Vanity Fair by William Makepeace Thackeray

Chapter 14

"Miss Crawley at Home"

About this time there drove up to an exceedingly snug and well-appointed house in Park Lane, a travelling chariot with a lozenge on the panels, a discontented female in a green veil and crimped curls on the rumble, and a large and confidential man on the box. It was the equipage of our friend Miss Crawley, returning from Hants. The carriage windows were shut; the fat spaniel, whose head and tongue ordinarily lolled out of one of them, reposed on the lap of the discontented female. When the vehicle stopped, a large round bundle of shawls was taken out of the carriage by the aid of various domestics and a young lady who accompanied the heap of cloaks. That bundle contained Miss Crawley, who was conveyed upstairs forthwith, and put into a bed and chamber warmed properly as for the reception of an invalid. Messengers went off for her physician and medical man. They came, consulted, prescribed, vanished. The young companion of Miss Crawley, at the conclusion of their interview, came in to receive their instructions, and administered those antiphlogistic medicines which the eminent men ordered.

Captain Crawley of the Life Guards rode up from Knightsbridge Barracks the next day; his black charger pawed the straw before his invalid aunt's door. He was most affectionate in his inquiries regarding that amiable relative. There seemed to be much source of apprehension. He found Miss Crawley's maid (the discontented female) unusually sulky and despondent; he found Miss Briggs, her dame de compagnie, in tears alone in the drawing-room. She had hastened home, hearing of her beloved friend's illness. She wished to fly to her couch, that couch which she, Briggs, had so often smoothed in the hour of sickness. She was denied admission to Miss Crawley's apartment. A stranger was administering her medicines–a stranger from the country–an odious Miss …–tears choked the utterance of the dame de compagnie, and she buried her crushed affections and her poor old red nose in her pocket handkerchief.

Rawdon Crawley sent up his name by the sulky femme de chambre, and Miss Crawley's new companion, coming tripping down from the sick-

room, put a little hand into his as he stepped forward eagerly to meet her, gave a glance of great scorn at the bewildered Briggs, and beckoning the young Guardsman out of the back drawing-room, led him downstairs into that now desolate dining-parlour, where so many a good dinner had been celebrated.

Here these two talked for ten minutes, discussing, no doubt, the symptoms of the old invalid above stairs; at the end of which period the parlour bell was rung briskly, and answered on that instant by Mr. Bowls, Miss Crawley's large confidential butler (who, indeed, happened to be at the keyhole during the most part of the interview); and the Captain coming out, curling his mustachios, mounted the black charger pawing among the straw, to the admiration of the little blackguard boys collected in the street. He looked in at the dining-room window, managing his horse, which curvetted and capered beautifully–for one instant the young person might be seen at the window, when her figure vanished, and, doubtless, she went upstairs again to resume the affecting duties of benevolence.

Who could this young woman be, I wonder? That evening a little dinner for two persons was laid in the dining-room–when Mrs. Firkin, the lady's maid, pushed into her mistress's apartment, and bustled about there during the vacancy occasioned by the departure of the new nurse–and the latter and Miss Briggs sat down to the neat little meal.

Briggs was so much choked by emotion that she could hardly take a morsel of meat. The young person carved a fowl with the utmost delicacy, and asked so distinctly for egg-sauce, that poor Briggs, before whom that delicious condiment was placed, started, made a great clattering with the ladle, and once more fell back in the most gushing hysterical state.

“Had you not better give Miss Briggs a glass of wine?” said the person to Mr. Bowls, the large confidential man. He did so. Briggs seized it mechanically, gasped it down convulsively, moaned a little, and began to play with the chicken on her plate.

“I think we shall be able to help each other,” said the person with great suavity: “and shall have no need of Mr. Bowls's kind services. Mr. Bowls, if you please, we will ring when we want you.” He went

downstairs, where, by the way, he vented the most horrid curses upon the unoffending footman, his subordinate.

“It is a pity you take on so, Miss Briggs,” the young lady said, with a cool, slightly sarcastic, air.

“My dearest friend is so ill, and wo–o–on't see me,” gurgled out Briggs in an agony of renewed grief.

“She's not very ill any more. Console yourself, dear Miss Briggs. She has only overeaten herself–that is all. She is greatly better. She will soon be quite restored again. She is weak from being cupped and from medical treatment, but she will rally immediately. Pray console yourself, and take a little more wine.”

“But why, why won't she see me again?” Miss Briggs bleated out. “Oh, Matilda, Matilda, after three-and-twenty years' tenderness! is this the return to your poor, poor Arabella?”

“Don't cry too much, poor Arabella,” the other said (with ever so little of a grin); “she only won't see you, because she says you don't nurse her as well as I do. It's no pleasure to me to sit up all night. I wish you might do it instead.”

