

Vanity Fair by William Makepeace Thackeray

Chapter 25

"In Which All the Principal Personages Think Fit to"

Leave Brighton Conducted to the ladies, at the Ship Inn, Dobbin assumed a jovial and rattling manner, which proved that this young officer was becoming a more consummate hypocrite every day of his life. He was trying to hide his own private feelings, first upon seeing Mrs. George Osborne in her new condition, and secondly to mask the apprehensions he entertained as to the effect which the dismal news brought down by him would certainly have upon her.

"It is my opinion, George," he said, "that the French Emperor will be upon us, horse and foot, before three weeks are over, and will give the Duke such a dance as shall make the Peninsula appear mere child's play. But you need not say that to Mrs. Osborne, you know. There mayn't be any fighting on our side after all, and our business in Belgium may turn out to be a mere military occupation. Many persons think so; and Brussels is full of fine people and ladies of fashion." So it was agreed to represent the duty of the British army in Belgium in this harmless light to Amelia.

This plot being arranged, the hypocritical Dobbin saluted Mrs. George Osborne quite gaily, tried to pay her one or two compliments relative to her new position as a bride (which compliments, it must be confessed, were exceedingly clumsy and hung fire woefully), and then fell to talking about Brighton, and the sea-air, and the gaities of the place, and the beauties of the road and the merits of the Lightning coach and horses—all in a manner quite incomprehensible to Amelia, and very amusing to Rebecca, who was watching the Captain, as indeed she watched every one near whom she came.

Little Amelia, it must be owned, had rather a mean opinion of her husband's friend, Captain Dobbin. He lisped—he was very plain and homely-looking: and exceedingly awkward and ungainly. She liked him for his attachment to her husband (to be sure there was very little merit in that), and she thought George was most generous and kind in extending his friendship to his brother officer. George had mimicked

Dobbin's lisp and queer manners many times to her, though to do him justice, he always spoke most highly of his friend's good qualities. In her little day of triumph, and not knowing him intimately as yet, she made light of honest William—and he knew her opinions of him quite well, and acquiesced in them very humbly. A time came when she knew him better, and changed her notions regarding him; but that was distant as yet.

As for Rebecca, Captain Dobbin had not been two hours in the ladies' company before she understood his secret perfectly. She did not like him, and feared him privately; nor was he very much prepossessed in her favour. He was so honest, that her arts and cajoleries did not affect him, and he shrank from her with instinctive repulsion. And, as she was by no means so far superior to her sex as to be above jealousy, she disliked him the more for his adoration of Amelia. Nevertheless, she was very respectful and cordial in her manner towards him. A friend to the Osbornes! a friend to her dearest benefactors! She vowed she should always love him sincerely: she remembered him quite well on the Vauxhall night, as she told Amelia archly, and she made a little fun of him when the two ladies went to dress for dinner. Rawdon Crawley paid scarcely any attention to Dobbin, looking upon him as a good-natured nincompoop and under-bred City man. Jos patronised him with much dignity.

When George and Dobbin were alone in the latter's room, to which George had followed him, Dobbin took from his desk the letter which he had been charged by Mr. Osborne to deliver to his son. "It's not in my father's handwriting," said George, looking rather alarmed; nor was it: the letter was from Mr. Osborne's lawyer, and to the following effect:

"Bedford Row, May 7, 1815.

"Sir,

"I am commissioned by Mr. Osborne to inform you, that he abides by the determination which he before expressed to you, and that in consequence of the marriage which you have been pleased to contract, he ceases to consider you henceforth as a member of his family. This determination is final and irrevocable.

“Although the monies expended upon you in your minority, and the bills which you have drawn upon him so unsparingly of late years, far exceed in amount the sum to which you are entitled in your own right (being the third part of the fortune of your mother, the late Mrs. Osborne and which reverted to you at her decease, and to Miss Jane Osborne and Miss Maria Frances Osborne); yet I am instructed by Mr. Osborne to say, that he waives all claim upon your estate, and that the sum of £2000, 4 per cent. annuities, at the value of the day (being your one-third share of the sum of £6000), shall be paid over to yourself or your agents upon your receipt for the same, by

“Your obedient Servt.,”_S. Higgs.

“P.S.—Mr. Osborne desires me to say, once for all, that he declines to receive any messages, letters, or communications from you on this or any other subject.

“A pretty way you have managed the affair,” said George, looking savagely at William Dobbin. “Look there, Dobbin,” and he flung over to the latter his parent’s letter. “A beggar, by Jove, and all in consequence of my d—d sentimentality. Why couldn’t we have waited? A ball might have done for me in the course of the war, and may still, and how will Emmy be bettered by being left a beggar’s widow? It was all your doing. You were never easy until you had got me married and ruined. What the deuce am I to do with two thousand pounds? Such a sum won’t last two years. I’ve lost a hundred and forty to Crawley at cards and billiards since I’ve been down here. A pretty manager of a man’s matters you are, forsooth.”

