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Revelation.

By Frank H. Shaw.



I T was on the last night but one of the session that Creighton found himself. Catching the Speaker's eye, he rose in his place and began to speak. With some diffidence he faltered through his preliminaries, and then, growing bolder, he launched forth into his theme with an eloquence and a passion that enchained his hearers. Dissident murmurs were drowned at their birth. Men who had sat there for hours, bored beyond expression, roused themselves and glanced with interest at the tall young figure with the earnest face and the glowing eyes. Those on the front benches began to turn their heads, restlessly at first, but their restlessness vanished as the impassioned periods volleyed among the benches and rang in the vaulted roof.

After a speech that had lasted forty-five minutes, and had been listened to with an interest that the House never remembered, Creighton sat down amid a burst of ringing applause.

Men craned over towards him, and patted him on the back. Though the Speaker and stood nervously determined, his voice could not penetrate the din. It was not a question of party interests that had occupied Creighton's intellectual tirade; it was a national matter of all-consuming import, and he knew, as he took his seat, that he had carried his point. The House rose in a tumult, and Creighton passed out into the open air, his mind in a whirl, his heart beating strangely, his head swimming with the intoxication of sudden success, than which, perhaps, there is no sweeter, more subtle intoxication known.

The chief of his party stopped him just as he was leaving, and held out his hand.

"You should go far," said the great man, with a smile that was both sad and encouraging, for he, too, had been young, and knew the taste of the wonderful joy that comes to him who has striven and won worthily. Even the leader of the Opposition had a friendly nod for the young member for East Kilbride, and many another man who had had his chance—and failed—bestowed ungrudging praise of word and look on the hero of the moment.

Carried out of himself, Creighton passed to the Terrace and looked down on the swirling tide of the Thames. The lights of the opposite shore were reflected wanly in the turbid flood; the steady swirl and rush of the headlong waters were in keeping with his thoughts. For a moment, a whimsicality of mental twisting allowed the young man to compare himself with the stream that flowed beneath him. Was he like it? he asked himself. Should he go forward, ever widening, growing in importance with every stride, until he bore on his shoulders the very welfare of a nation? But another thought struck him close on the heels of the first. The Thames was of vast importance to the land he served, but presently, flowing onward through the world's richest city, the river became merged in the sea and was lost to human ken.

Even so might he fare. Public acclaim was an uncertain thing. He had carried his hearers with him on a flood-tide of rhetoric, had swept away the oppositions of those who would have stayed him, but—what was it all worth? Did it mean ultimate submergence, a sinking of his identity in the myriad identities of those others who, in common with himself, flocked daily to the House? "Rather a startler tonight."

The words came to him faintly, but he straightened himself instinctively, for his own heart told him they referred to what had gone before. A couple of shadowy figures leaned over the balustrade, and Creighton could not avoid overhearing.

"Creighton will climb very high," said another voice, which he recognized with a thrill as the voice of a very great man

indeed. "I shouldn't be surprised if that speech of his carries him to the top. Not directly, of course; but I foresee an Under-Secretaryship almost immediately. There aren't many strong men, and he's undoubtedly strong. I heard Sir Edward Freshman call him 'The new Pitt' five minutes ago."

Creighton craned forward, but the night was dark, and he could not distinguish the features of the speaker. He knew, however, from the thrill in his voice that he was in earnest. Wave after wave of exultation surged through the young man. He felt all the glow of a conqueror, and the sweetness of his success was still unembittered. That would come on the morrow, perhaps, when the newspapers took up the tale and spoke their mind, unaffected by the personal magnetism of the man who had stirred his listeners to the core.

"Great promise," said the voice that had first spoken. "Great promise. But then, many others have shown great promise, too. I only hope Creighton won't fall suddenly, as suddenly as he has risen. One can never tell. But if I were in his place, with my life before me, untrammelled, rich, I'd never stop until I'd raised myself to the very top of the tree. That's his chief asset, the fact of his being unhampered. Once a man marries, he's done. If he marries a political woman she starts a salon, and then—well, the men whose wives have salons don't go very far. There can't be two strong souls under one roof without disaster. If he marries a sweet, clinging woman, love proves fatal. No man can serve two masters, especially today. Political success is a master that requires undivided attention. Love also is another insistent dominie. He who tried to love a woman and make a Parliamentary career would fall between two stools, and the end would be very much worse than the beginning."

"So that's your opinion, is it? Well, there's truth in it, too. But I venture to predict that if Creighton remains unmarried, and if he follows up the promise of tonight by the practice of the future, he'll be Prime Minister before he's thirty-five. The country's waiting for him. If that speech had been made against the Government, the whole country would have risen, and demanded an election. He'll go far, once he's got rid of his personal note, and learnt to make himself a part of the machinery. His egotism came out here and there, you know; but that's youth more than anything else."

"Yes; and that egotism is just the downfall of the many. That's where marriage is fatal to success. For if the man marries, his egotism becomes more rampant than ever. It's fanned by the gentle admiration of the one woman, or it's called into the action by the opposition of the one woman, if the wife happens to be of the militant sort."

"But then, Sir Frederick, you're a misogynist."

"And why shouldn't I be? Good Heavens, my heart bleeds for my sex when I see the careers that have been sacrificed on the altars of a woman's demands. Look at Sidney, look at Wentworth, look at half a dozen in the House tonight. If Creighton is a wise man, he'll climb alone, and then—we shall see."

They strolled away, leaving the member for East Kilbride vaguely torn by conflicting emotions.

"And that's what it all turns on?" he said to himself, his eyes still fixed unseeing on the river. "Love and success cannot mix. They're oil and water. Well, what has it to be? There's Marjorie on the one hand, and the high places of the world on the other. And it's come to this: that tonight I must make my choice. Love versus Greatness. And God knows how I want to be great!"

He roused himself, conscious that the clammy night was chilling him to the bone. The remembrance of his sensational speech was dimming before the rush of other thoughts now. One face seemed to grow up on the background