“Have I not tended that dear couch for years?” Arabella said, “and now–”

“Now she prefers somebody else. Well, sick people have these fancies, and must be humoured. When she's well I shall go.”

“Never, never,” Arabella exclaimed, madly inhaling her salts-bottle.

“Never be well or never go, Miss Briggs?” the other said, with the same provoking good-nature. “Pooh–she will be well in a fortnight, when I shall go back to my little pupils at Queen's Crawley, and to their mother, who is a great deal more sick than our friend. You need not be jealous about me, my dear Miss Briggs. I am a poor little girl without any friends, or any harm in me. I don't want to supplant you in Miss Crawley's good graces. She will forget me a week after I am gone: and her affection for you has been the work of years. Give me a little wine if

you please, my dear Miss Briggs, and let us be friends. I'm sure I want friends."

The placable and soft-hearted Briggs speechlessly pushed out her hand at this appeal; but she felt the desertion most keenly for all that, and bitterly, bitterly moaned the fickleness of her Matilda. At the end of half an hour, the meal over, Miss Rebecca Sharp (for such, astonishing to state, is the name of her who has been described ingeniously as "the person" hitherto), went upstairs again to her patient's rooms, from which, with the most engaging politeness, she eliminated poor Firkin. "Thank you, Mrs. Firkin, that will quite do; how nicely you make it! I will ring when anything is wanted." "Thank you"; and Firkin came downstairs in a tempest of jealousy, only the more dangerous because she was forced to confine it in her own bosom.

Could it be the tempest which, as she passed the landing of the first floor, blew open the drawing-room door? No; it was stealthily opened by the hand of Briggs. Briggs had been on the watch. Briggs too well heard the creaking Firkin descend the stairs, and the clink of the spoon and gruel-basin the neglected female carried.

"Well, Firkin?" says she, as the other entered the apartment. "Well, Jane?"

"Wuss and wuss, Miss B.," Firkin said, wagging her head.

"Is she not better then?"

"She never spoke but once, and I asked her if she felt a little more easy, and she told me to hold my stupid tongue. Oh, Miss B., I never thought to have seen this day!" And the water-works again began to play.

"What sort of a person is this Miss Sharp, Firkin? I little thought, while enjoying my Christmas revels in the elegant home of my firm friends, the Reverend Lionel Delamere and his amiable lady, to find a stranger had taken my place in the affections of my dearest, my still dearest Matilda!" Miss Briggs, it will be seen by her language, was of a literary and sentimental turn, and had once published a volume of poems–"Trills of the Nightingale"–by subscription.

“Miss B., they are all infatyated about that young woman,” Firkin replied. “Sir Pitt wouldn't have let her go, but he daredn't refuse Miss Crawley anything. Mrs. Bute at the Rectory jist as bad–never happy out of her sight. The Capting quite wild about her. Mr. Crawley mortial jealous. Since Miss C. was took ill, she won't have nobody near her but Miss Sharp, I can't tell for where nor for why; and I think somethink has bewidged everybody.”

Rebecca passed that night in constant watching upon Miss Crawley; the next night the old lady slept so comfortably, that Rebecca had time for several hours' comfortable repose herself on the sofa, at the foot of her patroness's bed; very soon, Miss Crawley was so well that she sat up and laughed heartily at a perfect imitation of Miss Briggs and her grief, which Rebecca described to her. Briggs' weeping snuffle, and her manner of using the handkerchief, were so completely rendered that Miss Crawley became quite cheerful, to the admiration of the doctors when they visited her, who usually found this worthy woman of the world, when the least sickness attacked her, under the most abject depression and terror of death.

Captain Crawley came every day, and received bulletins from Miss Rebecca respecting his aunt's health. This improved so rapidly, that poor Briggs was allowed to see her patroness; and persons with tender hearts may imagine the smothered emotions of that sentimental female, and the affecting nature of the interview.

Miss Crawley liked to have Briggs in a good deal soon. Rebecca used to mimic her to her face with the most admirable gravity, thereby rendering the imitation doubly piquant to her worthy patroness.

The causes which had led to the deplorable illness of Miss Crawley, and her departure from her brother's house in the country, were of such an unromantic nature that they are hardly fit to be explained in this genteel and sentimental novel. For how is it possible to hint of a delicate female, living in good society, that she ate and drank too much, and that a hot supper of lobsters profusely enjoyed at the Rectory was the reason of an indisposition which Miss Crawley herself persisted was solely attributable to the dampness of the weather? The attack was so sharp that Matilda–as his Reverence expressed it–was very nearly “off the hooks”; all the family were in a fever of expectation regarding the will, and

Rawdon Crawley was making sure of at least forty thousand pounds before the commencement of the London season. Mr. Crawley sent over a choice parcel of tracts, to prepare her for the change from Vanity Fair and Park Lane for another world; but a good doctor from Southampton being called in in time, vanquished the lobster which was so nearly fatal to her, and gave her sufficient strength to enable her to return to London. The Baronet did not disguise his exceeding mortification at the turn which affairs took.

