THE PRIMROSE LEAGUE.

When it was announced that the Hon. Lilian Curzon—the energetic organizer of the Primrose league—was desirous of establishing a Dames' habitation at Snobton, the conservative ladies of that little town were thrown into a flutter of delicious excitement. As the Snobton people were very conservative, and the women even more so than the men, it was not strange that the Hon. Lilian's project was received with enthusiasm.

No doubt the enthusiasm of most of the ladies was due to real political feeling, but it would scarcely be uncharitable to say that with many it was largely the result of a desire to mingle with their betters, so that if the scheme had been proposed by the vicar's wife instead of by a peer's daughter they would have received it much more coolly. Among ladies of the latter class the chief was Mrs. Tallow, the wife of a wealthy butter merchant of that name. Mrs. Tallow was probably a thorough tory, but she was unquestionably a complete flunkey. If she believed in tory principles it was by faith alone, since she knew nothing about them—a default for which she may the more readily be excused, as since Lord Randolph Churchill came to the front it has become extremely common among people better informed and more discerning than she. But her belief—whatever it may have been—in toryism was as nothing compared with her reverence for lords and ladies. She worshipped these with an unutterable love and devotion, and ever since her butter-dealing husband began to heap up a fortune it was the ambition of her life to use it to bring her nearer these gods and goddesses of her idolatry.

This ambition her husband appeared not to share. He discouraged all her efforts in that direction, and for a long time she was compelled to pine in the obscurity of her own class. She was past middle age, and as yet the vicar and his family were the most fashionable of her acquaintances, and she could not conceal from herself that even they scarcely recognized her as an equal. She had almost abandoned her ambition as hopeless, when it was roused to life again by her receipt of the circular about the Primrose league. To be sure, it was only a printed circular, but it was directed by the instructions, perhaps by the hand, of Hon. Lilian Curzon; and, properly used, it might be made the means of establishing an acquaintance with this lady. Mrs. Tallow resolved not to let such a chance slip.

A very short time spent in reflection was enough to decide the course she should take. She would at once write, in reply to the circular, and assure the Hon. Lilian of her enthusiastic support, and place her services at her disposal. She did so, and, to her inexpressible joy, next day's post brought her a reply in the Hon. Lilian's own handwriting. It thanked her for her offer and accepted it, requesting her at the same time to call a meeting of the conservative ladies of Snobton to discuss the project and make preliminary arrangements. When these were finished, if Mrs. Tallow would kindly inform her, Miss Curzon would be glad to attend the inaugural meeting.

Mrs. Tallow at once accepted this duty, and without delay sent a circular to the other Snobton ladies, stating that by request of Miss Curzon, she desired the honor of their attendance at a meeting at her house for the purpose of making arrangements for establishing a Dames' habitation of the Primrose league. On the day appointed many ladies attended. Mrs. Tallow presided, and she noticed with delight her hearers' envious looks, when, in her address from the chair, she referred to the communication which had passed between herself and her friend, Hon. Lilian Curzon. The vicar's wife, who expected to have the carrying out of the arrangements herself, was particularly cross; and when, after the meeting was over, she left in company of some of the more genteel folk present, she told them that she felt no very warm interest in the undertaking, as ever since tory democracy came into fashion, conservatism was nearly as bad as radicalism; it was continually truckling to the lower classes.

These remarks, it may be guessed, soon found their way to Mrs. Tallow's ears, but she only laughed at them. The vicar's wife might be as bitter as she pleased; Mrs. Tallow had the trump cards in her hand, and knew it. Every day notes passed between her and Hon. Lilian; and once the latter even called at her house and discussed the arrangements over a cup of afternoon tea. When that got abroad in Snobton, the vicar's wife herself felt bound to treat Mrs. Tallow with more than ordinary respect.

It had been resolved to call the habitation the "Curzon" in honor of the Hon. Lilian, but just before the inaugural meeting was to take place, Mrs. Tallow received a note from another still greater lady, the wife of Lord Roughshod's eldest son, in which she declared her intention of becoming a member. Mrs. Tallow was overjoyed by this communication from so distinguished a person, and summoned a meeting of the provisional committee to consider how they should recognize the honor the viscountess had done them by joining their habitation. The vicar's wife suggested a measure which was carried unanimously. It was that the habitation should be called after both the viscountess and the Hon. Lilian; that it should be, in fact, "The Curzon [illegible]waren habitation." The proposal was accordingly communicated to the two ladies, and in due course it received their cordial approval.

