

Vanity Fair by William Makepeace Thackeray

Chapter 63

In Which We Meet an Old Acquaintance

Such polite behaviour as that of Lord Tapeworm did not fail to have the most favourable effect upon Mr. Sedley's mind, and the very next morning, at breakfast, he pronounced his opinion that Pumpernickel was the pleasantest little place of any which he had visited on their tour. Jos's motives and artifices were not very difficult of comprehension, and Dobbin laughed in his sleeve, like a hypocrite as he was, when he found, by the knowing air of the civilian and the offhand manner in which the latter talked about Tapeworm Castle and the other members of the family, that Jos had been up already in the morning, consulting his travelling Peerage. Yes, he had seen the Right Honourable the Earl of Bagwig, his lordship's father; he was sure he had, he had met him at—at the Levee—didn't Dob remember? and when the Diplomatist called on the party, faithful to his promise, Jos received him with such a salute and honours as were seldom accorded to the little Envoy. He winked at Kirsch on his Excellency's arrival, and that emissary, instructed beforehand, went out and superintended an entertainment of cold meats, jellies, and other delicacies, brought in upon trays, and of which Mr. Jos absolutely insisted that his noble guest should partake.

Tapeworm, so long as he could have an opportunity of admiring the bright eyes of Mrs. Osborne (whose freshness of complexion bore daylight remarkably well) was not ill pleased to accept any invitation to stay in Mr. Sedley's lodgings; he put one or two dexterous questions to him about India and the dancing-girls there; asked Amelia about that beautiful boy who had been with her; and complimented the astonished little woman upon the prodigious sensation which she had made in the house; and tried to fascinate Dobbin by talking of the late war and the exploits of the Pumpernickel contingent under the command of the Hereditary Prince, now Duke of Pumpernickel.

Lord Tapeworm inherited no little portion of the family gallantry, and it was his happy belief that almost every woman upon whom he himself cast friendly eyes was in love with him. He left Emmy under the persuasion that she was slain by his wit and attractions and went home to

his lodgings to write a pretty little note to her. She was not fascinated, only puzzled, by his grinning, his simpering, his scented cambric handkerchief, and his high-heeled lacquered boots. She did not understand one-half the compliments which he paid; she had never, in her small experience of mankind, met a professional ladies' man as yet, and looked upon my lord as something curious rather than pleasant; and if she did not admire, certainly wondered at him. Jos, on the contrary, was delighted. "How very affable his Lordship is," he said; "How very kind of his Lordship to say he would send his medical man! Kirsch, you will carry our cards to the Count de Schluselback directly; the Major and I will have the greatest pleasure in paying our respects at Court as soon as possible. Put out my uniform, Kirsch—both our uniforms. It is a mark of politeness which every English gentleman ought to show to the countries which he visits to pay his respects to the sovereigns of those countries as to the representatives of his own."

When Tapeworm's doctor came, Doctor von Glauber, Body Physician to H.S.H. the Duke, he speedily convinced Jos that the Pumpnickel mineral springs and the Doctor's particular treatment would infallibly restore the Bengalee to youth and slimness. "Dere came here last year," he said, "Sheneral Bulkeley, an English Sheneral, twice so pic as you, sir. I sent him back qvite tin after tree months, and he danced vid Baroness Glauber at the end of two."

Jos's mind was made up; the springs, the Doctor, the Court, and the Charge d'Affaires convinced him, and he proposed to spend the autumn in these delightful quarters. And punctual to his word, on the next day the Charge d'Affaires presented Jos and the Major to Victor Aurelius XVII, being conducted to their audience with that sovereign by the Count de Schluselback, Marshal of the Court.

They were straightway invited to dinner at Court, and their intention of staying in the town being announced, the politest ladies of the whole town instantly called upon Mrs. Osborne; and as not one of these, however poor they might be, was under the rank of a Baroness, Jos's delight was beyond expression. He wrote off to Chutney at the Club to say that the Service was highly appreciated in Germany, that he was going to show his friend, the Count de Schluselback, how to stick a pig in the Indian fashion, and that his august friends, the Duke and Duchess, were everything that was kind and civil.

