

There is nothing to do, of course, at the Zoological after you have been to see some of your favourite animals. There are always a few of these in fashion, and you 'do' these rigorously. This object accomplished, you concentrate your attention upon trying to get chairs, a pleasing pursuit which passes away an hour very well. As everybody tries to get chairs, I suppose they are the unsuccessful candidates who walk about; and it is well that somebody should so disport themselves, otherwise sitting would be comparatively dull work.

An elderly gentleman, to whom I wish to call your attention, has been foraging for seats ever since he entered the gardens. He has not regarded the chase, like more philosophical persons, as an incidental piece of amusement, and has been actually out of temper at the delay. But see, he has at last brought down his game, and comes upon the grass with a chair in each hand; and his satisfaction is complete when, on joining two ladies who form his party, he finds that one of them has found a seat for herself. As he also is thus saved from standing you might suppose that he would begin to be amiable. But he does nothing of the kind. He dislikes the place and the people also, and, as he says, doesn't care who knows it. A more insane way of passing the afternoon he cannot conceive, and he expresses his dissatisfaction in audible terms. He is a portly person with a pink face, dresses scrupulously in black, with a white cravat of a previous period of society, and a big diamond brooch in the bosom of his shirt which 'would buy half Northumberland,' if half Northumberland happened to be for sale. Both his pink face and his portliness are appearances in his favour. Neither is too pronounced, and both draw that nice line between prosperity and apoplexy which one always rejoices to see in elderly gentlemen.

Of the two ladies one is evidently his wife and the other apparently his daughter.

His wife is tall, stately, and reserved; grandly rather than gaily dressed, like many courtly persons of her period in life whom one meets in the exclusive circles of Madame Tussaud—persons whose manners have considerably more than the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere; for so little influenced are they by vulgar emotion that a condescending inclination of the head, or a haughty turn of that appendage upon their aristocratic shoulders, are all the signs they deign to make of taking the smallest interest in their fellow-creatures. The lady in question has evidently modelled herself upon one of these courtly dames. You can see at a glance that her ideas of good-breeding are entirely of a negative character; and without overhearing any family conversation you may be sure that she tells her daughter not to do this and not to do that, because great people never do any thing of the kind, neglecting, of course, to add what it is that great people *do* do, and in what respects the nature of their activity differs from that of little people.

Her daughter, ah! her daughter is very different. You have heard some account of her in the artless criticism of Mr. Shorncliffe; for—there need be no mystery in the matter—she is indeed the unknown enchantress of the Plungers' ball! But Mr. Shorncliffe, with all his enthusiasm and powers of description, did nothing like justice to her loveliness, which in its general character was like that of a lolling lily, if you can fancy a lolling lily with an aggressive abundance of chestnut hair and eyes the colour of the corn-flower. She has, as Mr. Shorncliffe observed, an ivory delicacy of surface; but that gentleman forgot to mention the pale coral tints that gave it relief. I am bound to admit also, on my own account, that I have never beheld a lily, lolling or otherwise, arrayed to such purpose in pale blue. It was Solomon in all his glory and the lily combined.

But it will save trouble to tell you at once who these people are.

Mr. Surbiton is principally known for having made a great deal of money. It is a very good reputation to have, and will carry its subject a considerable way into society. It is not quite understood how the money had been made, except, I suppose, by Mr. Surbiton's old and more immediate friends; but he is supposed to have begun in a very small way and ended in a very large way, and being now retired he is of course in no way at all. But do not suppose that people in general care in what particular line of business the money had been made, and very few would trouble themselves on the subject but for Mrs. Surbiton's horror at any hint of her husband having been in trade, which makes her friends laugh occasionally, and of course tends to keep the fact before their eyes. Two-thirds of her life, I should think, are passed in trying to conceal what she considers this family disgrace, and, as far as any degree of success is concerned, she might as well proclaim it periodically from the house-tops. Her main object at the present time is to effect an aristocratic alliance with her daughter. That young lady, by the way, is happily uninfluenced by the peculiarities of her parents. Being no more than seventeen or eighteen years of age, she is not able to remember the humbler state of the family, and having been educated away from home she is unaffected by any of its traditions.

Scarcely have Mr. and Mrs. Surbiton and their daughter taken possession of their chairs than they are joined by a gentleman, a stranger, who addresses himself to the head of the family in a manner indicative of some special errand.

But I must here leave them to note a scene which is enacting in another part of the gardens.

Harry Doncaster has been two or three times up and down that long walk where the walkers seem to congregate for the amusement of the people in chairs. He has performed the process with some impatience, having an object in view apart from being stared at. But his glances right and left are evidently not rewarded by the sight of some persons of whom he seems to be in quest, and after mingling for a few minutes with the crowd on the grass he turns away as if for the purpose of being alone. His mood is plainly not a pleasant one, and he seems preoccupied to an extent incompatible with enjoyment of the Zoological. So he sits under a tree and has an interview with himself—a very unsatisfactory interview, I should

say, judging from his frowns and occasional ejaculations. It would end in a violent quarrel, I have no doubt, but for a diversion caused by the appearance of a stranger.