While everybody was attending on Miss Crawley, and messengers every hour from the Rectory were carrying news of her health to the affectionate folks there, there was a lady in another part of the house, being exceedingly ill, of whom no one took any notice at all; and this was the lady of Crawley herself. The good doctor shook his head after seeing her; to which visit Sir Pitt consented, as it could be paid without a fee; and she was left fading away in her lonely chamber, with no more heed paid to her than to a weed in the park.

The young ladies, too, lost much of the inestimable benefit of their governess's instruction, So affectionate a nurse was Miss Sharp, that Miss Crawley would take her medicines from no other hand. Firkin had been deposed long before her mistress's departure from the country. That faithful attendant found a gloomy consolation on returning to London, in seeing Miss Briggs suffer the same pangs of jealousy and undergo the same faithless treatment to which she herself had been subject.

Captain Rawdon got an extension of leave on his aunt's illness, and remained dutifully at home. He was always in her antechamber. (She lay sick in the state bedroom, into which you entered by the little blue saloon.) His father was always meeting him there; or if he came down the corridor ever so quietly, his father's door was sure to open, and the hyena face of the old gentleman to glare out. What was it set one to watch the other so? A generous rivalry, no doubt, as to which should be most attentive to the dear sufferer in the state bedroom. Rebecca used to come out and comfort both of them; or one or the other of them rather. Both of these worthy gentlemen were most anxious to have news of the invalid from her little confidential messenger.

At dinner–to which meal she descended for half an hour–she kept the peace between them: after which she disappeared for the night; when

Rawdon would ride over to the depot of the 150th at Mudbury, leaving his papa to the society of Mr. Horrocks and his rum and water. She passed as weary a fortnight as ever mortal spent in Miss Crawley's sick-room; but her little nerves seemed to be of iron, as she was quite unshaken by the duty and the tedium of the sick-chamber.

She never told until long afterwards how painful that duty was; how peevish a patient was the jovial old lady; how angry; how sleepless; in what horrors of death; during what long nights she lay moaning, and in almost delirious agonies respecting that future world which she quite ignored when she was in good health.–Picture to yourself, oh fair young reader, a worldly, selfish, graceless, thankless, religionless old woman, writhing in pain and fear, and without her wig. Picture her to yourself, and ere you be old, learn to love and pray!

Sharp watched this graceless bedside with indomitable patience. Nothing escaped her; and, like a prudent steward, she found a use for everything. She told many a good story about Miss Crawley's illness in after days–stories which made the lady blush through her artificial carnations. During the illness she was never out of temper; always alert; she slept light, having a perfectly clear conscience; and could take that refreshment at almost any minute's warning. And so you saw very few traces of fatigue in her appearance. Her face might be a trifle paler, and the circles round her eyes a little blacker than usual; but whenever she came out from the sick-room she was always smiling, fresh, and neat, and looked as trim in her little dressing-gown and cap, as in her smartest evening suit.

The Captain thought so, and raved about her in uncouth convulsions. The barbed shaft of love had penetrated his dull hide. Six weeks–appropinquity–opportunity–had victimised him completely. He made a confidante of his aunt at the Rectory, of all persons in the world. She rallied him about it; she had perceived his folly; she warned him; she finished by owning that little Sharp was the most clever, droll, odd, good-natured, simple, kindly creature in England. Rawdon must not trifle with her affections, though–dear Miss Crawley would never pardon him for that; for she, too, was quite overcome by the little governess, and loved Sharp like a daughter. Rawdon must go away–go back to his regiment and naughty London, and not play with a poor artless girl's feelings.

Many and many a time this good-natured lady, compassionating the forlorn life-guardsman's condition, gave him an opportunity of seeing Miss Sharp at the Rectory, and of walking home with her, as we have seen. When men of a certain sort, ladies, are in love, though they see the hook and the string, and the whole apparatus with which they are to be taken, they gorge the bait nevertheless– they must come to it–they must swallow it–and are presently struck and landed gasping. Rawdon saw there was a manifest intention on Mrs. Bute's part to captivate him with Rebecca. He was not very wise; but he was a man about town, and had seen several seasons. A light dawned upon his dusky soul, as he thought, through a speech of Mrs. Bute's.

“Mark my words, Rawdon,” she said. “You will have Miss Sharp one day for your relation.”