Emmy, too, was presented to the august family, and as mourning is not admitted in Court on certain days, she appeared in a pink crape dress with a diamond ornament in the corsage, presented to her by her brother, and she looked so pretty in this costume that the Duke and Court (putting out of the question the Major, who had scarcely ever seen her before in an evening dress, and vowed that she did not look five-and-twenty) all admired her excessively.

In this dress she walked a Polonaise with Major Dobbin at a Court ball, in which easy dance Mr. Jos had the honour of leading out the Countess of Schluselback, an old lady with a hump back, but with sixteen good quarters of nobility and related to half the royal houses of Germany.

Pumpernickel stands in the midst of a happy valley through which sparkles—to mingle with the Rhine somewhere, but I have not the map at hand to say exactly at what point—the fertilizing stream of the Pump. In some places the river is big enough to support a ferry-boat, in others to turn a mill; in Pumpernickel itself, the last Transparency but three, the great and renowned Victor Aurelius XIV built a magnificent bridge, on which his own statue rises, surrounded by water-nymphs and emblems of victory, peace, and plenty; he has his foot on the neck of a prostrate Turk—history says he engaged and ran a Janissary through the body at the relief of Vienna by Sobieski—but, quite undisturbed by the agonies of that prostrate Mahometan, who writhes at his feet in the most ghastly manner, the Prince smiles blandly and points with his truncheon in the direction of the Aurelius Platz, where he began to erect a new palace that would have been the wonder of his age had the great-souled Prince but had funds to complete it. But the completion of Monplaisir (Monblaisir the honest German folks call it) was stopped for lack of ready money, and it and its park and garden are now in rather a faded condition, and not more than ten times big enough to accommodate the Court of the reigning Sovereign.

The gardens were arranged to emulate those of Versailles, and amidst the terraces and groves there are some huge allegorical waterworks still, which spout and froth stupendously upon fete-days, and frighten one with their enormous aquatic insurrections. There is the Trophonius' cave in which, by some artifice, the leaden Tritons are made not only to spout water, but to play the most dreadful groans out of their lead conchs—there is the nymphbath and the Niagara cataract, which the

people of the neighbourhood admire beyond expression, when they come to the yearly fair at the opening of the Chamber, or to the fetes with which the happy little nation still celebrates the birthdays and marriage-days of its princely governors.

Then from all the towns of the Duchy, which stretches for nearly ten mile—from Bolkum, which lies on its western frontier bidding defiance to Prussia, from Grogwitz, where the Prince has a hunting-lodge, and where his dominions are separated by the Pump River from those of the neighbouring Prince of Potzenthal; from all the little villages, which besides these three great cities, dot over the happy principality—from the farms and the mills along the Pump come troops of people in red petticoats and velvet head-dresses, or with three-cornered hats and pipes in their mouths, who flock to the Residenz and share in the pleasures of the fair and the festivities there. Then the theatre is open for nothing, then the waters of Monblaisir begin to play (it is lucky that there is company to behold them, for one would be afraid to see them alone)—then there come mountebanks and riding troops (the way in which his Transparency was fascinated by one of the horse-riders is well known, and it is believed that La Petite Vivandiere, as she was called, was a spy in the French interest), and the delighted people are permitted to march through room after room of the Grand Ducal palace and admire the slippery floor, the rich hangings, and the spittoons at the doors of all the innumerable chambers. There is one Pavilion at Monblaisir which Aurelius Victor XV had arranged—a great Prince but too fond of pleasure—and which I am told is a perfect wonder of licentious elegance. It is painted with the story of Bacchus and Ariadne, and the table works in and out of the room by means of a windlass, so that the company was served without any intervention of domestics. But the place was shut up by Barbara, Aurelius XV's widow, a severe and devout Princess of the House of Bolkum and Regent of the Duchy during her son's glorious minority, and after the death of her husband, cut off in the pride of his pleasures.