Harry Doncaster, being rather slender in figure than otherwise, did not occupy the entire seven or eight feet of the bench upon which he had chosen to rest; so the stranger availed himself of the vacant accommodation. This stranger was one of the most agreeable persons you ever beheld. He was not a fat man, but he was certainly a plump man, with a beaming, radiant presence, confirmed by his face, which was so happy and healthy, smiling and benevolent, as to be irresistibly attractive. A sanguine complexion and sandy hair may have something to do with the prevailing effect, but the genial nature of the stranger shone especially in his eyes.

Harry Doncaster, preoccupied though he was, could not avoid notice of these characteristics; so when the stranger spoke to him he did not resent the intrusion, but showed himself to be favourably impressed.

'You do not remember me, Captain Doncaster?' said the stranger.

Captain Doncaster could not dispute the proposition. The stranger continued—

'No doubt you do not; you were a small boy when we used to meet. But I was well acquainted with your father, the late viscount—was, I may say, his friend, and had the pleasure of obliging him in many ways. Always happy to do it, too, having the greatest respect for him and his family. Besides, it's always better to make friends than enemies, and every man has it in his power to do some good in his generation if he only has his heart in the right place.'

Harry Doncaster was charmed to hear such generous sentiments, and professed some hereditary gratitude for the services rendered to his father, not that he knew their nature, but he guessed they might have been of a pecuniary character.

'You do remember my name, I dare say,' pursued his obliging neighbour—'Matthew Harcastle.'

Harry Doncaster thought he remembered it—was not sure—yes, he certainly—it seemed familiar to him—he must have heard it at home when he was young.

'Ah! I thought you had not forgotten my name, at any rate,' said Mr. Harcastle, with a pleasant chuckle; 'and now let me tell you why I have recalled myself to your recollection. Frankly, I wish to render you a service. There is too little sympathy in this world between man and man; we ought all to do more for one another than we do; the curse of the world is selfishness.'

'My dear sir,' said Harry Doncaster, 'it is charming to hear you express such noble sentiments, but I am not aware in what manner you can do me a service. I am full of troubles, but they are of a nature very difficult to provide for, and a stranger—'

'Not a stranger,' interrupted Mr. Harcastle, taking Harry's hand and grasping it with much warmth; 'say a friend. It is indeed in my power to render you a service, and fortunately it is not necessary to test my friendliness by any sacrifice on my own part. The service I am able to render you will cost me nothing. On the contrary, I shall be a gainer by conferring an obligation in another quarter, not a pecuniary obligation of course. What I mean is that I shall gain the lasting gratitude of the family of one of my oldest friends, and that is payment to me enough. Nobody ever said that Matt Harcastle ever did a good action only for money, though that perhaps is no merit of mine. I don't know what I might have done had I been poor, and we must always be charitable to the errors of needy men. Happily I have always been beyond the reach of temptation.'

'You puzzle me,' said Captain Doncaster, 'who thought that his new friend would indeed be a clever fellow if he could do anything for him. But he remembered that he had read of equally wonderful things in the 'Arabian Nights' Entertainments.'

'Now, let me be frank with you,' Mr. Harcastle continued. 'I know your position at the present moment to be one of great embarrassment. I know that you have for years past spent a great deal more than your income. You have had expectations, doubtless, and were justified in so doing; but these expectations have not been realized as yet, and you have no time to wait for them. I know that besides a—if I may so call it—somewhat reckless personal expenditure, pardonable in a young man of family belonging to an expensive regiment, you have been unfortunate in horses and have dropped a little at cards. You have met debts of honour by contracting legal obligations. There are some of them considerably over due, and unless—in the immortal words of our friend Micawber—"something turns up" for you, you may be considered in the light of a ruined man.'

Harry was obliged to own that this was but too faithful a picture of his state and prospects in life; but he expressed some surprise that Mr. Harcastle should have arrived at so accurate a knowledge of his condition.

'Never mind how I came to know it,' said that gentleman in his most genial manner; 'I know a great many things about a great many people that they little suspect. The fact is that I have rather a speciality for doing friendly offices for people in my humble way, and such cases reach my ears sooner than they reach those of most men. Now there is only one way of extricating yourself from your difficulties, and that one way is—marriage.'

