

THE AUSTRALIAN DUKE; OR, THE NEW UTOPIA.

CHAPTER VI. (Continued.)

FRESH SURPRISES.

My own interests, of course, were not forgotten; the duke's terms were more than liberal; and when the whole estate had been fully disposed of, I was able to return to England a wealthy man. One commission, entrusted to me by the duke, spoke well for his heart; it was the removal to England of his parents' remains, which had been laid to rest in the little cemetery of Ballarat.

Yet I own there were some things in my home correspondence which gave me a secret anxiety. Much was said in praise of the new duke, of his generosity, his manly principles, his care for his property and his tenants; but expressions were now and then dropped which showed me he had the character of being eccentric. I was sorry for this, though not much surprised; in my brief intercourse with him in former years it was impossible to deny that his originality looked in that direction. What did surprise me much more was that, judging by his own letters, far from despising money, he seemed to care for it a good deal. He took his millions from Australia with a very good grace, and made no objection to the proposals I submitted, whereby a large revenue could be raised from the property. And after all, sometimes said to myself, this is but natural. Men theorize on gold and like to call it dirt, so long as their hands are clear of it; but let them feel its magic touch and the dirt becomes marvellously pleasant. Leven desires to get as much as he justly can from his property, and so I do, and so does everybody. And yet the sigh with which I closed my meditations showed me that my imagination had painted the "Grant" of former days as something higher and more unselfish in his aims than "everybody."

There was another thing that struck me as odd. A year or two after I came to Glenleven I became a Catholic. I had never thought much of these subjects in early youth; but many things which Grant had said had gone home; and the impressions first received from him were deepened in Australia. There, for the first time, I saw the Catholic religion at full work; I felt its mastery of souls; its reality as a Divine power, and to that power I submitted. It was only natural for me to imagine that the Catholic Duke of Leven would have been leader of his co-religionists in England. I had the English papers, Catholic and Protestant, sent out to me pretty regularly, and after my conversion I looked with some eagerness to see what part he took in parliamentary debates on questions affecting Catholic interests, education, questions, workhouse questions, church-building questions, and the rest. I looked for his name, and I generally looked in vain. In my perhaps romantic imaginings about his probable course I had pictured him as the founder of benevolent institutions through the length and breadth of the kingdom; I thought he would acquire a distinguished name and achieve great things for the poor and the laboring classes; but if he did so, the papers, at any rate, had nothing to tell me about it. There is no denying, it was a disappointment, but I gradually grew used to regard the whole subject as one in which the fancy of youth had cheated me with its wonted delusions; and who is there who reaches middle life who has not to look back at one thing or other as having been the shadow of his imagination?

I returned, then, to England, spending a week or two in London before going down to Oakham, where my parents still lived; for though my father's age had obliged him to give up his post as steward to younger hands, the duke would not hear of his leaving the Grange. Mary had become the wife of Charles Oswald, a small squire of the neighborhood, and was still able to be a good deal of comfort to her father and mother, and to find an ample sphere for all her capacities of usefulness. In returning to Oakham, therefore, I was still returning home, though I had formed no plans as to my own final settlement.

In London, I found plenty of old friends to welcome me, not perhaps, the less kindly from the fact that rumor had credited me with having brought home an Australian fortune. Some of these whom I had left just entering on their profession, had fought their way to legal eminence, and some had earned their silken gowns and a certain share of reputation.

Sir Clinton Edwards, the brother of our Oakham vicar, was now a judge, and at his table I met a group of men more or less distinguished in the world of politics and of letters. The world has many phases, some more, and some less pleasant to come in contact with. A London dinner-room, filled with refined and intelligent people, who know everything and everybody worth knowing, is, no doubt, a very agreeable sample of polite society; but mark well this truth, dear reader, it is still the world, and anything higher and better than what savors of the world, you must not look to extract from its conversation. Sir Clinton had a keen eye for well-mixed variety in his company, so on the present occasion I had the good fortune to meet a Solicitor-General, and a Home Secretary; the editor of a popular philosophic review (whose theology, by the way, was not predominantly Christian), two men of science, and a county member. Including our host and myself, we numbered eight. It is needless to say that our dinner was irreproachable. For the passing moment I found myself a lion; for the gayest and wittiest circles so soon exhaust the sources of their gaiety, that any person who, for one half hour, can stimulate a new curiosity, may calculate for exactly that space of time on enjoying a fair amount of popularity.