The theatre of Pumpnickel is known and famous in that quarter of Germany. It languished a little when the present Duke in his youth insisted upon having his own operas played there, and it is said one day, in a fury, from his place in the orchestra, when he attended a rehearsal, broke a bassoon on the head of the Chapel Master, who was conducting, and led too slow; and during which time the Duchess Sophia wrote

domestic comedies, which must have been very dreary to witness. But the Prince executes his music in private now, and the Duchess only gives away her plays to the foreigners of distinction who visit her kind little Court.

It is conducted with no small comfort and splendour. When there are balls, though there may be four hundred people at supper, there is a servant in scarlet and lace to attend upon every four, and every one is served on silver. There are festivals and entertainments going continually on, and the Duke has his chamberlains and equerries, and the Duchess her mistress of the wardrobe and ladies of honour, just like any other and more potent potentates.

The Constitution is or was a moderate despotism, tempered by a Chamber that might or might not be elected. I never certainly could hear of its sitting in my time at Pumpnickel. The Prime Minister had lodgings in a second floor, and the Foreign Secretary occupied the comfortable lodgings over Zwieback's Conditorey. The army consisted of a magnificent band that also did duty on the stage, where it was quite pleasant to see the worthy fellows marching in Turkish dresses with rouge on and wooden scimitars, or as Roman warriors with ophicleides and trombones—to see them again, I say, at night, after one had listened to them all the morning in the Aurelius Platz, where they performed opposite the cafe where we breakfasted. Besides the band, there was a rich and numerous staff of officers, and, I believe, a few men. Besides the regular sentries, three or four men, habited as hussars, used to do duty at the Palace, but I never saw them on horseback, and au fait, what was the use of cavalry in a time of profound peace?—and whither the deuce should the hussars ride?

Everybody—everybody that was noble of course, for as for the bourgeois we could not quite be expected to take notice of them—visited his neighbour. H. E. Madame de Burst received once a week, H. E. Madame de Schnurrbart had her night—the theatre was open twice a week, the Court graciously received once, so that a man's life might in fact be a perfect round of pleasure in the unpretending Pumpnickel way.

That there were feuds in the place, no one can deny. Politics ran very high at Pumpnickel, and parties were very bitter. There was the Strumpff faction and the Lederlung party, the one supported by our

envoy and the other by the French Charge d’Affaires, M. de Macabau. Indeed it sufficed for our Minister to stand up for Madame Strumpff, who was clearly the greater singer of the two, and had three more notes in her voice than Madame Lederlung her rival—it sufficed, I say, for our Minister to advance any opinion to have it instantly contradicted by the French diplomatist.

Everybody in the town was ranged in one or other of these factions. The Lederlung was a prettyish little creature certainly, and her voice (what there was of it) was very sweet, and there is no doubt that the Strumpff was not in her first youth and beauty, and certainly too stout; when she came on in the last scene of the Sonnambula, for instance, in her night-chemise with a lamp in her hand, and had to go out of the window, and pass over the plank of the mill, it was all she could do to squeeze out of the window, and the plank used to bend and creak again under her weight—but how she poured out the finale of the opera! and with what a burst of feeling she rushed into Elvino’s arms—almost fit to smother him! Whereas the little Lederlung—but a truce to this gossip—the fact is that these two women were the two flags of the French and the English party at Pumpernickel, and the society was divided in its allegiance to those two great nations.

We had on our side the Home Minister, the Master of the Horse, the Duke’s Private Secretary, and the Prince’s Tutor; whereas of the French party were the Foreign Minister, the Commander-in-Chief’s Lady, who had served under Napoleon, and the Hof-Marschall and his wife, who was glad enough to get the fashions from Pans, and always had them and her caps by M. de Macabau’s courier. The Secretary of his Chancery was little Grignac, a young fellow, as malicious as Satan, and who made caricatures of Tapeworm in all the-albums of the place.