“There’s no denying that the position is a hard one,” Dobbin replied, after reading over the letter with a blank countenance; “and as you say, it is partly of my making. There are some men who wouldn’t mind changing with you,” he added, with a bitter smile. “How many captains in the regiment have two thousand pounds to the fore, think you? You must live on your pay till your father relents, and if you die, you leave your wife a hundred a year.”

“Do you suppose a man of my habits call live on his pay and a hundred a year?” George cried out in great anger. “You must be a fool to talk so, Dobbin. How the deuce am I to keep up my position in the world upon

such a pitiful pittance? I can't change my habits. I must have my comforts. I wasn't brought up on porridge, like MacWhirter, or on potatoes, like old O'Dowd. Do you expect my wife to take in soldiers' washing, or ride after the regiment in a baggage waggon?"

"Well, well," said Dobbin, still good-naturedly, "we'll get her a better conveyance. But try and remember that you are only a dethroned prince now, George, my boy; and be quiet whilst the tempest lasts. It won't be for long. Let your name be mentioned in the Gazette, and I'll engage the old father relents towards you:"

"Mentioned in the Gazette!" George answered. "And in what part of it? Among the killed and wounded returns, and at the top of the list, very likely."

"Psha! It will be time enough to cry out when we are hurt," Dobbin said. "And if anything happens, you know, George, I have got a little, and I am not a marrying man, and I shall not forget my godson in my will," he added, with a smile. Whereupon the dispute ended—as many scores of such conversations between Osborne and his friend had concluded previously—by the former declaring there was no possibility of being angry with Dobbin long, and forgiving him very generously after abusing him without cause.

"I say, Becky," cried Rawdon Crawley out of his dressing-room, to his lady, who was attiring herself for dinner in her own chamber.

"What?" said Becky's shrill voice. She was looking over her shoulder in the glass. She had put on the neatest and freshest white frock imaginable, and with bare shoulders and a little necklace, and a light blue sash, she looked the image of youthful innocence and girlish happiness.

"I say, what'll Mrs. O. do, when O. goes out with the regiment?" Crawley said coming into the room, performing a duet on his head with two huge hair-brushes, and looking out from under his hair with admiration on his pretty little wife.

"I suppose she'll cry her eyes out," Becky answered. "She has been whimpering half a dozen times, at the very notion of it, already to me."

“You don’t care, I suppose?” Rawdon said, half angry at his wife’s want of feeling.

“You wretch! don’t you know that I intend to go with you,” Becky replied. “Besides, you’re different. You go as General Tufto’s aide-de-camp. We don’t belong to the line,” Mrs. Crawley said, throwing up her head with an air that so enchanted her husband that he stooped down and kissed it.

“Rawdon dear—don’t you think—you’d better get that—money from Cupid, before he goes?” Becky continued, fixing on a killing bow. She called George Osborne, Cupid. She had flattered him about his good looks a score of times already. She watched over him kindly at ecarte of a night when he would drop in to Rawdon’s quarters for a half-hour before bed-time.

She had often called him a horrid dissipated wretch, and threatened to tell Emmy of his wicked ways and naughty extravagant habits. She brought his cigar and lighted it for him; she knew the effect of that manoeuvre, having practised it in former days upon Rawdon Crawley. He thought her gay, brisk, arch, distinguee, delightful. In their little drives and dinners, Becky, of course, quite outshone poor Emmy, who remained very mute and timid while Mrs. Crawley and her husband rattled away together, and Captain Crawley (and Jos after he joined the young married people) gobbled in silence.

Emmy’s mind somehow misgave her about her friend. Rebecca’s wit, spirits, and accomplishments troubled her with a rueful disquiet. They were only a week married, and here was George already suffering ennui, and eager for others’ society! She trembled for the future. How shall I be a companion for him, she thought—so clever and so brilliant, and I such a humble foolish creature? How noble it was of him to marry me—to give up everything and stoop down to me! I ought to have refused him, only I had not the heart. I ought to have stopped at home and taken care of poor Papa. And her neglect of her parents (and indeed there was some foundation for this charge which the poor child’s uneasy conscience brought against her) was now remembered for the first time, and caused her to blush with humiliation. Oh! thought she, I have been very wicked and selfish—selfish in forgetting them in their sorrows—selfish in forcing George to marry me. I know I’m not worthy of him—I know he would

have been happy without me—and yet—I tried, I tried to give him up.

It is hard when, before seven days of marriage are over, such thoughts and confessions as these force themselves on a little bride's mind. But so it was, and the night before Dobbin came to join these young people—on a fine brilliant moonlight night of May—so warm and balmy that the windows were flung open to the balcony, from which George and Mrs. Crawley were gazing upon the calm ocean spread shining before them, while Rawdon and Jos were engaged at backgammon within—Amelia couched in a great chair quite neglected, and watching both these parties, felt a despair and remorse such as were bitter companions for that tender lonely soul. Scarce a week was past, and it was come to this! The future, had she regarded it, offered a dismal prospect; but Emmy was too shy, so to speak, to look to that, and embark alone on that wide sea, and unfit to navigate it without a guide and protector. I know Miss Smith has a mean opinion of her. But how many, my dear Madam, are endowed with your prodigious strength of mind?