“What relation–my cousin, hey, Mrs. Bute? James sweet on her, hey?” inquired the waggish officer.

“More than that,” Mrs. Bute said, with a flash from her black eyes.

“Not Pitt? He sha'n't have her. The sneak a'n't worthy of her. He's booked to Lady Jane Sheepshanks.”

“You men perceive nothing. You silly, blind creature–if anything happens to Lady Crawley, Miss Sharp will be your mother-in-law; and that's what will happen.”

Rawdon Crawley, Esquire, gave vent to a prodigious whistle, in token of astonishment at this announcement. He couldn't deny it. His father's evident liking for Miss Sharp had not escaped him. He knew the old gentleman's character well; and a more unscrupulous old– whyou–he did not conclude the sentence, but walked home, curling his mustachios, and convinced he had found a clue to Mrs. Bute's mystery.

“By Jove, it's too bad,” thought Rawdon, “too bad, by Jove! I do believe the woman wants the poor girl to be ruined, in order that she shouldn't come into the family as Lady Crawley.”

When he saw Rebecca alone, he rallied her about his father's attachment in his graceful way. She flung up her head scornfully, looked him full in

the face, and said,

“Well, suppose he is fond of me. I know he is, and others too. You don't think I am afraid of him, Captain Crawley? You don't suppose I can't defend my own honour,” said the little woman, looking as stately as a queen.

“Oh, ah, why–give you fair warning–look out, you know–that's all,” said the mustachio-twiddler.

“You hint at something not honourable, then?” said she, flashing out.

“O Gad–really–Miss Rebecca,” the heavy dragoon interposed.

“Do you suppose I have no feeling of self-respect, because I am poor and friendless, and because rich people have none? Do you think, because I am a governess, I have not as much sense, and feeling, and good breeding as you gentlefolks in Hampshire? I'm a Montmorency. Do you suppose a Montmorency is not as good as a Crawley?”

When Miss Sharp was agitated, and alluded to her maternal relatives, she spoke with ever so slight a foreign accent, which gave a great charm to her clear ringing voice. “No,” she continued, kindling as she spoke to the Captain; “I can endure poverty, but not shame– neglect, but not insult; and insult from–from you.”

Her feelings gave way, and she burst into tears.

“Hang it, Miss Sharp–Rebecca–by Jove–upon my soul, I wouldn't for a thousand pounds. Stop, Rebecca!”

She was gone. She drove out with Miss Crawley that day. It was before the latter's illness. At dinner she was unusually brilliant and lively; but she would take no notice of the hints, or the nods, or the clumsy expostulations of the humiliated, infatuated guardsman. Skirmishes of this sort passed perpetually during the little campaign–tedious to relate, and similar in result. The Crawley heavy cavalry was maddened by defeat, and routed every day.

If the Baronet of Queen's Crawley had not had the fear of losing his

sister's legacy before his eyes, he never would have permitted his dear girls to lose the educational blessings which their invaluable governess was conferring upon them. The old house at home seemed a desert without her, so useful and pleasant had Rebecca made herself there. Sir Pitt's letters were not copied and corrected; his books not made up; his household business and manifold schemes neglected, now that his little secretary was away. And it was easy to see how necessary such an amanuensis was to him, by the tenor and spelling of the numerous letters which he sent to her, entreating her and commanding her to return. Almost every day brought a frank from the Baronet, enclosing the most urgent prayers to Becky for her return, or conveying pathetic statements to Miss Crawley, regarding the neglected state of his daughters' education; of which documents Miss Crawley took very little heed.

Miss Briggs was not formally dismissed, but her place as companion was a sinecure and a derision; and her company was the fat spaniel in the drawing-room, or occasionally the discontented Firkin in the housekeeper's closet. Nor though the old lady would by no means hear of Rebecca's departure, was the latter regularly installed in office in Park Lane. Like many wealthy people, it was Miss Crawley's habit to accept as much service as she could get from her inferiors; and good-naturedly to take leave of them when she no longer found them useful. Gratitude among certain rich folks is scarcely natural or to be thought of. They take needy people's services as their due. Nor have you, O poor parasite and humble hanger-on, much reason to complain! Your friendship for Dives is about as sincere as the return which it usually gets. It is money you love, and not the man; and were Croesus and his footman to change places you know, you poor rogue, who would have the benefit of your allegiance.

And I am not sure that, in spite of Rebecca's simplicity and activity, and gentleness and untiring good humour, the shrewd old London lady, upon whom these treasures of friendship were lavished, had not a lurking suspicion all the while of her affectionate nurse and friend. It must have often crossed Miss Crawley's mind that nobody does anything for nothing. If she measured her own feeling towards the world, she must have been pretty well able to gauge those of the world towards herself; and perhaps she reflected that it is the ordinary lot of people to have no friends if they themselves care for nobody.

