

Vanity Fair by William Makepeace Thackeray

Chapter 55

"In Which the Same Subject is Pursued"

Becky did not rally from the state of stupor and confusion in which the events of the previous night had plunged her intrepid spirit until the bells of the Curzon Street Chapels were ringing for afternoon service, and rising from her bed she began to ply her own bell, in order to summon the French maid who had left her some hours before.

Mrs. Rawdon Crawley rang many times in vain; and though, on the last occasion, she rang with such vehemence as to pull down the bell-rope, Mademoiselle Fifine did not make her appearance—no, not though her mistress, in a great pet, and with the bell-rope in her hand, came out to the landing-place with her hair over her shoulders and screamed out repeatedly for her attendant.

The truth is, she had quitted the premises for many hours, and upon that permission which is called French leave among us After picking up the trinkets in the drawing-room, Mademoiselle had ascended to her own apartments, packed and corded her own boxes there, tripped out and called a cab for herself, brought down her trunks with her own hand, and without ever so much as asking the aid of any of the other servants, who would probably have refused it, as they hated her cordially, and without wishing any one of them good-bye, had made her exit from Curzon Street.

The game, in her opinion, was over in that little domestic establishment. Fifine went off in a cab, as we have known more exalted persons of her nation to do under similar circumstances: but, more provident or lucky than these, she secured not only her own property, but some of her mistress's (if indeed that lady could be said to have any property at all)—and not only carried off the trinkets before alluded to, and some favourite dresses on which she had long kept her eye, but four richly gilt Louis Quatorze candlesticks, six gilt albums, keepsakes, and Books of Beauty, a gold enamelled snuff-box which had once belonged to Madame du Barri, and the sweetest little inkstand and mother-of-pearl blotting book, which Becky used when she composed her charming little

pink notes, had vanished from the premises in Curzon Street together with Mademoiselle Fifine, and all the silver laid on the table for the little festin which Rawdon interrupted. The plated ware Mademoiselle left behind her was too cumbrous, probably for which reason, no doubt, she also left the fire irons, the chimney-glasses, and the rosewood cottage piano.

A lady very like her subsequently kept a milliner's shop in the Rue du Helder at Paris, where she lived with great credit and enjoyed the patronage of my Lord Steyne. This person always spoke of England as of the most treacherous country in the world, and stated to her young pupils that she had been affreusement volee by natives of that island. It was no doubt compassion for her misfortunes which induced the Marquis of Steyne to be so very kind to Madame de Saint-Amaranthe. May she flourish as she deserves—she appears no more in our quarter of Vanity Fair.

Hearing a buzz and a stir below, and indignant at the impudence of those servants who would not answer her summons, Mrs. Crawley flung her morning robe round her and descended majestically to the drawing-room, whence the noise proceeded.

The cook was there with blackened face, seated on the beautiful chintz sofa by the side of Mrs. Raggles, to whom she was administering Maraschino. The page with the sugar-loaf buttons, who carried about Becky's pink notes, and jumped about her little carriage with such alacrity, was now engaged putting his fingers into a cream dish; the footman was talking to Raggles, who had a face full of perplexity and woe—and yet, though the door was open, and Becky had been screaming a half-dozen of times a few feet off, not one of her attendants had obeyed her call. “Have a little drop, do'ee now, Mrs. Raggles,” the cook was saying as Becky entered, the white cashmere dressing-gown flouncing around her.

“Simpson! Trotter!” the mistress of the house cried in great wrath. “How dare you stay here when you heard me call? How dare you sit down in my presence? Where's my maid?” The page withdrew his fingers from his mouth with a momentary terror, but the cook took off a glass of Maraschino, of which Mrs. Raggles had had enough, staring at Becky over the little gilt glass as she drained its contents. The liquor appeared

to give the odious rebel courage.

“Your sofy, indeed!” Mrs. Cook said. “I’m a settin’ on Mrs. Raggles’s sofy. Don’t you stir, Mrs. Raggles, Mum. I’m a settin’ on Mr. and Mrs. Raggles’s sofy, which they bought with honest money, and very dear it cost â€˜em, too. And I’m thinkin’ if I set here until I’m paid my wages, I shall set a precious long time, Mrs. Raggles; and set I will, too—ha! ha!” and with this she filled herself another glass of the liquor and drank it with a more hideously satirical air.

“Trotter! Simpson! turn that drunken wretch out,” screamed Mrs. Crawley.

“I shawn’t,” said Trotter the footman; “turn out yourself. Pay our selleries, and turn me out too. We’ll go fast enough.”