The conversation in such a circle was as graceful and varied as the forms in a kaleidoscope. Home politics, the state of the colonies, Haprock's last pamphlet on the Council of Ephesus, the vicar of Oakham's long promised, and recently published, work on Roman Antiquities, the last cartoon in Punch, and the University boat race, all passed in review, till for my sins I fell into the hands of the philosophic editor, who was, of course, profoundly ignorant of the creed of his next door neighbor. He was engaged on an article which aimed, I will not say at proving men to be well-developed monkeys, for I have never found that writers of this particular class ever aim at proving anything whatsoever, but at throwing out pleasant theories of the possible probability of their being nothing better. The intellectual inferiority of the Australian aborigines was the point on which I was subjected to cross-examination, and every fact elicited was bagged by the tormentor for future editorial purposes. But the county member, who sat opposite, charitably stepped in to my relief.

"I tell you what, Ford," he said, when he could get in a word, "you needn't go to Australia to look for intellectual inferiority; no, nor for savages either, nor for that matter for heathens; you'll find the whole stock-in-trade ready for inspection in a good many of our manufacturing towns, only nobody comes to inspect them."

"Very true," said Sir Clinton; "when I am Lord Chancellor, I shall introduce a bill for obliging all members of Parliament to spend one calendar month in a colliery district, say Bradford, for instance."

The familiar name struck on my ear and raised a host of recollections. "Ah," said one of the men of science, "I've been down there lately. You know the improvement of the mines is one of the duke's hobbies."

"And not merely mines, is it?" said the secretary; "I've heard a good deal of his work among the people."

"Just so," replied the scientific gentleman, "he's always at something; you know it would puzzle the calculating boy to number his hobbies; but the last thing has been the mines, and really his ideas about ventilation are very creditable."

"You are speaking, I presume, of the Duke of Leven?" I inquired.

"Ah, yes, you would have known him, of course, before going to Australia. Curious history his has been, certainly."

"He is really an excellent fellow," said Sir Clinton, "but not long for this world, I fear; I never saw a man so altered."

"Well, he is a very good fellow, of course," said the county member; "but he carries things too far, to my mind."

"How so?" I ventured to ask.

"Oh, I don't know exactly; lives the life of a hermit, which, in his position, is a miracle, and does mischief; and then he's always sporting some social view or other; setting himself a little against the current. One thing you know, he's a Catholic."

"Yes," observed the second man of science, who till now had spoken but little, "it's a great pity that. Cuts a man off from standing so completely out of everything. He can't take his proper place in general society, parliament or anywhere."

"Well," began the editor, "of all the idiotic absurdities a man can be guilty of, I should say that was the primeest. I declare it would justify a commission of lunacy."

"I'm afraid that's the real explanation of the whole thing," said the county member, looking sagacious, and touching his forehead; "there certainly is a touch in the top story."

"Touch or no touch," said Sir Clinton, "he has done wonders at Bradford. I know it by the results at the sessions."

"And may I ask what he has done?" said the editor, with the slightest possible tone of sarcasm.

"Changed the whole system of wages, shut up about twenty public-houses, and, really, I don't know how he has managed it, but they're not so brutalized by half since he's had the manor."

"And if I am rightly informed (you'll correct me, of course, if I am in error), but I understood he had brought over a lot of Germans monks and built them a monastery."

"Ah, yes," said Sir Clinton, "that's at Glenleven, on the moors, you know. Well, it's one of his crochets, and, perhaps, not the most sensible."

The secretary shook his head, and looked disgusted. "I know this, we shall have to put a stop to all that sort of thing some day," he said, "and the sooner the better, in my opinion."

Then the conversation, by an easy change, flowed into foreign politics, and I was left to digest all I had heard, and form my own conclusions. Was Leven really a little touched? Was he unpopular? Or was he dying? Had his ten years of boundless means produced as their whole result an improved system of wages and mine ventilation, and the building of a monastery? And did he fritter away his genius and his undoubted powers in a quick succession of profitable hobbies?

I should go down next day to Oakham and judge for myself.

CHAPTER VII.

RETURNING HOME.