Well, meanwhile Becky was the greatest comfort and convenience to her, and she gave her a couple of new gowns, and an old necklace and shawl, and showed her friendship by abusing all her intimate acquaintances to her new confidante (than which there can't be a more touching proof of regard), and meditated vaguely some great future benefit–to marry her perhaps to Clump, the apothecary, or to settle her in some advantageous way of life; or at any rate, to send her back to Queen's Crawley when she had done with her, and the full London season had begun.

When Miss Crawley was convalescent and descended to the drawing-room, Becky sang to her, and otherwise amused her; when she was well enough to drive out, Becky accompanied her. And amongst the drives which they took, whither, of all places in the world, did Miss Crawley's admirable good-nature and friendship actually induce her to penetrate, but to Russell Square, Bloomsbury, and the house of John Sedley, Esquire.

Ere that event, many notes had passed, as may be imagined, between the two dear friends. During the months of Rebecca's stay in Hampshire, the eternal friendship had (must it be owned?) suffered considerable diminution, and grown so decrepit and feeble with old age as to threaten demise altogether. The fact is, both girls had their own real affairs to think of: Rebecca her advance with her employers–Amelia her own absorbing topic. When the two girls met, and flew into each other's arms with that impetuosity which distinguishes the behaviour of young ladies towards each other, Rebecca performed her part of the embrace with the most perfect briskness and energy. Poor little Amelia blushed as she kissed her friend, and thought she had been guilty of something very like coldness towards her.

Their first interview was but a very short one. Amelia was just ready to go out for a walk. Miss Crawley was waiting in her carriage below, her people wondering at the locality in which they found themselves, and gazing upon honest Sambo, the black footman of Bloomsbury, as one of the queer natives of the place. But when Amelia came down with her kind smiling looks (Rebecca must introduce her to her friend, Miss Crawley was longing to see her, and was too ill to leave her carriage)–when, I say, Amelia came down, the Park Lane shoulder-knot aristocracy wondered more and more that such a thing could come out of

Bloomsbury; and Miss Crawley was fairly captivated by the sweet blushing face of the young lady who came forward so timidly and so gracefully to pay her respects to the protector of her friend.

“What a complexion, my dear! What a sweet voice!” Miss Crawley said, as they drove away westward after the little interview. “My dear Sharp, your young friend is charming. Send for her to Park Lane, do you hear?” Miss Crawley had a good taste. She liked natural manners–a little timidity only set them off. She liked pretty faces near her; as she liked pretty pictures and nice china. She talked of Amelia with rapture half a dozen times that day. She mentioned her to Rawdon Crawley, who came dutifully to partake of his aunt's chicken.

Of course, on this Rebecca instantly stated that Amelia was engaged to be married–to a Lieutenant Osborne–a very old flame.

“Is he a man in a line-regiment?” Captain Crawley asked, remembering after an effort, as became a guardsman, the number of the regiment, the –th.

Rebecca thought that was the regiment. “The Captain's name,” she said, “was Captain Dobbin.”

“A lanky gawky fellow,” said Crawley, “tumbles over everybody. I know him; and Osborne's a goodish-looking fellow, with large black whiskers?”

“Enormous,” Miss Rebecca Sharp said, “and enormously proud of them, I assure you.”

Captain Rawdon Crawley burst into a horse-laugh by way of reply; and being pressed by the ladies to explain, did so when the explosion of hilarity was over. “He fancies he can play at billiards,” said he. “I won two hundred of him at the Cocoa-Tree. He play, the young flat! He'd have played for anything that day, but his friend Captain Dobbin carried him off, hang him!”

“Rawdon, Rawdon, don't be so wicked,” Miss Crawley remarked, highly pleased.

“Why, ma'am, of all the young fellows I've seen out of the line, I think this fellow's the greenest. Tarquin and Deuceace get what money they like out of him. He'd go to the deuce to be seen with a lord. He pays their dinners at Greenwich, and they invite the company.”

“And very pretty company too, I dare say.”

“Quite right, Miss Sharp. Right, as usual, Miss Sharp. Uncommon pretty company–haw, haw!” and the Captain laughed more and more, thinking he had made a good joke.

“Rawdon, don't be naughty!” his aunt exclaimed.

“Well, his father's a City man–immensely rich, they say. Hang those City fellows, they must bleed; and I've not done with him yet, I can tell you. Haw, haw!”

“Fie, Captain Crawley; I shall warn Amelia. A gambling husband!”