Their headquarters and table d’hôte were established at the Pariser Hof, the other inn of the town; and though, of course, these gentlemen were obliged to be civil in public, yet they cut at each other with epigrams that were as sharp as razors, as I have seen a couple of wrestlers in Devonshire, lashing at each other’s shins and never showing their agony upon a muscle of their faces. Neither Tapeworm nor Macabau ever sent home a dispatch to his government without a most savage series of attacks upon his rival. For instance, on our side we would write, “The interests of Great Britain in this place, and throughout the whole of

Germany, are perilled by the continuance in office of the present French envoy; this man is of a character so infamous that he will stick at no falsehood, or hesitate at no crime, to attain his ends. He poisons the mind of the Court against the English minister, represents the conduct of Great Britain in the most odious and atrocious light, and is unhappily backed by a minister whose ignorance and necessities are as notorious as his influence is fatal." On their side they would say, "M. de Tapeworm continues his system of stupid insular arrogance and vulgar falsehood against the greatest nation in the world. Yesterday he was heard to speak lightly of Her Royal Highness Madame the Duchess of Berri; on a former occasion he insulted the heroic Duke of Angouleme and dared to insinuate that H.R.H. the Duke of Orleans was conspiring against the august throne of the lilies. His gold is prodigated in every direction which his stupid menaces fail to frighten. By one and the other, he has won over creatures of the Court here—and, in fine, Pumpernickel will not be quiet, Germany tranquil, France respected, or Europe content until this poisonous viper be crushed under heel": and so on. When one side or the other had written any particularly spicy dispatch, news of it was sure to slip out.

Before the winter was far advanced, it is actually on record that Emmy took a night and received company with great propriety and modesty. She had a French master, who complimented her upon the purity of her accent and her facility of learning; the fact is she had learned long ago and grounded herself subsequently in the grammar so as to be able to teach it to George; and Madam Strumpff came to give her lessons in singing, which she performed so well and with such a true voice that the Major's windows, who had lodgings opposite under the Prime Minister, were always open to hear the lesson. Some of the German ladies, who are very sentimental and simple in their tastes, fell in love with her and began to call her du at once. These are trivial details, but they relate to happy times. The Major made himself George's tutor and read Caesar and mathematics with him, and they had a German master and rode out of evenings by the side of Emmy's carriage—she was always too timid, and made a dreadful outcry at the slightest disturbance on horse-back. So she drove about with one of her dear German friends, and Jos asleep on the back-seat of the barouche.

He was becoming very sweet upon the Grafinn Fanny de Butterbrod, a very gentle tender-hearted and unassuming young creature, a Canoness

and Countess in her own right, but with scarcely ten pounds per year to her fortune, and Fanny for her part declared that to be Amelia's sister was the greatest delight that Heaven could bestow on her, and Jos might have put a Countess's shield and coronet by the side of his own arms on his carriage and forks; when—when events occurred, and those grand fetes given upon the marriage of the Hereditary Prince of Pumpernickel with the lovely Princess Amelia of Humbourg-Schlippenschloppen took place.

At this festival the magnificence displayed was such as had not been known in the little German place since the days of the prodigal Victor XIV. All the neighbouring Princes, Princesses, and Grandees were invited to the feast. Beds rose to half a crown per night in Pumpernickel, and the Army was exhausted in providing guards of honour for the Highnesses, Serenities, and Excellencies who arrived from all quarters. The Princess was married by proxy, at her father's residence, by the Count de Schluselback. Snuff-boxes were given away in profusion (as we learned from the Court jeweller, who sold and afterwards bought them again), and bushels of the Order of Saint Michael of Pumpernickel were sent to the nobles of the Court, while hampers of the cordons and decorations of the Wheel of St. Catherine of Schlippenschloppen were brought to ours. The French envoy got both. "He is covered with ribbons like a prize cart-horse," Tapeworm said, who was not allowed by the rules of his service to take any decorations: "Let him have the cordons; but with whom is the victory?" The fact is, it was a triumph of British diplomacy, the French party having proposed and tried their utmost to carry a marriage with a Princess of the House of Potztausend-Donnerwetter, whom, as a matter of course, we opposed.