My first week at Oakham was given to my family. I had to be introduced to my new brother-in-law, Oswald, who had brought Mary over from Exdale manor, that we might all be once more together. The duke had been called away to Scotland, and to tell the truth, I was not sorry to have time and opportunity for rectifying my ideas on the new order of things before meeting him. My father praised him highly, for he was not a Leven? That simple fact sufficed for him; he would I had disturbed the simplicity of his loyalty to the representative of the old family by so much as a question. My mother had a special kindness for him, only regretting that he had never married. Mr. Edwards, as courteous and harmonious as ever, fully seconded her regrets, and suggested that the influence of a refined and affectionate wife might have softened something of that austerity of character which he perceived was out of tune with the century. His curate, the Rev. Wilfrid Knowles, who happened to be present, said nothing, but I thought he looked a good deal, and on inquiry, I found that the curate held more advanced views than the vicar, and was supposed to have what Mrs. Edwards termed "monastic tendencies."

All this explained but little. Oswald informed me that the general impression in the county was that his policies were revolutionary; but the solitary fact in support of this theory appeared to be that his first act on coming to Oakham had been to lower his farmers' rents on condition that they raised the rate of their laborer's wages. Mary said it was all malice, and that they did not understand him. She evidently was his warm friend, and her husband declared that she did what she liked with him.

On the third day after my arrival, I strolled up to the park in company with Oswald, and could not help observing with a little surprise that the pineries and forcing-houses kept their ground, and had even apparently received some additions. Inquired for my old friend Jones, but found he had departed, and that his place was filled by one of a younger generation.

"I had expected," he would have made a clean sweep of all this," I said; "he used to inveigh against it all as though grapes in June had been one of the deadly sins."

"Ah!" said Oswald, "that was Mary's doing. She suggested to him that if he did not choose to grow grapes and apricots for his own table, he would be doing a good work to grow them for other people, and that they would be like gifts from paradise if he sent them to the hospitals. So now every week they are packed up and sent to the Ex-borough Infirmary, and the County Hospital, and half a dozen other institutions, not to speak of his own affair that he has founded at Bradford."

"Really that was a bright thought of old Mary's," I said; "who would have thought of her taking the command in that style?"

"Yes, and she gets her own perquisites, I believe," said Oswald, "with which she makes happy all the sick people of the neighborhood."

"How about the orchards?" I asked, rather maliciously.

"Oh, as to them, you had better ask Verney. And so saying, he led the way to a small enclosure where a young and intelligent-looking man was superintending the packing of various cases of fruit and flowers. I looked at the rich fruit, no longer grown for show or luxury, and felt pleased to think of its altered destination. "And the flowers?" I asked, amazed at the quantity which were being delicately packed in cool moss, about to be carried off to the station.

"To Bradford, sir, and Homcheester," replied Verney, the head gardener, "and one or two other missions. Thursday will be Corpus Christi, and they use a wonderful quantity of flowers."

"Hem!" I thought; "I see all about it; what used to go to the dinner-table and the ball-room he sends to the hospital and the altar. Well, that is like old Grant;" and it gave me a glow of pleasure.

I soon found that Verney was a Catholic, as were several of the men now employed about the place, and I heard from him that a private chapel had been added to the house, which sufficed for the wants of the few Oakham Catholics. But a magnificent church had replaced the old and miserable erection at Bradford; and there was a convent with nuns who worked the schools and served the hospital; and, besides that, half the town had been rebuilt, and the wretched dens which formerly abounded were replaced by model lodging-houses.

"The duke himself has a house at Bradford," said Oswald, "and spends a good deal of time there; how he can endure it, I do not know, but he sees to all manner of things himself, for at heart, you know, he likes business."

"I suspect also, Oswald," said I, "that he has a liking for souls."

Well, I should have thought Bradford about the last place to have supplied him with that commodity," said Oswald; "very queer style of souls he must find among the colliers, and not the most

responsive, for just now they seem greatly disposed to stone him by way of expressing their gratitude."

"How so? Is he not popular?"

"Not with all. You see, he attempts to limit their means of making beasts of themselves, and many resent it like true-born Britons. They've got a fellow named Degg to lead them now, who possesses a tongue, and a quite remarkable gift of slander, of which he gives the duke a weekly benefit in a rascally penny paper, which he edits, and which he sells by thousands. It's a grand thing is oreducation movement; it enables each man now-a-days to read his Degg."