“Gad, what a fine night, and how bright the moon is!” George said, with a puff of his cigar, which went soaring up skywards.

“How delicious they smell in the open air! I adore them. Who'd think the moon was two hundred and thirty-six thousand eight hundred and forty-seven miles off?” Becky added, gazing at that orb with a smile. “Isn't it clever of me to remember that? Pooh! we learned it all at Miss Pinkerton's! How calm the sea is, and how clear everything. I declare I can almost see the coast of France!” and her bright green eyes streamed out, and shot into the night as if they could see through it.

“Do you know what I intend to do one morning?” she said; “I find I can swim beautifully, and some day, when my Aunt Crawley's companion—old Briggs, you know—you remember her—that hook-nosed woman, with the long wisps of hair—when Briggs goes out to bathe, I intend to dive under her awning, and insist on a reconciliation in the water. Isn't that a stratagem?”

George burst out laughing at the idea of this aquatic meeting. “What's the row there, you two?” Rawdon shouted out, rattling the box. Amelia was making a fool of herself in an absurd hysterical manner, and retired to her own room to whimper in private.

Our history is destined in this chapter to go backwards and forwards in a very irresolute manner seemingly, and having conducted our story to tomorrow presently, we shall immediately again have occasion to step back to yesterday, so that the whole of the tale may get a hearing. As you behold at her Majesty's drawing-room, the ambassadors' and high dignitaries' carriages whisk off from a private door, while Captain Jones's ladies are waiting for their fly: as you see in the Secretary of the Treasury's antechamber, a half-dozen of petitioners waiting patiently for their audience, and called out one by one, when suddenly an Irish member or some eminent personage enters the apartment, and instantly walks into Mr. Under-Secretary over the heads of all the people present: so in the conduct of a tale, the romancer is obliged to exercise this most partial sort of justice. Although all the little incidents must be heard, yet they must be put off when the great events make their appearance; and surely such a circumstance as that which brought Dobbin to Brighton, viz., the ordering out of the Guards and the line to Belgium, and the mustering of the allied armies in that country under the command of his Grace the Duke of Wellington—such a dignified circumstance as that, I say, was entitled to the pas over all minor occurrences whereof this history is composed mainly, and hence a little trifling disarrangement and disorder was excusable and becoming. We have only now advanced in time so far beyond Chapter XXII as to have got our various characters up into their dressing-rooms before the dinner, which took place as usual on the day of Dobbin's arrival.

George was too humane or too much occupied with the tie of his neckcloth to convey at once all the news to Amelia which his comrade had brought with him from London. He came into her room, however, holding the attorney's letter in his hand, and with so solemn and important an air that his wife, always ingeniously on the watch for calamity, thought the worst was about to befall, and running up to her husband, besought her dearest George to tell her everything—he was ordered abroad; there would be a battle next week—she knew there would.

Dearest George parried the question about foreign service, and with a melancholy shake of the head said, "No, Emmy; it isn't that: it's not myself I care about: it's you. I have had bad news from my father. He refuses any communication with me; he has flung us off; and leaves us to poverty. I can rough it well enough; but you, my dear, how will you

bear it? read here.” And he handed her over the letter.

Amelia, with a look of tender alarm in her eyes, listened to her noble hero as he uttered the above generous sentiments, and sitting down on the bed, read the letter which George gave her with such a pompous martyr-like air. Her face cleared up as she read the document, however. The idea of sharing poverty and privation in company with the beloved object is, as we have before said, far from being disagreeable to a warm-hearted woman. The notion was actually pleasant to little Amelia. Then, as usual, she was ashamed of herself for feeling happy at such an indecorous moment, and checked her pleasure, saying demurely, “O, George, how your poor heart must bleed at the idea of being separated from your papa!”

“It does,” said George, with an agonised countenance.

“But he can’t be angry with you long,” she continued. “Nobody could, I’m sure. He must forgive you, my dearest, kindest husband. O, I shall never forgive myself if he does not.”

“What vexes me, my poor Emmy, is not my misfortune, but yours,” George said. “I don’t care for a little poverty; and I think, without vanity, I’ve talents enough to make my own way.”

“That you have,” interposed his wife, who thought that war should cease, and her husband should be made a general instantly.

“Yes, I shall make my way as well as another,” Osborne went on; “but you, my dear girl, how can I bear your being deprived of the comforts and station in society which my wife had a right to expect? My dearest girl in barracks; the wife of a soldier in a marching regiment; subject to all sorts of annoyance and privation! It makes me miserable.”

