

for I had spoken my mind, and was willing enough to leave such a subject, more especially when I remembered that it was our last night.

After a good deal of chat, and in a very thick atmosphere of smoke, I wished him farewell deep in the small hours, as an Englishman does, without any display of feeling, though we knew it would be at least a ten years' parting. "Good-bye, old boy," I said; "and me a line now and then, and tell me when your wings are clipped."

"Good-bye, my dear Tracy; be quick and kill off all the Nabobs. One last word of advice,—be sure you don't marry a Begum in blue!"

Next morning the good ship "Glendower" bore me slowly to my adopted country. For fourteen years I ministered to enlarged livers, and mingled in the gaiety of Indian life at a pleasant station. Having left few friends behind me, I seldom heard much domestic intelligence from the old country. "You ought to have at least three sisters if you go to India; no letters are so amusing after all, as theirs. One mail came wedding cards indeed from the Hon. John Francis Arden, my old friend Jack, and Mrs. J. F. Arden, *née* Julia Harrington. I wrote and congratulated him duly. Then the mutiny burst like a meteor on the country; I was besieged in a compound at R— with a handful of Europeans. The Sepoys battered at us from an intrenchment hastily thrown up. We sallied out and stormed it; I saw a tall mutineer in front, as I leapt through their rattle embrasure, and made at him with my regulation blade. It shivered on his wooden shield; he raised his tulwar, and next moment I should have been cut down, but ere the blow fell my supporters had planted a sheaf of bayonets in his breast. I rushed on, but a ball laid me low, and when I recovered consciousness, I found the day our own, our compound relieved, and myself ordered off to England next mail, as the only chance for my life.

It was a dull foggy November evening when I reached London. To a man who has long been expatriated no solitude is greater than Bond Street; it was with the greatest joy therefore that I fell in with Arden two days after my arrival. He was now in Parliament, and a very glutton of statistics. It was soon settled that after I had finished my business in town I should visit him at Blackmoor.

A few days afterwards I was whirled along the South Western to Devonshire. Working, with its melancholy grave-stones, looking like so many white garden pyres stuck in a park, as you hurry past, was left behind; the vast Fleet Pond was crossed; soon we were in the dreary country of Templecombe and Milborne Port. Who on earth lives there, that trains should require to stop in that wilderness? Then we had a glimpse of Ford Abbey, another nap, and I awoke to find myself flying through the cider orchards and valleys round Honiton. The Blackmoor carriage soon brought me to the Hall, and I descended light and refreshed, like Hercules himself, to the dining-room.

It was not a large party, and I had a particularly silent partner, who was more attentive to the *entrées* than to your humble servant, so I had leisure to contemplate Mrs. Arden. She was a very pretty blonde, rose-checked, bright-eyed, and smiling at every word she uttered. Jack was always a good-humoured fellow, I reflected; here for once you see the husband mirrored in the wife; who could ever be snappish to that woman, who looks like the caricature of cheerfulness?

We adjourned to the drawing-room. Some one sang "*Di tanti palpiti*." I was leisurely chatting to Mrs. Arden, and thinking what a lucky fellow Jack was to marry such a pretty and sensible woman, when the final cadence seemed to touch a long silent chord within me. Joining the group round the piano, I found Miss Vandeleur at the instrument.

Kate was an old flame, and we were speedily on the best of terms. She was strapping with the Awdry's she told me, at Kilton Park.—Awdry himself soon came up, and, seeing how matters stood, asked me over to look up the pheasants for a few days.

Jack had evidently forgotten all about our conversation on madness before I left home so many years ago, and I could not quite ask him whether he married the obnoxious lady I had inveighed against that evening. Neither could I satisfy myself whether Mrs. Arden were that lady. Every now and then I fancied a shade came over her usual serenity. It might be an index of the terrible power slumbering within, or again, I thought prosaically, it might be indigestion.

The Ardens drove me over to Kilton, and I was soon head-over-ears in love with Kate Vandeleur. I am not going to inflict upon you our lovenaking; suffice it to say that in a week Kate and I were engaged.