"Would you like to see the chapel, sir?" said Verney.

Immensely," I replied. And leaving his flowers in charge of one of the men in attendance, he led the way towards the building. It had an approach through the shrubberies as well as from the house, for the convenience of the congregation; and Verney, having found means of informing the chaplain of my presence, left me in the hands of that gentleman, and returned to his green-houses.

The Oakham chapel was small in size, and my first impression of it was rather devotional than magnificent. Except in the east window there was no painted glass; but through the open casements came the sound of waving branches, and the green and pleasant light which falls through summer foliage.

After a few minutes, I began to take in some of the details. Though the chapel was Gothic in style, the architect had contrived to find places for several pictures, some of which struck my eyes as familiar. I remarked it to the chaplain. "Probably," he replied, "you may remember them formerly in the Bradford collection; the Crucifixion which you see there used to hang in the great dining-room. It had been a Spanish altar-piece, I think, and the duke said it was a sacrilege to put such a painting over a gentleman's sideboard."

And at the same time that he removed it," whispered Oswald, "he burned half a dozen Venetian and Adonises, which had been the glory of old Bradford's gallery; a fact, I assure you; and at Christie's they would have brought their thousands."

The paintings had, in fact, been taken from various parts of the dual mansions; all, with one exception, a singular picture, painted, as the chaplain said, by a young German artist, under the duke's personal direction. It was a single figure, representing a young man in poor and squalid attire, lying on a bed of straw, and clasping a crucifix. The background was dark, and there were few or no pictorial adjuncts; only in one corner of the picture appeared something like a ladder or flight of steps above the head of the principal figure. All the beauty of the painting was in that head; wasted, sweet, and looking again, and I fancied I had understood its meaning. The noble youth, who fled the world, who despised pleasure, and held riches as a curse, the prince who chose in his own father's house, to live unknown, and to die as a beggar, was, doubtless, one whose story might have a deep attraction for a man made rich against his will, and ever fighting with wealth and its temptations.

We approached the altar, and I perceived what had not struck me at first, the exceeding richness of all its fittings.

"That tabernacle," said the chaplain, "is solid gold; it was made out of the first gold discovered at Glenleven, in Australia, 'the great nugget,' as it was called; the duke had sent to England untouched, and resolved that the first fruits of his gold-fields should fund the tabernacle of his chapel. The lamps and candlesticks are likewise Australian gold, and so are the sacred vessels."

I knelt before the tabernacle, and the last fragment of my doubts and misgivings vanished into thin air. "Oh, Grant, Grant!" I murmured, "what injustice I have done you! The world talks and judges, and comprehends nothing; you are not of its form and fashion!" And as we turned to leave the chapel, I seemed still to see before me the dying face of St. Alexis, and the golden tabernacle.

We walked home through the plantations, and Oswald was silent, and, for him, thoughtful.

"I called your duke a man of business this morning," he said, "but just now I could fancy him to be a poet."

"A poet! Why so?"

"Well, it was a beautiful thought that about his gold; there was something about the whole thing that struck me as poetical."

"I doubt if the duke was ever conscious of doing anything particularly graceful; but, undoubtedly, Faith always has an innate sense of beauty."

"That is a little beyond me," said Oswald; "but I will tell you why it struck me. At Ex-borough Park, as you may be aware, there is also what goes by the name of a chapel. The Ex-borough people always set you down to gold plate at dinner, but the chapel looks like a dust-hole. Leven has abolished the gold plate at Oakham, and the gentry hereabouts called it one of his peculiarities; but I suspect they would understand it better if they looked at that altar."

"Yet the Ex-boroughs are Catholics," I remarked.

"I should rather think so," said Oswald, "and immensely proud of being of the old stock, and all that sort of thing. But Lady Ex. goes in for London seasons to any extent, and the Ex-borough girls are the fastest in the county."

TO BE CONTINUED.

A MOTHER'S DREAM.

"Oh, dear," said tidy Mrs. Jewett, "there's Willie in the parlour again with his muddy boots, and Jennie has fingered the woodwork of the piano all over, I see, that I polished so nicely only yesterday. I know the door of the spare room has been left open, too, for the muslin curtains are pulled all away, where pussy must have frolicked in the folds; and dear, dear, there's Jack this minute with his feet in that stuffed chair!"