The warrant having been duly received, the inaugural meeting was held. It was a red-letter day in Mrs. Tallow's calendar. The viscountess and her eldest boy, Hon. Cecil Terrington, and Hon. Lilian Curzon dined at her house before going to the meeting. The vicar and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Pewter, of the brewery, and several more of the most wealthy and respectable inhabitants of Snobton were of the company. Both the great ladies were most kind and condescending, and delighted everybody. Even Mr. Tallow, who was suspected of radicalism, melted under the sunshine of their smiles.

After dinner they all attended the inaugural meeting. The viscountess occupied the chair, and was appointed president of the habitation. Miss Curzon was elected ruling councillor, Mrs. Tallow honorable secretary, and the vicar's wife had to be content with a seat on the executive council. The proceedings went off without a hitch, and when the meeting was dissolved Mrs. Tallow received the congratulations and thanks of the viscountess and the Hon. Lilian for the skill and tact with which all the arrangements had been made.

Mrs. Tallow's position of secretary gave her many opportunities of communicating with the viscountess and Miss Curzon, which she did not neglect and they did not discourage. Miss Curzon was much interested in, and the viscountess much amused by, the doings of the Dames, and both were glad to hear from Mrs. Tallow. That lady proved indeed an indefatigable secretary, and soon made the habitation very prosperous.

It has already been said that Mr. Tallow did not at first share his wife's ambition to become a member of fashionable society; this, however, was owing to his belief in its hopelessness; but her brilliant success in connection with the habitation at once changed his mind, and he became even a greater votary of fashion than she. He, too, joined the Primrose league, and became a knight harbinger (though he never knew exactly what that meant), and, as in his wife's case, his connection with it brought him into contact with some distinguished persons. Viscount Swaren, who had some intention of becoming a candidate for Snobton, found he had need of advice on various occasions, and Captain Cash, the sitting member, whom the noble viscount desired to oust, became quite his friend. In fact, Mr. Tallow was so much involved in politics that he had little time to attend to the fluctuations of the butter market, so he determined to retire altogether from a business which circumstances had made both unprofitable and distasteful to him.

It was a month or two after Mr. Tallow had become a private gentleman that he broached a project to his lady which surprised and delighted her. One morning, as they were seated at late breakfast—they had been dining the previous night with Captain Cash (whose family were in town) at Moneymore house, his seat near Snobton—he suddenly said, "Mariar, I was thinking we oughter go to London."

"Yes," said Mrs. Tallow, "it would be very pleasant to go there for a day or two."

"I don't mean that," answered Mr. Tallow; "I mean I was thinking we should go up for the season. All the nobs do that, you know."

Mrs. Tallow gazed at her husband in amazement, which, when his serious countenance showed her he was not joking, changed into delight.

"You don't mean it, William, do you?" she asked.

"Yes, Mariar, I do," replied Mr. Tallow, resolutely. "I've been thinking that as we're pretty rich, and have no children to provide for, we should enjoy ourselves. What's the use of having money if we don't enjoy ourselves? We're richer than some who do. There's Lord Bleaklands—his estate ain't large, and every acre of it's mortgaged; yet he goes every year and keeps his house there. Why, I say, shouldn't we?"

"I don't see any reason, William," said Mrs. Tallow, trying to hide her ecstacy.

"Then, you see," continued Mr. Tallow, "we ain't like most rich traders; we know a crowd of swells, and are sure to do well in society. There's the viscount and viscountess and their family, and the Hon. Miss Curzon, and Captain Cash, M. P.—lord bless you, I know Cash as well as I know you! We're sure to get heaps of invitations to big dinners and balls, and swarries where we'll meet more swells, and make the acquaintance of the leaders of our party."

"I'm sure of it, William," said Mrs. Tallow.

"Yes, Mariar," repeated Mr. Tallow, looking very seriously into his wife's face. "Yes, we'll make the acquaintance of the leaders of our party. I ain't exactly sure who they are just now, but I'm certain we'll meet them, and I'm very anxious to do so, because, Mariar, let me tell you, I'm a bit ambitious."

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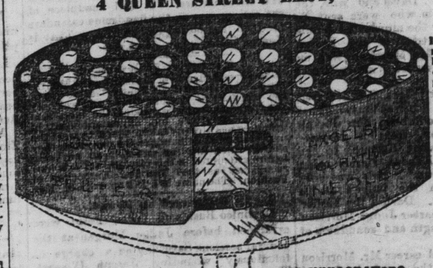
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