Everybody was asked to the fetes of the marriage. Garlands and triumphal arches were hung across the road to welcome the young bride. The great Saint Michael's Fountain ran with uncommonly sour wine, while that in the Artillery Place frothed with beer. The great waters played; and poles were put up in the park and gardens for the happy peasantry, which they might climb at their leisure, carrying off watches, silver forks, prize sausages hung with pink ribbon, &c., at the top. Georgy got one, wrenching it off, having swarmed up the pole to the delight of the spectators, and sliding down with the rapidity of a fall of water. But it was for the glory's sake merely. The boy gave the sausage to a peasant, who had very nearly seized it, and stood at the foot of the

mast, blubbering, because he was unsuccessful.

At the French Chancellerie they had six more lampions in their illumination than ours had; but our transparency, which represented the young Couple advancing and Discord flying away, with the most ludicrous likeness to the French Ambassador, beat the French picture hollow; and I have no doubt got Tapeworm the advancement and the Cross of the Bath which he subsequently attained.

Crowds of foreigners arrived for the fetes, and of English, of course. Besides the Court balls, public balls were given at the Town Hall and the Redoute, and in the former place there was a room for trente-et-quarante and roulette established, for the week of the festivities only, and by one of the great German companies from Ems or Aix-la-Chapelle. The officers or inhabitants of the town were not allowed to play at these games, but strangers, peasants, ladies were admitted, and any one who chose to lose or win money.

That little scapegrace Georgy Osborne amongst others, whose pockets were always full of dollars and whose relations were away at the grand festival of the Court, came to the Stadthaus Ball in company of his uncle's courier, Mr. Kirsch, and having only peeped into a play-room at Baden-Baden when he hung on Dobbin's arm, and where, of course, he was not permitted to gamble, came eagerly to this part of the entertainment and hankered round the tables where the croupiers and the punters were at work. Women were playing; they were masked, some of them; this license was allowed in these wild times of carnival.

A woman with light hair, in a low dress by no means so fresh as it had been, and with a black mask on, through the eyelets of which her eyes twinkled strangely, was seated at one of the roulette-tables with a card and a pin and a couple of florins before her. As the croupier called out the colour and number, she pricked on the card with great care and regularity, and only ventured her money on the colours after the red or black had come up a certain number of times. It was strange to look at her.

But in spite of her care and assiduity she guessed wrong and the last two florins followed each other under the croupier's rake, as he cried out with his inexorable voice the winning colour and number. She gave a

sigh, a shrug with her shoulders, which were already too much out of her gown, and dashing the pin through the card on to the table, sat thrumming it for a while. Then she looked round her and saw Georgy's honest face staring at the scene. The little scamp! What business had he to be there?

When she saw the boy, at whose face she looked hard through her shining eyes and mask, she said, "Monsieur n'est pas joueur?"

"Non, Madame," said the boy; but she must have known, from his accent, of what country he was, for she answered him with a slight foreign tone. "You have nevare played—will you do me a littl' favor?"

"What is it?" said Georgy, blushing again. Mr. Kirsch was at work for his part at the rouge et noir and did not see his young master.

"Play this for me, if you please; put it on any number, any number." And she took from her bosom a purse, and out of it a gold piece, the only coin there, and she put it into George's hand. The boy laughed and did as he was bid.

The number came up sure enough. There is a power that arranges that, they say, for beginners.

"Thank you," said she, pulling the money towards her, "thank you. What is your name?"