Emmy, quite at ease, as this was her husband’s only cause of disquiet, took his hand, and with a radiant face and smile began to warble that stanza from the favourite song of “Wapping Old Stairs,” in which the heroine, after rebuking her Tom for inattention, promises “his trousers to mend, and his grog too to make,” if he will be constant and kind, and not forsake her. “Besides,” she said, after a pause, during which she looked as pretty and happy as any young woman need, “isn’t two thousand

pounds an immense deal of money, George?”

George laughed at her naivete; and finally they went down to dinner, Amelia clinging to George’s arm, still warbling the tune of “Wapping Old Stairs,” and more pleased and light of mind than she had been for some days past.

Thus the repast, which at length came off, instead of being dismal, was an exceedingly brisk and merry one. The excitement of the campaign counteracted in George’s mind the depression occasioned by the disinheriting letter. Dobbin still kept up his character of rattle. He amused the company with accounts of the army in Belgium; where nothing but fetes and gaiety and fashion were going on. Then, having a particular end in view, this dexterous captain proceeded to describe Mrs. Major O’Dowd packing her own and her Major’s wardrobe, and how his best epaulets had been stowed into a tea canister, whilst her own famous yellow turban, with the bird of paradise wrapped in brown paper, was locked up in the Major’s tin cocked-hat case, and wondered what effect it would have at the French king’s court at Ghent, or the great military balls at Brussels.

“Ghent! Brussels!” cried out Amelia with a sudden shock and start. “Is the regiment ordered away, George—is it ordered away?” A look of terror came over the sweet smiling face, and she clung to George as by an instinct.

“Don’t be afraid, dear,” he said good-naturedly; “it is but a twelve hours’ passage. It won’t hurt you. You shall go, too, Emmy.”

“I intend to go,” said Becky. “I’m on the staff. General Tufto is a great flirt of mine. Isn’t he, Rawdon?” Rawdon laughed out with his usual roar. William Dobbin flushed up quite red. “She can’t go,” he said; “think of the—of the danger,” he was going to add; but had not all his conversation during dinner-time tended to prove there was none? He became very confused and silent.

“I must and will go,” Amelia cried with the greatest spirit; and George, applauding her resolution, patted her under the chin, and asked all the persons present if they ever saw such a termagant of a wife, and agreed that the lady should bear him company. “We’ll have Mrs. O’Dowd to

chaperon you," he said. What cared she so long as her husband was near her? Thus somehow the bitterness of a parting was juggled away. Though war and danger were in store, war and danger might not befall for months to come. There was a respite at any rate, which made the timid little Amelia almost as happy as a full reprieve would have done, and which even Dobbin owned in his heart was very welcome. For, to be permitted to see her was now the greatest privilege and hope of his life, and he thought with himself secretly how he would watch and protect her. I wouldn't have let her go if I had been married to her, he thought. But George was the master, and his friend did not think fit to remonstrate.

Putting her arm round her friend's waist, Rebecca at length carried Amelia off from the dinner-table where so much business of importance had been discussed, and left the gentlemen in a highly exhilarated state, drinking and talking very gaily.

In the course of the evening Rawdon got a little family-note from his wife, which, although he crumpled it up and burnt it instantly in the candle, we had the good luck to read over Rebecca's shoulder. "Great news," she wrote. "Mrs. Bute is gone. Get the money from Cupid tonight, as he'll be off to-morrow most likely. Mind this.— R." So when the little company was about adjourning to coffee in the women's apartment, Rawdon touched Osborne on the elbow, and said gracefully, "I say, Osborne, my boy, if quite convenient, I'll trouble you for that 'ere small trifle." It was not quite convenient, but nevertheless George gave him a considerable present instalment in bank-notes from his pocket-book, and a bill on his agents at a week's date, for the remaining sum.

This matter arranged, George, and Jos, and Dobbin, held a council of war over their cigars, and agreed that a general move should be made for London in Jos's open carriage the next day. Jos, I think, would have preferred staying until Rawdon Crawley quitted Brighton, but Dobbin and George overruled him, and he agreed to carry the party to town, and ordered four horses, as became his dignity. With these they set off in state, after breakfast, the next day. Amelia had risen very early in the morning, and packed her little trunks with the greatest alacrity, while Osborne lay in bed deploring that she had not a maid to help her. She was only too glad, however, to perform this office for herself. A dim

uneasy sentiment about Rebecca filled her mind already; and although they kissed each other most tenderly at parting, yet we know what jealousy is; and Mrs. Amelia possessed that among other virtues of her sex.

Besides these characters who are coming and going away, we must remember that there were some other old friends of ours at Brighton; Miss Crawley, namely, and the suite in attendance upon her. Now, although Rebecca and her husband were but at a few stones' throw of the lodgings which the invalid Miss Crawley occupied, the old lady's door remained as pitilessly closed to them as it had been heretofore in London. As long as she remained by the side of her sister-in-law, Mrs. Bute Crawley took care that her beloved Matilda should not be agitated by a meeting with her nephew. When the spinster took her drive, the faithful Mrs. Bute sat beside her in the carriage. When Miss Crawley took the air in a chair, Mrs. Bute marched on one side of the vehicle, whilst honest Briggs occupied the other wing. And if they met Rawdon and his wife by chance—although the former constantly and obsequiously took off his hat, the Miss-Crawley party passed him by with such a frigid and killing indifference, that Rawdon began to despair.