"Come, come, mother, I wouldn't fret," said easy Mr. Jewett; "the children must put their feet somewhere, and I suppose kittens will be kittens and fly about where they can find the most fun."

"Oh, yes," rejoined Mrs. Jewett, "it's very easy for you, father, to think children and cats can go where they like and do what they please. I'm not fretting, but it's hard work to sweep and do clear starching; and men never did know and never will know anything about the work of a housekeeper and a mother."

So saying, Mrs. Jewett, with her fair, pretty face all in wrinkles, went out of the room with a worried air.

"Oh, dear!"

And her husband looked after her with a compassionate: "Poor mother!"

Naturally Mrs. Jewett was of a happy disposition, and like many another fond, faithful mother, she was unconsciously falling into the habit of worrying over the inevitable faults and thoughtlessness of her children.

She was a scrupulously neat housekeeper, and as her things had not come as easily as they do to many others they acquired all the more value and importance in her eyes, once they came into her possession.

One morning the curtains were discovered to have been rolled up all to one side, while the summer sunshine was flooding, with its wholesome light, the

bright pattern of the new Brussels carpet. Jennie and Carrie had left their school books scattered around on the chair, and Jack's muddy boots stood in the middle of the floor.

Mrs. Jewett burst into a tirade of displeasure, but the children were out playing, so instead of judiciously and patiently calling them in and obliging them to put things in their places, she began putting to rights herself, allowing Mr. Jewett, as frequently happened, to bear the brunt of her displeasure, and for once his good nature gave way, and he said pettily:

"I declare, wife, it is a thousand pities there are any children here to bother you so."

Mrs. Jewett made no reply, but going to her room she sat down for a moment to consider whether or not her husband meant what he had just said.

But by degrees the room faded from her vision, the house became quiet—terribly quiet the sunlight died out, and shade and quietness reigned supreme. There were footsteps heard, but hushed, creeping, awed.

All of active life had ceased; even the kitty had taken herself off, and was nowhere to be seen. Mrs. Jewett roused herself, and went from kitchen to dining room, from dining room to parlor. The luxurious order was oppressive.

The curtains were rolled with exact evenness; not the faintest line of sunshine could pierce through crack or crevice of the nicely adjusted shutters. Every book was in its place; the chairs as guiltless of dust as if just cleaned, and the unblurred polish of the piano reflected each undisturbed ornament and object in its vicinity.

But the children! Oh, the children! A great appalling throb of apprehension and withering pain shot unexpressed through the mother's heart at the mention of their names.

Where was Winnie—no longer mischievous, but winsome—Willie.

Where, pray, were sportive Carrie and lively Jerry? Where, too, bounding, loving little Jack? "Yes," she said, vaguely peering about in the sunless gloom, "where are all my precious children?"

She left the dining room and parlor and went from one child's chamber to another—everything in that same oppressive, even their little beds were unruddied, each smooth pillow looked as if unpressed by a sunny head for—oh, so long.

And, ah, misery! What was that in Willie's room in the porcelain vase?

Some white flowers tied with white satin ribbon; and this heart-breaking emblem in Jennie's room? Her picture, sweet child! with a crown of fading flowers encircling it—and here in Carrie's room her picture, the darling, also crowned with immortelles.

And Jack's room, forsaken in its tidiness, yes, a funeral wreath in his room, dear, loving little Jack.

Mrs. Jewett's first impulse was to disarrange everything; the quiet and appalling neatness were goading her to madness; even little had deserted the subtle, childless house, but the children—oh the children! The mother felt as if her brain were afebrile, and her heart was bursting with its pent grief; she could not endure it another moment—and she awoke.

Thank God! She was sitting directly in the rare, sweet sunlight which God made to come in, not to be shut out of our homes. In the garden she heard the sweet, delightful voice of her children—the blessed little children.

Kitty, with fluttering little paws, was clutching with unobedient feet at the tassels of the muslin curtain, and she noticed with a sigh of relief that the mahogany bureau, with its burnished surface, had been pawed with fresh finger marks.

Mrs. Jewett arose slowly, looked the door, then quietly down. After awhile she went forth, a new quiet in her heart, a new smile on her face.

