addressed herself in whispers and hints to Mr. Drencher. She had in her own man Bulkeley, and bullied him. She desired to know whether she was to have the barouche or not; and when informed that it was at her ladyship's service, said it was a great deal too cold for the open carriage, and that she would have the brougham. When she was told that Mr. and Mrs. Bonnington had impounded the brougham, she said she had no idea of people taking other people's carriages; and when Mr. Bedford remarked that her ladyship had her choice that morning, and had chosen the barouche, she said, "I didn't speak to you, Sir; and I will thank you not to address me until you are spoken to!" She made the place so hot that I began to wish I had quitted it.

"And pray, Miss Prior, where is Captain Baker to sleep," she asked, "now that the ground-floor room is engaged?"

Miss Prior meekly said, "Captain Baker would have the pink room."

"The room on my landing-place, without double doors? Impossible! Clarence is always smoking. Clarence will fill the whole house with his smoke. He shall *not* sleep in the pink room. I expected the ground-floor room for him, which—a—this gentleman persists in not vacating." And the dear creature looked me full in the face.

"This gentleman smokes, too, and is so comfortable where he is, that he proposes to remain there," I say, with a bland smile.

"Haspic of plovers' eggs, Sir," says Bedford, handing a dish over my back. And he actually gave me a little dig and growled, "Go it—give it her."

"There is a capital inn on the Heath," I con-

tinue, peeling one of my opal favorites. "If Captain Baker must smoke, he may have a room there."

"Sir! my son does not live at inns," cries Lady Baker.

"Oh, grandma! Don't he, though? And wasn't there a row at the Star and Garter; and didn't Pa pay Uncle Clarence's bill there, though?"

"Silence, Popham. Little boys should be seen and not heard," says Cissy. "Shouldn't little boys be seen and not heard, Miss Prior?"

"They shouldn't insult their grandmothers. Oh my Cecilia—my Cecilia!" cries Lady Baker, lifting her hand.

"You sha'n't hit me! I say, you sha'n't hit me!" roars Pop, starting back, and beginning

to square at his enraged ancestress. The scene was growing painful. And there was that rascal of a Bedford choking with suppressed laughter at the sideboard. Bulkeley, her ladyship's man, stood calm as fate; but young Buttons burst out in a guffaw; on which, I assure you, Lady Baker looked as savage as Lady Macbeth.

"Am I to be insulted by my daughter's servants?" cries Lady Baker. "I will leave the house this instant."

"At what hour will your ladyship have the barouche?" says Bedford, with perfect gravity.

If Mr. Drencher had whipped out a lancet and bled Lady B. on the spot, he would have done her good. I shall draw the curtain over this sad—this humiliating scene. Drop, little curtain! on this absurd little act.

Monthly Record of Current Events.

UNITED STATES.

IN Congress, the Post-office deficiency bill having passed the House received several amendments in the Senate, the most important being one which abolished the franking privilege. The House refusing to concur in this amendment, the Senate receded, and the bill was passed.—In the Senate a bill abolishing the franking privilege has been passed.—In the House Mr. Sherman, from the Committee on Ways and Means, reported a bill reducing the mileage of members from forty cents a mile to twenty, and computing the distance in a straight line instead of by the route actually traveled; the bill passed in the House by a vote of 154 to 21.—Upon motions by Mr. Covode, of Pennsylvania, and Mr. Hoard, of New York, Committees have been appointed in the House to investigate certain charges of corruption and bribery made against the Administration.—In the Senate Mr. Wigfall proposed an appropriation of \$1,100,000 for the support of a regiment of mounted volunteers to defend the frontiers of Texas.—The subject of the enormous expenditures for Public Printing has occupied considerable attention in both Houses.

In the Senate Mr. Davis, of Mississippi, presented a series of seven resolutions which had been drawn up in a caucus of the Democratic Members. They affirm: 1. That in the adoption of the Federal Constitution the States acted as sovereigns; and that any attempt by any State, or the citizens thereof, to interfere with the domestic institutions of another is in violation of the Constitution, and tends to weaken and destroy the Union. 2. That negro slavery, as it exists in fifteen States of the Union, is an important portion of their domestic institutions; that no change of opinion in the non-slaveholding States, in relation to this institution, can justify them or their citizens in open or covert attacks upon it, with a view to its overthrow; and that such attacks are a manifest breach of faith, and a violation of the most solemn obligations. 3. That the Union of the States rests on the equality of rights and privileges among its members; and that it is the special duty of the Senate, which represents the States in their sovereign capacity, to resist all attempts so to discriminate in the Territories between the person or property of citizens of the States. 4. That neither Congress nor a Territorial Legislature possesses

the power, directly or indirectly, to impair the right of any citizen to take his slaves into any Territory and to hold them while the Territorial condition remains. 5. That if at any time experience should prove that the Judiciary and Executive authority do not possess the means to secure protection to constitutional rights in a Territory, and if the Territorial governments should fail to provide the necessary remedies, it will be the duty of Congress to supply the deficiency. 6. That the inhabitants of a Territory, when they rightfully form a Constitution to be admitted as a State, have, for the first time, a right to decide whether Slavery shall be maintained or prohibited; and if Congress admit them as a State, they shall be received with or without Slavery, as their Constitution may prescribe at the time of their admission. 7. That the provision of the Constitution for the rendition of fugitives from service of labor, and the laws to secure its execution, should be faithfully observed; and that all acts of individuals or State Legislatures to defeat or nullify that provision or those laws, are hostile in character, subversive of the Constitution, and revolutionary in their effects.—Mr. Brown, of Mississippi, who had offered a series of resolutions upon the same subject objected to the fourth and fifth of these resolutions. He thought that Congress ought not to wait for any further experience in regard to necessary action. He argued that slaves were property in the same sense as sheep and oxen, yet thousands of slaves were annually run off to Canada. If he had his way, he would file an immediate notice to the British Minister that unless Canada yielded up the stolen negroes, this Government would use all legal means to force her to do so, and in case this was not sufficient, would go to war.

Mr. Seward presented to the Senate the memorial of the Legislature of Kansas, praying for admission into the Union; supporting it in an elaborate speech setting forth his views upon slavery as a political issue, and the position of the Republican and Democratic parties in relation to it. He reiterated at length his well-known views in relation to the institution. In the Slave States, he said, the laborer was regarded not as a person, but as capital; in the Free States, he was invested with the rights of personality, and generally of citizenship. In the one case, capital invested in slaves becomes a great political force; in the other, labor, thus enfranchised