“We might as well be in London as here,” Captain Rawdon often said, with a downcast air.

“A comfortable inn in Brighton is better than a spunging-house in Chancery Lane,” his wife answered, who was of a more cheerful temperament. “Think of those two aides-de-camp of Mr. Moses, the sheriff's-officer, who watched our lodging for a week. Our friends here are very stupid, but Mr. Jos and Captain Cupid are better companions than Mr. Moses's men, Rawdon, my love.”

“I wonder the writs haven't followed me down here,” Rawdon continued, still desponding.

“When they do, we'll find means to give them the slip,” said dauntless little Becky, and further pointed out to her husband the great comfort and advantage of meeting Jos and Osborne, whose acquaintance had brought to Rawdon Crawley a most timely little supply of ready money.

“It will hardly be enough to pay the inn bill,” grumbled the Guardsman.

“Why need we pay it?” said the lady, who had an answer for everything.

Through Rawdon’s valet, who still kept up a trifling acquaintance with the male inhabitants of Miss Crawley’s servants’ hall, and was instructed to treat the coachman to drink whenever they met, old Miss Crawley’s movements were pretty well known by our young couple; and Rebecca luckily bethought herself of being unwell, and of calling in the same apothecary who was in attendance upon the spinster, so that their information was on the whole tolerably complete. Nor was Miss Briggs, although forced to adopt a hostile attitude, secretly inimical to Rawdon and his wife. She was naturally of a kindly and forgiving disposition. Now that the cause of jealousy was removed, her dislike for Rebecca disappeared also, and she remembered the latter’s invariable good words and good humour. And, indeed, she and Mrs. Firkin, the lady’s-maid, and the whole of Miss Crawley’s household, groaned under the tyranny of the triumphant Mrs. Bute.

As often will be the case, that good but imperious woman pushed her advantages too far, and her successes quite unmercifully. She had in the course of a few weeks brought the invalid to such a state of helpless docility, that the poor soul yielded herself entirely to her sister’s orders, and did not even dare to complain of her slavery to Briggs or Firkin. Mrs. Bute measured out the glasses of wine which Miss Crawley was daily allowed to take, with irresistible accuracy, greatly to the annoyance of Firkin and the butler, who found themselves deprived of control over even the sherry-bottle. She apportioned the sweetbreads, jellies, chickens; their quantity and order. Night and noon and morning she brought the abominable drinks ordained by the Doctor, and made her patient swallow them with so affecting an obedience that Firkin said “my poor Missus du take her physic like a lamb.” She prescribed the drive in the carriage or the ride in the chair, and, in a word, ground down the old lady in her convalescence in such a way as only belongs to your proper-managing, motherly moral woman. If ever the patient faintly resisted, and pleaded for a little bit more dinner or a little drop less medicine, the nurse threatened her with instantaneous death, when Miss Crawley instantly gave in. “She’s no spirit left in her,” Firkin remarked to Briggs; “she ain’t ave called me a fool these three weeks.” Finally, Mrs. Bute had made up her mind to dismiss the aforesaid honest lady’s-maid, Mr. Bowls the large confidential man, and Briggs herself, and to send for her daughters from the Rectory, previous to removing the dear

invalid bodily to Queen's Crawley, when an odious accident happened which called her away from duties so pleasing. The Reverend Bute Crawley, her husband, riding home one night, fell with his horse and broke his collar-bone. Fever and inflammatory symptoms set in, and Mrs. Bute was forced to leave Sussex for Hampshire. As soon as ever Bute was restored, she promised to return to her dearest friend, and departed, leaving the strongest injunctions with the household regarding their behaviour to their mistress; and as soon as she got into the Southampton coach, there was such a jubilee and sense of relief in all Miss Crawley's house, as the company of persons assembled there had not experienced for many a week before. That very day Miss Crawley left off her afternoon dose of medicine: that afternoon Bowls opened an independent bottle of sherry for himself and Mrs. Firkin: that night Miss Crawley and Miss Briggs indulged in a game of piquet instead of one of Porteus's sermons. It was as in the old nursery-story, when the stick forgot to beat the dog, and the whole course of events underwent a peaceful and happy revolution.

At a very early hour in the morning, twice or thrice a week, Miss Briggs used to betake herself to a bathing-machine, and disport in the water in a flannel gown and an oilskin cap. Rebecca, as we have seen, was aware of this circumstance, and though she did not attempt to storm Briggs as she had threatened, and actually dive into that lady's presence and surprise her under the sacredness of the awning, Mrs. Rawdon determined to attack Briggs as she came away from her bath, refreshed and invigorated by her dip, and likely to be in good humour.