I had not paid much attention to the pheasants, and, beyond fancying Mrs. Awdry rather a shrew, had found no leisure for aught but the attentions a man must show a pretty girl in a country house, particularly when he is engaged to her. One evening in December, in the pleasant glow of the large drawing-room, Kate and I were chatting at the piano, oblivious of else than ourselves, when she suddenly looked up and saw Mrs. Awdry leave her work-table and walk to the west window.

Kate jumped up and ran to her.

"My dear Mrs. Awdry! six-fifty, and we have not gone upstairs even! What will your husband say?"

"Never mind, Miss Vandeleur; come here."

The two stood together in the embrasure of the window, and I could not help admiring them from my snug seat at the fire. They were about the same stature; but how different in face! The faint lamp burning in the window amongst the camellias and cyruses, flung its pale glow upon their countenances, and while Mrs. Awdry was solemn and awe-struck, with her flaxen hair gathered into a simple mass behind, Kate was laughing turgively, and wreathed in smiles for my benefit, and her dark hair and eyebrows stood out in strong relief against the melow amber light.

"Do you see those gloomy clouds away in the west, Miss Vandeleur?"

"To be sure, Mrs. Awdry; but how dark and chilly they are. Shall I light your candle?"

"Stop here, child," said Mrs. Awdry, seizing Kate's arm earnestly, "do you believe in omens?" and then she pointed to the dark background, while Kate, now somewhat awe-struck too, followed her glance.

A light radiance seemed floating in the west. Soon a bright point seemed struggling on through the sky, a moment more and the full moon burst forth in all its splendour, and what seemed clouds proved to be mountains, down which a flood of soft light poured, showing us a

fair prospect of valley and hill, through which every now and then a roof glistened, or a torrent flashed down the precipice like a stream of silver. Then a cloud-veil drifted over the moon, and all again became obscure.

"How very beautiful!" exclaimed Kate, and we were all silent for a moment.

Something seemed to have excited Mrs. Awdry strangely, for she still held Kate and pointed to the west.

"Well, I will light candles," said that young lady, and having done so joined me at the fireside.

A few minutes more and the gong at the top of the stairs roared its summons to dinner. How I hate gongs! They are detestable at dinner-time, but who shall describe their horror in the morning? You are in the calmest of dreams; a moment more and the Princess Camaralzaman will lay her hand in yours, when "rooh! ooh! ooh!" out rings that frightful tocsin, and you leap up most valiantly and snatch at what should be a sword, to find that you have been tricked, and that, now you are once out of bed, it is no use getting in again. My malison on the whole race of gongs! from the little ones you see advertised "to alarm burglars," to those full-blown monstrosities "able to rouse a whole parish."

Dinner passed in a mood less merry than usual. Mrs. Awdry seemed very *distrainé*. Awdry himself, a man of rather obtuse perceptions, conversed with Mrs. Arden of magistrates' business and shorthorns. Making every allowance for her weariness of these topics, I, who was listening to Jack, could see that his wife was ill at ease about something else. Mrs. Awdry had some whim about leaving one of the dining-room windows with the blind up and no shutters drawn. It was just behind me and opposite Mrs. Arden; I glanced round and saw the moon "riding apparent queen" among the stars. Then I looked at Jack's wife. Her eyes wandered restlessly to the window, and then to Mrs. Awdry, but she said nothing.

When the womankind retired at the close of the evening, Jack and our entertainer withdrew to the gun-room, situated at the other end of the house, for a cigar. I felt unaccountably sleepy, and sought my room.

After winding my watch up and kicking off my shoes, something drew me to the window. I raised the blind and swept back the curtains. It was very clear and star-ilt. Just below a gravel-walk, shining between two dark lawns, let off to the shrubberies. An ominous send flew every now and then over the moon. "A nice night for the poachers," I thought, when suddenly a woman flitted on the walk before me.

(To be concluded.)



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M. O. Office, Halifax, Nova Scotia, }
16th March, 1865. }

J. S. THOMPSON, Supt.



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