“Horrid, ain't he, hey?” the Captain said with great solemnity; and then added, a sudden thought having struck him: “Gad, I say, ma'am, we'll have him here.”

“Is he a presentable sort of a person?” the aunt inquired.

“Presentable?–oh, very well. You wouldn't see any difference,” Captain Crawley answered. “Do let's have him, when you begin to see a few people; and his whatdyecallem–his inamorato–eh, Miss Sharp; that's what you call it–comes. Gad, I'll write him a note, and have him; and I'll try if he can play piquet as well as billiards. Where does he live, Miss Sharp?”

Miss Sharp told Crawley the Lieutenant's town address; and a few days after this conversation, Lieutenant Osborne received a letter, in Captain Rawdon's schoolboy hand, and enclosing a note of invitation from Miss Crawley.

Rebecca despatched also an invitation to her darling Amelia, who, you may be sure, was ready enough to accept it when she heard that George was to be of the party. It was arranged that Amelia was to spend the

morning with the ladies of Park Lane, where all were very kind to her. Rebecca patronised her with calm superiority: she was so much the cleverer of the two, and her friend so gentle and unassuming, that she always yielded when anybody chose to command, and so took Rebecca's orders with perfect meekness and good humour. Miss Crawley's graciousness was also remarkable. She continued her raptures about little Amelia, talked about her before her face as if she were a doll, or a servant, or a picture, and admired her with the most benevolent wonder possible. I admire that admiration which the genteel world sometimes extends to the commonalty. There is no more agreeable object in life than to see Mayfair folks condescending. Miss Crawley's prodigious benevolence rather fatigued poor little Amelia, and I am not sure that of the three ladies in Park Lane she did not find honest Miss Briggs the most agreeable. She sympathised with Briggs as with all neglected or gentle people: she wasn't what you call a woman of spirit.

George came to dinner–a repast en garcon with Captain Crawley.

The great family coach of the Osbornes transported him to Park Lane from Russell Square; where the young ladies, who were not themselves invited, and professed the greatest indifference at that slight, nevertheless looked at Sir Pitt Crawley's name in the baronetage; and learned everything which that work had to teach about the Crawley family and their pedigree, and the Binkies, their relatives, &c., &c. Rawdon Crawley received George Osborne with great frankness and graciousness: praised his play at billiards: asked him when he would have his revenge: was interested about Osborne's regiment: and would have proposed piquet to him that very evening, but Miss Crawley absolutely forbade any gambling in her house; so that the young Lieutenant's purse was not lightened by his gallant patron, for that day at least. However, they made an engagement for the next, somewhere: to look at a horse that Crawley had to sell, and to try him in the Park; and to dine together, and to pass the evening with some jolly fellows. “That is, if you're not on duty to that pretty Miss Sedley,” Crawley said, with a knowing wink. “Monstrous nice girl, 'pon my honour, though, Osborne,” he was good enough to add. “Lots of tin, I suppose, eh?”

Osborne wasn't on duty; he would join Crawley with pleasure: and the latter, when they met the next day, praised his new friend's horsemanship–as he might with perfect honesty–and introduced him to

three or four young men of the first fashion, whose acquaintance immensely elated the simple young officer.

“How's little Miss Sharp, by-the-bye?” Osborne inquired of his friend over their wine, with a dandified air. “Good-natured little girl that. Does she suit you well at Queen's Crawley? Miss Sedley liked her a good deal last year.”

Captain Crawley looked savagely at the Lieutenant out of his little blue eyes, and watched him when he went up to resume his acquaintance with the fair governess. Her conduct must have relieved Crawley if there was any jealousy in the bosom of that life-guardsman.

When the young men went upstairs, and after Osborne's introduction to Miss Crawley, he walked up to Rebecca with a patronising, easy swagger. He was going to be kind to her and protect her. He would even shake hands with her, as a friend of Amelia's; and saying, “Ah, Miss Sharp! how-dy-doo?” held out his left hand towards her, expecting that she would be quite confounded at the honour.

Miss Sharp put out her right forefinger, and gave him a little nod, so cool and killing, that Rawdon Crawley, watching the operations from the other room, could hardly restrain his laughter as he saw the Lieutenant's entire discomfiture; the start he gave, the pause, and the perfect clumsiness with which he at length condescended to take the finger which was offered for his embrace.

“She'd beat the devil, by Jove!” the Captain said, in a rapture; and the Lieutenant, by way of beginning the conversation, agreeably asked Rebecca how she liked her new place.

“My place?” said Miss Sharp, coolly, “how kind of you to remind me of it! It's a tolerably good place: the wages are pretty good–not so good as Miss Wirt's, I believe, with your sisters in Russell Square. How are those young ladies?–not that I ought to ask.”