So getting up very early the next morning, Becky brought the telescope in their sitting-room, which faced the sea, to bear upon the bathing-machines on the beach; saw Briggs arrive, enter her box; and put out to sea; and was on the shore just as the nymph of whom she came in quest stepped out of the little caravan on to the shingles. It was a pretty picture: the beach; the bathing-women's faces; the long line of rocks and building were blushing and bright in the sunshine. Rebecca wore a kind, tender smile on her face, and was holding out her pretty white hand as Briggs emerged from the box. What could Briggs do but accept the salutation?

"Miss Sh—Mrs. Crawley," she said.

Mrs. Crawley seized her hand, pressed it to her heart, and with a sudden impulse, flinging her arms round Briggs, kissed her affectionately. "Dear, dear friend!" she said, with a touch of such natural feeling, that Miss Briggs of course at once began to melt, and even the bathing-woman was mollified.

Rebecca found no difficulty in engaging Briggs in a long, intimate, and delightful conversation. Everything that had passed since the morning of Becky's sudden departure from Miss Crawley's house in Park Lane up to the present day, and Mrs. Bute's happy retreat, was discussed and described by Briggs. All Miss Crawley's symptoms, and the particulars of her illness and medical treatment, were narrated by the confidante with that fulness and accuracy which women delight in. About their complaints and their doctors do ladies ever tire of talking to each other? Briggs did not on this occasion; nor did Rebecca weary of listening. She was thankful, truly thankful, that the dear kind Briggs, that the faithful, the invaluable Firkin, had been permitted to remain with their benefactress through her illness. Heaven bless her! though she, Rebecca, had seemed to act undutifully towards Miss Crawley; yet was not her fault a natural and excusable one? Could she help giving her hand to the man who had won her heart? Briggs, the sentimental, could only turn up her eyes to heaven at this appeal, and heave a sympathetic sigh, and think that she, too, had given away her affections long years ago, and own that Rebecca was no very great criminal.

"Can I ever forget her who so befriended the friendless orphan? No, though she has cast me off," the latter said, "I shall never cease to love her, and I would devote my life to her service. As my own benefactress, as my beloved Rawdon's adored relative, I love and admire Miss Crawley, dear Miss Briggs, beyond any woman in the world, and next to her I love all those who are faithful to her. I would never have treated Miss Crawley's faithful friends as that odious designing Mrs. Bute has done. Rawdon, who was all heart," Rebecca continued, "although his outward manners might seem rough and careless, had said a hundred times, with tears in his eyes, that he blessed Heaven for sending his dearest Aunty two such admirable nurses as her attached Firkin and her admirable Miss Briggs. Should the machinations of the horrible Mrs. Bute end, as she too much feared they would, in banishing everybody that Miss Crawley loved from her side, and leaving that poor lady a victim to those harpies at the Rectory, Rebecca besought her (Miss

Briggs) to remember that her own home, humble as it was, was always open to receive Briggs. Dear friend," she exclaimed, in a transport of enthusiasm, "some hearts can never forget benefits; all women are not Bute Crawleys! Though why should I complain of her," Rebecca added; "though I have been her tool and the victim to her arts, do I not owe my dearest Rawdon to her?" And Rebecca unfolded to Briggs all Mrs. Bute's conduct at Queen's Crawley, which, though unintelligible to her then, was clearly enough explained by the events now—now that the attachment had sprung up which Mrs. Bute had encouraged by a thousand artifices—now that two innocent people had fallen into the snares which she had laid for them, and loved and married and been ruined through her schemes.

It was all very true. Briggs saw the stratagems as clearly as possible. Mrs. Bute had made the match between Rawdon and Rebecca. Yet, though the latter was a perfectly innocent victim, Miss Briggs could not disguise from her friend her fear that Miss Crawley's affections were hopelessly estranged from Rebecca, and that the old lady would never forgive her nephew for making so imprudent a marriage.

On this point Rebecca had her own opinion, and still kept up a good heart. If Miss Crawley did not forgive them at present, she might at least relent on a future day. Even now, there was only that puling, sickly Pitt Crawley between Rawdon and a baronetcy; and should anything happen to the former, all would be well. At all events, to have Mrs. Bute's designs exposed, and herself well abused, was a satisfaction, and might be advantageous to Rawdon's interest; and Rebecca, after an hour's chat with her recovered friend, left her with the most tender demonstrations of regard, and quite assured that the conversation they had had together would be reported to Miss Crawley before many hours were over.

This interview ended, it became full time for Rebecca to return to her inn, where all the party of the previous day were assembled at a farewell breakfast. Rebecca took such a tender leave of Amelia as became two women who loved each other as sisters; and having used her handkerchief plentifully, and hung on her friend's neck as if they were parting for ever, and waved the handkerchief (which was quite dry, by the way) out of window, as the carriage drove off, she came back to the breakfast table, and ate some prawns with a good deal of appetite, considering her emotion; and while she was munching these delicacies,

explained to Rawdon what had occurred in her morning walk between herself and Briggs. Her hopes were very high: she made her husband share them. She generally succeeded in making her husband share all her opinions, whether melancholy or cheerful.