Harry Doncaster was deeply disappointed at the nature of the remedy proposed. As if he had never thought of it before! Why, it is the first idea that occurs to every spendthrift who is hard pressed. Harry did not avow this contemptuous opinion, however, but contented himself with saying—

'I am much obliged, my dear sir, for your suggestion, and I must confess it had occurred to me before. But there has always been this difficulty in the way. I have a prejudice against marrying a woman I don't like, and I have hitherto been unable to combine the necessary conditions. When I have liked, or fancied that I have liked, a girl, she has always turned out to be without a penny, and richer than myself only through having no debts. On the other hand, women with fortunes sufficiently large to enable them to take me, debts and all, have always

been objectionable persons one way or another, besides being mostly cads. Indeed, women in my own rank of life are not to be had under the conditions, and I have never found any with money enough whom I cared even to ask. I am not very particular about grade, but in any grade I have always met with the same difficulty. As for selling myself entirely for the benefit of my creditors, I have not quite arrived at that pitch of heroism. Of the two I prefer the creditors to the kind of wife I could get—they may ruin me, but they cannot force me to suffer my ruin in their society.'

'But if I could introduce you to a lady whom you would be sure to like?'

'Thank you very much, my dear sir,' rejoined Harry Doncaster, somewhat decidedly, and getting rather red in the face, 'I have reasons, at the present time, for not being prepared to make the experiment.'

'An attachment already formed, eh? Excuse me—I am an older man than you—for asking the question. It is so, I see by your face. No doubt it does you honour, and so do all the sentiments you have expressed. It is something strange to meet with the finer feelings in a man who has passed through your career. But supposing that I could assist you with the object of your choice?'

'My dear sir, I have not told you that I have any choice, and I repeat—'

'Now, my dear friend, don't make a stranger of me, who only wish to oblige you. It is just possible that your choice—or shall I call it your fancy?—is but a few days old.'

'You are certainly determined, Mr. Harcastle, to know as much as I know myself.'

'It is not improbable that you never yet spoke to the lady?'

'Mr. Harcastle, I—'

'That you do not even know her name?'

'You are most determined in your interrogatories.'

'That you never saw her but once—at a ball?'

'Well, you evidently know something about it,' said Harry Doncaster, his first instinct of resentment appeased as he found his obliging friend really as well informed as he pretended to be.

'Supposing, then, as I have said, I could introduce you to the lady in question?'

'You would indeed please me, but I know not to what it could lead. To tell you the truth, I came here on purpose to see her; but even had I seen her I should scarcely have ventured to introduce myself, for I have no right to suppose that either she or her family desired to meet me, and the only excuse I had for intruding I have somehow lost.'

'You have lost the glove, then?'

'And you know about the glove?'

'Yes. I agree with you that they were not likely to advertise for such a very unimportant article, and it would certainly be strange if they advertised for you.'

'That is just what occurred to me. And you have seen the advertisement too?'

'Well, I have heard about it. But you won't want the glove if I present you myself.'

Harry Doncaster could not withstand the temptation; and in a few minutes the pair were in the midst of the promenaders, and peering in every direction among the occupants of the much-coveted chairs.

I left the Surbiton party taking their rest, and being joined by a stranger. You may guess who it was—Mr. Shorncliffe, of course.

Mr. Shorncliffe rushed in where Captain Doncaster feared to tread; but he considered himself the lesser fool of the two on that account, and I suppose he was in the right.

Lifting his hat with a half recognition of the ladies, this enterprising gentleman addressed himself to Mr. Surbiton, who rose from his seat with a certain air of deference; for Mr. Shorncliffe's manners were imposing—to Mr. Surbiton, at any rate.

'I have taken the liberty of intruding upon you here,' said Mr. Shorncliffe, with composed audacity, 'in obedience to your hint.'

'My hint, sir,' replied Mr. Surbiton, surprised out of politeness. 'What do you mean?'

'Mean, sir! Is it possible that you have forgotten the Plungers—the Dragoon Guards' ball at Brighton, and the advertisement in the "South Down Reporter"? I am the finder of the glove.'

The latter communication was conveyed in a low, confidential tone, as if it bore the weight of a state secret. Poor Mr. Surbiton was sorely perplexed. As soon as he could find words to reply, he said—

'Ball! Yes, I remember the ball, and a very dull affair it was. But what the deuce you mean by the advertisement and the glove I can't say. You must take me for somebody else, or have gone clean out of your senses.'

And here the horrible idea seized upon Mr. Surbiton that he had to do with a lunatic of a dangerous kind; so, with a precautionary instinct as creditable to him as his promptitude of action, he seized the chair upon which he had been sitting, covered himself with it, and covered the ladies with it, while awaiting a further demonstration on the other side.

The attitude was so unusual at the Zoological as to attract the attention of several bystanders; but they were well-bred persons, and did not precipitate a scene. The ladies, if not alarmed, felt very awkwardly placed, and Mrs. Surbiton told her husband in quiet, but commanding tones, to resume his seat, and hear what the gentleman had to say.

'I can assure you, sir,' continued Mr. Shorncliffe, rather amused than otherwise, and speaking round the chair for the benefit of the ladies, 'that I am not a madman, but am most pleasantly in my senses, and that I have intruded myself upon you simply because I supposed you desired my presence.'

(To be continued.)