“Why not?” Mr. Osborne said, amazed.

“Why, they never condescended to speak to me, or to ask me into their house, whilst I was staying with Amelia; but we poor governesses, you

know, are used to slights of this sort."

"My dear Miss Sharp!" Osborne ejaculated.

"At least in some families," Rebecca continued. "You can't think what a difference there is though. We are not so wealthy in Hampshire as you lucky folks of the City. But then I am in a gentleman's family–good old English stock. I suppose you know Sir Pitt's father refused a peerage. And you see how I am treated. I am pretty comfortable. Indeed it is rather a good place. But how very good of you to inquire!"

Osborne was quite savage. The little governess patronised him and persiffled him until this young British Lion felt quite uneasy; nor could he muster sufficient presence of mind to find a pretext for backing out of this most delectable conversation.

"I thought you liked the City families pretty well," he said, haughtily.

"Last year you mean, when I was fresh from that horrid vulgar school? Of course I did. Doesn't every girl like to come home for the holidays? And how was I to know any better? But oh, Mr. Osborne, what a difference eighteen months' experience makes! eighteen months spent, pardon me for saying so, with gentlemen. As for dear Amelia, she, I grant you, is a pearl, and would be charming anywhere. There now, I see you are beginning to be in a good humour; but oh these queer odd City people! And Mr. Jos–how is that wonderful Mr. Joseph?"

"It seems to me you didn't dislike that wonderful Mr. Joseph last year," Osborne said kindly.

"How severe of you! Well, entre nous, I didn't break my heart about him; yet if he had asked me to do what you mean by your looks (and very expressive and kind they are, too), I wouldn't have said no."

Mr. Osborne gave a look as much as to say, "Indeed, how very obliging!"

"What an honour to have had you for a brother-in-law, you are thinking? To be sister-in-law to George Osborne, Esquire, son of John Osborne, Esquire, son of–what was your grandpapa, Mr. Osborne? Well, don't be

angry. You can't help your pedigree, and I quite agree with you that I would have married Mr. Joe Sedley; for could a poor penniless girl do better? Now you know the whole secret. I'm frank and open; considering all things, it was very kind of you to allude to the circumstance–very kind and polite. Amelia dear, Mr. Osborne and I were talking about your poor brother Joseph. How is he?"

Thus was George utterly routed. Not that Rebecca was in the right; but she had managed most successfully to put him in the wrong. And he now shamefully fled, feeling, if he stayed another minute, that he would have been made to look foolish in the presence of Amelia.

Though Rebecca had had the better of him, George was above the meanness of talebearing or revenge upon a lady–only he could not help cleverly confiding to Captain Crawley, next day, some notions of his regarding Miss Rebecca–that she was a sharp one, a dangerous one, a desperate flirt, &c.; in all of which opinions Crawley agreed laughingly, and with every one of which Miss Rebecca was made acquainted before twenty-four hours were over. They added to her original regard for Mr. Osborne. Her woman's instinct had told her that it was George who had interrupted the success of her first love-passage, and she esteemed him accordingly.

"I only just warn you," he said to Rawdon Crawley, with a knowing look–he had bought the horse, and lost some score of guineas after dinner, "I just warn you–I know women, and counsel you to be on the look-out."

"Thank you, my boy," said Crawley, with a look of peculiar gratitude. "You're wide awake, I see." And George went off, thinking Crawley was quite right.

He told Amelia of what he had done, and how he had counselled Rawdon Crawley–a devilish good, straightforward fellow–to be on his guard against that little sly, scheming Rebecca.

"Against whom?" Amelia cried.

"Your friend the governess.–Don't look so astonished."

“O George, what have you done?” Amelia said. For her woman's eyes, which Love had made sharp-sighted, had in one instant discovered a secret which was invisible to Miss Crawley, to poor virgin Briggs, and above all, to the stupid peepers of that young whiskered prig, Lieutenant Osborne.

For as Rebecca was shawling her in an upper apartment, where these two friends had an opportunity for a little of that secret talking and conspiring which form the delight of female life, Amelia, coming up to Rebecca, and taking her two little hands in hers, said, “Rebecca, I see it all.”

Rebecca kissed her.

And regarding this delightful secret, not one syllable more was said by either of the young women. But it was destined to come out before long.