“You will now, if you please, my dear, sit down at the writing-table and pen me a pretty little letter to Miss Crawley, in which you’ll say that you are a good boy, and that sort of thing.” So Rawdon sate down, and wrote off, “Brighton, Thursday,” and “My dear Aunt,” with great rapidity: but there the gallant officer’s imagination failed him. He mumbled the end of his pen, and looked up in his wife’s face. She could not help laughing at his rueful countenance, and marching up and down the room with her hands behind her, the little woman began to dictate a letter, which he took down.

“Before quitting the country and commencing a campaign, which very possibly may be fatal.”

“What?” said Rawdon, rather surprised, but took the humour of the phrase, and presently wrote it down with a grin.

“Which very possibly may be fatal, I have come hither—”

“Why not say come here, Becky? Come here’s grammar,” the dragoon interposed.

“I have come hither,” Rebecca insisted, with a stamp of her foot, “to say farewell to my dearest and earliest friend. I beseech you before I go, not perhaps to return, once more to let me press the hand from which I have received nothing but kindnesses all my life.”

“Kindnesses all my life,” echoed Rawdon, scratching down the words, and quite amazed at his own facility of composition.

“I ask nothing from you but that we should part not in anger. I have the pride of my family on some points, though not on all. I married a painter’s daughter, and am not ashamed of the union.”

“No, run me through the body if I am!” Rawdon ejaculated.

“You old booby,” Rebecca said, pinching his ear and looking over to see that he made no mistakes in spelling—“beseech is not spelt with an a, and earliest is.” So he altered these words, bowing to the superior knowledge of his little Missis.

“I thought that you were aware of the progress of my attachment,” Rebecca continued: “I knew that Mrs. Bute Crawley confirmed and encouraged it. But I make no reproaches. I married a poor woman, and am content to abide by what I have done. Leave your property, dear Aunt, as you will. I shall never complain of the way in which you dispose of it. I would have you believe that I love you for yourself, and not for money’s sake. I want to be reconciled to you ere I leave England. Let me, let me see you before I go. A few weeks or months hence it may be too late, and I cannot bear the notion of quitting the country without a kind word of farewell from you.”

“She won’t recognise my style in that,” said Becky. “I made the sentences short and brisk on purpose.” And this authentic missive was despatched under cover to Miss Briggs.

Old Miss Crawley laughed when Briggs, with great mystery, handed her over this candid and simple statement. “We may read it now Mrs. Bute is away,” she said. “Read it to me, Briggs.”

When Briggs had read the epistle out, her patroness laughed more. “Don’t you see, you goose,” she said to Briggs, who professed to be much touched by the honest affection which pervaded the composition, “don’t you see that Rawdon never wrote a word of it. He never wrote to me without asking for money in his life, and all his letters are full of bad spelling, and dashes, and bad grammar. It is that little serpent of a governess who rules him.” They are all alike, Miss Crawley thought in her heart. They all want me dead, and are hankering for my money.

“I don’t mind seeing Rawdon,” she added, after a pause, and in a tone of perfect indifference. “I had just as soon shake hands with him as not. Provided there is no scene, why shouldn’t we meet? I don’t mind. But human patience has its limits; and mind, my dear, I respectfully decline to receive Mrs. Rawdon—I can’t support that quite”—and Miss Briggs was fain to be content with this half-message of conciliation; and thought that the best method of bringing the old lady and her nephew together,

was to warn Rawdon to be in waiting on the Cliff, when Miss Crawley went out for her air in her chair. There they met. I don't know whether Miss Crawley had any private feeling of regard or emotion upon seeing her old favourite; but she held out a couple of fingers to him with as smiling and good-humoured an air, as if they had met only the day before. And as for Rawdon, he turned as red as scarlet, and wrung off Briggs's hand, so great was his rapture and his confusion at the meeting. Perhaps it was interest that moved him: or perhaps affection: perhaps he was touched by the change which the illness of the last weeks had wrought in his aunt.

"The old girl has always acted like a trump to me," he said to his wife, as he narrated the interview, "and I felt, you know, rather queer, and that sort of thing. I walked by the side of the what-dy'e-call-'em, you know, and to her own door, where Bowls came to help her in. And I wanted to go in very much, only—"

"You didn't go in, Rawdon!" screamed his wife.

"No, my dear; I'm hanged if I wasn't afraid when it came to the point."

"You fool! you ought to have gone in, and never come out again," Rebecca said.

"Don't call me names," said the big Guardsman, sulkily. "Perhaps I was a fool, Becky, but you shouldn't say so"; and he gave his wife a look, such as his countenance could wear when angered, and such as was not pleasant to face.