"My name's Osborne," said Georgy, and was fingering in his own pockets for dollars, and just about to make a trial, when the Major, in his uniform, and Jos, en Marquis, from the Court ball, made their appearance. Other people, finding the entertainment stupid and preferring the fun at the Stadthaus, had quitted the Palace ball earlier; but it is probable the Major and Jos had gone home and found the boy's absence, for the former instantly went up to him and, taking him by the shoulder, pulled him briskly back from the place of temptation. Then, looking round the room, he saw Kirsch employed as we have said, and going up to him, asked how he dared to bring Mr. George to such a place.

"Laissez-moi tranquille," said Mr. Kirsch, very much excited by play

and wine. “Il faut s’amuser, parbleu. Je ne suis pas au service de Monsieur.”

Seeing his condition the Major did not choose to argue with the man, but contented himself with drawing away George and asking Jos if he would come away. He was standing close by the lady in the mask, who was playing with pretty good luck now, and looking on much interested at the game.

“Hadn’t you better come, Jos,” the Major said, “with George and me?”

“I’ll stop and go home with that rascal, Kirsch,” Jos said; and for the same reason of modesty, which he thought ought to be preserved before the boy, Dobbin did not care to remonstrate with Jos, but left him and walked home with Georgy.

“Did you play?” asked the Major when they were out and on their way home.

The boy said “No.”

“Give me your word of honour as a gentleman that you never will.”

“Why?” said the boy; “it seems very good fun.” And, in a very eloquent and impressive manner, the Major showed him why he shouldn’t, and would have enforced his precepts by the example of Georgy’s own father, had he liked to say anything that should reflect on the other’s memory. When he had housed him, he went to bed and saw his light, in the little room outside of Amelia’s, presently disappear. Amelia’s followed half an hour afterwards. I don’t know what made the Major note it so accurately.

Jos, however, remained behind over the play-table; he was no gambler, but not averse to the little excitement of the sport now and then, and he had some Napoleons chinking in the embroidered pockets of his court waistcoat. He put down one over the fair shoulder of the little gambler before him, and they won. She made a little movement to make room for him by her side, and just took the skirt of her gown from a vacant chair there.

“Come and give me good luck,” she said, still in a foreign accent, quite different from that frank and perfectly English “Thank you,” with which she had saluted Georgy’s coup in her favour. The portly gentleman, looking round to see that nobody of rank observed him, sat down; he muttered—“Ah, really, well now, God bless my soul. I’m very fortunate; I’m sure to give you good fortune,” and other words of compliment and confusion. “Do you play much?” the foreign mask said.

“I put a Nap or two down,” said Jos with a superb air, flinging down a gold piece.

“Yes; ay nap after dinner,” said the mask archly. But Jos looking frightened, she continued, in her pretty French accent, “You do not play to win. No more do I. I play to forget, but I cannot. I cannot forget old times, monsieur. Your little nephew is the image of his father; and you—you are not changed—but yes, you are. Everybody changes, everybody forgets; nobody has any heart.”

“Good God, who is it?” asked Jos in a flutter.

“Can’t you guess, Joseph Sedley?” said the little woman in a sad voice, and undoing her mask, she looked at him. “You have forgotten me.”

“Good heavens! Mrs. Crawley!” gasped out Jos.

“Rebecca,” said the other, putting her hand on his; but she followed the game still, all the time she was looking at him.

“I am stopping at the Elephant,” she continued. “Ask for Madame de Raudon. I saw my dear Amelia to-day; how pretty she looked, and how happy! So do you! Everybody but me, who am wretched, Joseph Sedley.” And she put her money over from the red to the black, as if by a chance movement of her hand, and while she was wiping her eyes with a pocket-handkerchief fringed with torn lace.

The red came up again, and she lost the whole of that stake. “Come away,” she said. “Come with me a little—we are old friends, are we not, dear Mr. Sedley?”

And Mr. Kirsch having lost all his money by this time, followed his

master out into the moonlight, where the illuminations were winking out and the transparency over our mission was scarcely visible.