The children had a gloriously happy day. At night, when they were all asleep, their mother went from room to room, gazing with pure thankfulness at each darling little sleeper, so dear—ah so dear! She sighed, then smiled at the sweet porcelain vase in Willie's room, filled with sweet wild flowers of his own plucking.

Then she went to her own room, and tearfully told "father" her terrible dream.

He kissed his wife's fair brow fondly, and said soothingly: "Never mind, dear; we're all right, now."

And they were. The timely warning was not lost on the mother's heart, for she never forgot how terrible it was when in dreams she roamed from one empty, orderly room to another in quest of her children, she could not find them. And she resolved that she would not wait to place white flowers in their hands when the perfume could not reach the dulled sense and their fading beauty would only break her heart. The children should have the flowers now, while the dear eyes were open to behold them, and their hearts still alive to all of earth's comforts and delights.

And we would that many another wife and mother who is drifting into habits of fretfulness and nervousness through undue care for the children's bodies rather than their souls "might dream this lady's dream."

A LETTER TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

Translated for the CATHOLIC RECORD from the French of Paul Féval.

Jean was six years old, his trousers were frayed at the knees, his curly hair was thick enough to cover the heads of the ladies of fashion, and his eyes were large and blue, eyes that still sometimes tried to smile, although they had already wept many tears. He wore a small waist coat, elegantly cut, a girl's boot upon his right foot, and a collegian's shoes upon his left—both alas! much too long and too large. They were also well turned up in the front and quite devoid of heels. He was cold and hungry, for it was a winter evening, and he had fasted since the middle of the preceding day, when the thought struck him to write a letter to the Blessed Virgin.

This is how wrote Jean, who knew not how to read or write, with his letter.

Down in the quarter of the Gros-Caillois, at the corner of an avenue, and not far from the Eplandais, was the stall of a public letter-writer. The letter-writer was an old soldier, a good man, no hypocrite, but very quick tempered, and oh! alas, not rich, who had the misfortune of not being sufficiently crippled to warrant his admission into the Hotel des Invalides.

Jean saw him through the window of his little shop. He was smoking his pipe and awaiting customers. So Jean entered saying:—

"Good-day, sir. I come to get you to write a letter."

"It will cost ten sous," answered old Bouin.

For this worthy, not being very pretentious, answered to the name of Bouin.

Jean, not having a cap, could not doff it, but he said politely:

"Then, sir, excuse me."

And opened the door to go out, when Father Bouin, pleased with his pretty manner, said:

"Are you the son of a soldier, little one?"

"No," replied Jean. "I am mamma's son, and she is all alone."

"Good," said the redactor, "and you have not ten sous?"

"Oh! no, I have not even one."

"For your mother either? Well, we will see. It is a letter to ask for something to make soup with, eh, little one?"

"Yes," replied Jean, "that is it."

"Come back then, for ten lines, and half a sheet of paper, one will never be much poorer."

Jean obeyed, old Bouin arranged his paper, dipped his pen in the ink and traced in his best handwriting:

"Paris, 17th January, 1867."

Then below that the words:

"A Monsieur —"

"What is his name, youngster?"

"Whose?" asked Jean.

"Why the gentleman's, of course."

"Why the gentleman?"

"Why, the man who is to give the soup."

Jean understood now, and replied:—

"It is not a gentleman."

"Ah! ha! a lady then?"

"Yes—No—that is to say—"

"It is strange," exclaimed the old man, "that you do not know to whom you are going to write."

"Oh! yes, I do," said the child.

"Tell me then and be quick."

Little Jean had become very red. Truly it is not always convenient to address yourself to a public letter-writer, in the matter of a correspondence of this sort. Finally he summoned all his courage and said:—

"It is to the Blessed Virgin that I wish to send a letter."

Old Father Bouin did not laugh. He put down his pen, and removed his pipe from his mouth.

"Youngster," said he severely, "I take for granted, that you do not intend to make fun of your elders. You are too little for me to slap you. Be off now, to the right about, clear out, or I'll be after you."

Little Jean obeyed, and showed his heels, literally, for his shoes had none. Seeing him so tractable, old Bouin changed his mind a second time, called him back, and took a good look at him.

"By my faith," murmured he, "what misery there is in Paris!"

"What is your name, baby?"

"Jean."

"Jean what?"

"Nothing but Jean."