"Well, dearest, to-morrow you must be on the look-out, and go and see her, mind, whether she asks you or no," Rebecca said, trying to soothe her angry yoke-mate. On which he replied, that he would do exactly as he liked, and would just thank her to keep a civil tongue in her head—and the wounded husband went away, and passed the forenoon at the billiard-room, sulky, silent, and suspicious.

But before the night was over he was compelled to give in, and own, as usual, to his wife's superior prudence and foresight, by the most melancholy confirmation of the presentiments which she had regarding the consequences of the mistake which he had made. Miss Crawley must

have had some emotion upon seeing him and shaking hands with him after so long a rupture. She mused upon the meeting a considerable time. “Rawdon is getting very fat and old, Briggs,” she said to her companion. “His nose has become red, and he is exceedingly coarse in appearance. His marriage to that woman has hopelessly vulgarised him. Mrs. Bute always said they drank together; and I have no doubt they do. Yes: he smelt of gin abominably. I remarked it. Didn’t you?”

In vain Briggs interposed that Mrs. Bute spoke ill of everybody: and, as far as a person in her humble position could judge, was an—

“An artful designing woman? Yes, so she is, and she does speak ill of every one—but I am certain that woman has made Rawdon drink. All those low people do—”

“He was very much affected at seeing you, ma’am,” the companion said; “and I am sure, when you remember that he is going to the field of danger—”

“How much money has he promised you, Briggs?” the old spinster cried out, working herself into a nervous rage—“there now, of course you begin to cry. I hate scenes. Why am I always to be worried? Go and cry up in your own room, and send Firkin to me—no, stop, sit down and blow your nose, and leave off crying, and write a letter to Captain Crawley.” Poor Briggs went and placed herself obediently at the writing-book. Its leaves were blotted all over with relics of the firm, strong, rapid handwriting of the spinster’s late amanuensis, Mrs. Bute Crawley.

“Begin ‘My dear sir,’ or ‘Dear sir,’ that will be better, and say you are desired by Miss Crawley—no, by Miss Crawley’s medical man, by Mr. Creamer, to state that my health is such that all strong emotions would be dangerous in my present delicate condition—and that I must decline any family discussions or interviews whatever. And thank him for coming to Brighton, and so forth, and beg him not to stay any longer on my account. And, Miss Briggs, you may add that I wish him a bon voyage, and that if he will take the trouble to call upon my lawyer’s in Gray’s Inn Square, he will find there a communication for him. Yes, that will do; and that will make him leave Brighton.” The benevolent Briggs penned this sentence with the utmost satisfaction.

“To seize upon me the very day after Mrs. Bute was gone,” the old lady prattled on; “it was too indecent. Briggs, my dear, write to Mrs. Crawley, and say she needn’t come back. No—she needn’t—and she shan’t—and I won’t be a slave in my own house—and I won’t be starved and choked with poison. They all want to kill me—all— all”—and with this the lonely old woman burst into a scream of hysterical tears.

The last scene of her dismal Vanity Fair comedy was fast approaching; the tawdry lamps were going out one by one; and the dark curtain was almost ready to descend.

That final paragraph, which referred Rawdon to Miss Crawley’s solicitor in London, and which Briggs had written so good-naturedly, consoled the dragoon and his wife somewhat, after their first blank disappointment, on reading the spinster’s refusal of a reconciliation. And it effected the purpose for which the old lady had caused it to be written, by making Rawdon very eager to get to London.

Out of Jos’s losings and George Osborne’s bank-notes, he paid his bill at the inn, the landlord whereof does not probably know to this day how doubtfully his account once stood. For, as a general sends his baggage to the rear before an action, Rebecca had wisely packed up all their chief valuables and sent them off under care of George’s servant, who went in charge of the trunks on the coach back to London. Rawdon and his wife returned by the same conveyance next day.

“I should have liked to see the old girl before we went,” Rawdon said. “She looks so cut up and altered that I’m sure she can’t last long. I wonder what sort of a cheque I shall have at Waxy’s. Two hundred—it can’t be less than two hundred—hey, Becky?”

In consequence of the repeated visits of the aides-de-camp of the Sheriff of Middlesex, Rawdon and his wife did not go back to their lodgings at Brompton, but put up at an inn. Early the next morning, Rebecca had an opportunity of seeing them as she skirted that suburb on her road to old Mrs. Sedley’s house at Fulham, whither she went to look for her dear Amelia and her Brighton friends. They were all off to Chatham, thence to Harwich, to take shipping for Belgium with the regiment—kind old Mrs. Sedley very much depressed and tearful, solitary. Returning from this visit, Rebecca found her husband, who had been off to Gray’s Inn,

and learnt his fate. He came back furious.

“By Jove, Becky,” says he, “she’s only given me twenty pound!”

Though it told against themselves, the joke was too good, and Becky burst out laughing at Rawdon’s discomfiture.