Some short period after the above events, and Miss Rebecca Sharp still remaining at her patroness's house in Park Lane, one more hatchment might have been seen in Great Gaunt Street, figuring amongst the many which usually ornament that dismal quarter. It was over Sir Pitt Crawley's house; but it did not indicate the worthy baronet's demise. It was a feminine hatchment, and indeed a few years back had served as a funeral compliment to Sir Pitt's old mother, the late dowager Lady Crawley. Its period of service over, the hatchment had come down from the front of the house, and lived in retirement somewhere in the back premises of Sir Pitt's mansion. It reappeared now for poor Rose Dawson. Sir Pitt was a widower again. The arms quartered on the shield along with his own were not, to be sure, poor Rose's. She had no arms. But the cherubs painted on the scutcheon answered as well for her as for Sir Pitt's mother, and Resurgam was written under the coat, flanked by the Crawley Dove and Serpent. Arms and Hatchments, Resurgam.–Here is an opportunity for moralising!

Mr. Crawley had tended that otherwise friendless bedside. She went out of the world strengthened by such words and comfort as he could give her. For many years his was the only kindness she ever knew; the only friendship that solaced in any way that feeble, lonely soul. Her heart was dead long before her body. She had sold it to become Sir Pitt Crawley's wife. Mothers and daughters are making the same bargain every day in

Vanity Fair.

When the demise took place, her husband was in London attending to some of his innumerable schemes, and busy with his endless lawyers. He had found time, nevertheless, to call often in Park Lane, and to despatch many notes to Rebecca, entreating her, enjoining her, commanding her to return to her young pupils in the country, who were now utterly without companionship during their mother's illness. But Miss Crawley would not hear of her departure; for though there was no lady of fashion in London who would desert her friends more complacently as soon as she was tired of their society, and though few tired of them sooner, yet as long as her engoument lasted her attachment was prodigious, and she clung still with the greatest energy to Rebecca.

The news of Lady Crawley's death provoked no more grief or comment than might have been expected in Miss Crawley's family circle. “I suppose I must put off my party for the 3rd,” Miss Crawley said; and added, after a pause, “I hope my brother will have the decency not to marry again.” “What a confounded rage Pitt will be in if he does,” Rawdon remarked, with his usual regard for his elder brother. Rebecca said nothing. She seemed by far the gravest and most impressed of the family. She left the room before Rawdon went away that day; but they met by chance below, as he was going away after taking leave, and had a parley together.

On the morrow, as Rebecca was gazing from the window, she startled Miss Crawley, who was placidly occupied with a French novel, by crying out in an alarmed tone, “Here's Sir Pitt, Ma'am!” and the Baronet's knock followed this announcement.

“My dear, I can't see him. I won't see him. Tell Bowls not at home, or go downstairs and say I'm too ill to receive any one. My nerves really won't bear my brother at this moment,” cried out Miss Crawley, and resumed the novel.

“She's too ill to see you, sir,” Rebecca said, tripping down to Sir Pitt, who was preparing to ascend.

“So much the better,” Sir Pitt answered. “I want to see you, Miss Becky. Come along a me into the parlour,” and they entered that apartment

together.

“I wawnt you back at Queen's Crawley, Miss,” the baronet said, fixing his eyes upon her, and taking off his black gloves and his hat with its great crape hat-band. His eyes had such a strange look, and fixed upon her so steadfastly, that Rebecca Sharp began almost to tremble.

“I hope to come soon,” she said in a low voice, “as soon as Miss Crawley is better–and return to–to the dear children.”

“You've said so these three months, Becky,” replied Sir Pitt, “and still you go hanging on to my sister, who'll fling you off like an old shoe, when she's wore you out. I tell you I want you. I'm going back to the Vuneral. Will you come back? Yes or no?”

“I daren't–I don't think–it would be right–to be alone–with you, sir,” Becky said, seemingly in great agitation.

“I say agin, I want you,” Sir Pitt said, thumping the table. “I can't git on without you. I didn't see what it was till you went away. The house all goes wrong. It's not the same place. All my accounts has got muddled agin. You must come back. Do come back. Dear Becky, do come.”

“Come–as what, sir?” Rebecca gasped out.

“Come as Lady Crawley, if you like,” the Baronet said, grasping his crape hat. “There! will that zatusfy you? Come back and be my wife. Your vit vor't. Birth be hanged. You're as good a lady as ever I see. You've got more brains in your little vinger than any baronet's wife in the county. Will you come? Yes or no?”

“Oh, Sir Pitt!” Rebecca said, very much moved.

“Say yes, Becky,” Sir Pitt continued. “I'm an old man, but a good'n. I'm good for twenty years. I'll make you happy, zee if I don't. You shall do what you like; spend what you like; and 'ave it all your own way. I'll make you a zettlement. I'll do everything reglar. Look year!” and the old man fell down on his knees and leered at her like a satyr.

Rebecca started back a picture of consternation. In the course of this

history we have never seen her lose her presence of mind; but she did now, and wept some of the most genuine tears that ever fell from her eyes.

“Oh, Sir Pitt!” she said. “Oh, sir–I–I'm married already.”