“Are you all here to insult me?” cried Becky in a fury; “when Colonel Crawley comes home I’ll—”

At this the servants burst into a horse haw-haw, in which, however, Raggles, who still kept a most melancholy countenance, did not join. “He ain’t a coming back,” Mr. Trotter resumed. “He sent for his things, and I wouldn’t let ‘em go, although Mr. Raggles would; and I don’t b’lieve he’s no more a Colonel than I am. He’s hoff, and I suppose you’re a goin’ after him. You’re no better than swindlers, both on you. Don’t be a bullyin’ me. I won’t stand it. Pay us our selleries, I say. Pay us our selleries.” It was evident, from Mr. Trotter’s flushed countenance and defective intonation, that he, too, had had recourse to vinous stimulus.

“Mr. Raggles,” said Becky in a passion of vexation, “you will not surely let me be insulted by that drunken man?” “Hold your noise, Trotter; do now,” said Simpson the page. He was affected by his mistress’s deplorable situation, and succeeded in preventing an outrageous denial of the epithet “drunken” on the footman’s part.

“Oh, M’am,” said Raggles, “I never thought to live to see this year day: I’ve known the Crawley family ever since I was born. I lived butler with Miss Crawley for thirty years; and I little thought one of that family was a goin’ to ruing me—yes, ruing me”—said the poor fellow with tears in his

eyes. "Har you a goin' to pay me? You've lived in this 'ouse four year. You've 'ad my substance: my plate and linning. You ho me a milk and butter bill of two 'undred pound, you must 'ave noo laid heggs for your homlets, and cream for your spanil dog."

"She didn't care what her own flesh and blood had," interposed the cook. "Many's the time, he'd have starved but for me."

"He's a charaty-boy now, Cooky," said Mr. Trotter, with a drunken "ha! ha!"—and honest Raggles continued, in a lamentable tone, an enumeration of his griefs. All he said was true. Becky and her husband had ruined him. He had bills coming due next week and no means to meet them. He would be sold up and turned out of his shop and his house, because he had trusted to the Crawley family. His tears and lamentations made Becky more peevish than ever.

"You all seem to be against me," she said bitterly. "What do you want? I can't pay you on Sunday. Come back to-morrow and I'll pay you everything. I thought Colonel Crawley had settled with you. He will to-morrow. I declare to you upon my honour that he left home this morning with fifteen hundred pounds in his pocket-book. He has left me nothing. Apply to him. Give me a bonnet and shawl and let me go out and find him. There was a difference between us this morning. You all seem to know it. I promise you upon my word that you shall all be paid. He has got a good appointment. Let me go out and find him."

This audacious statement caused Raggles and the other personages present to look at one another with a wild surprise, and with it Rebecca left them. She went upstairs and dressed herself this time without the aid of her French maid. She went into Rawdon's room, and there saw that a trunk and bag were packed ready for removal, with a pencil direction that they should be given when called for; then she went into the Frenchwoman's garret; everything was clean, and all the drawers emptied there. She bethought herself of the trinkets which had been left on the ground and felt certain that the woman had fled. "Good Heavens! was ever such ill luck as mine?" she said; "to be so near, and to lose all. Is it all too late?" No; there was one chance more.

She dressed herself and went away unmolested this time, but alone. It was four o'clock. She went swiftly down the streets (she had no money

to pay for a carriage), and never stopped until she came to Sir Pitt Crawley's door, in Great Gaunt Street. Where was Lady Jane Crawley? She was at church. Becky was not sorry. Sir Pitt was in his study, and had given orders not to be disturbed—she must see him—she slipped by the sentinel in livery at once, and was in Sir Pitt's room before the astonished Baronet had even laid down the paper.

He turned red and started back from her with a look of great alarm and horror.

“Do not look so,” she said. “I am not guilty, Pitt, dear Pitt; you were my friend once. Before God, I am not guilty. I seem so. Everything is against me. And oh! at such a moment! just when all my hopes were about to be realized: just when happiness was in store for us.”

“Is this true, what I see in the paper then?” Sir Pitt said—a paragraph in which had greatly surprised him.

“It is true. Lord Steyne told me on Friday night, the night of that fatal ball. He has been promised an appointment any time these six months. Mr. Martyr, the Colonial Secretary, told him yesterday that it was made out. That unlucky arrest ensued; that horrible meeting. I was only guilty of too much devotedness to Rawdon's service. I have received Lord Steyne alone a hundred times before. I confess I had money of which Rawdon knew nothing. Don't you know how careless he is of it, and could I dare to confide it to him?” And so she went on with a perfectly connected story, which she poured into the ears of her perplexed kinsman.

It was to the following effect. Becky owned, and with perfect frankness, but deep contrition, that having remarked Lord Steyne's partiality for her (at the mention of which Pitt blushed), and being secure of her own virtue, she had determined to turn the great peer's attachment to the advantage of herself and her family. “I looked for a peerage for you, Pitt,” she said (the brother-in-law again turned red). “We have talked about it. Your genius and Lord Steyne's interest made it more than probable, had not this dreadful calamity come to put an end to all our hopes. But, first, I own that it was my object to rescue my dear husband—him whom I love in spite of all his ill usage and suspicions of me—to remove him from the poverty and ruin which was impending over

us. I saw Lord Steyne's partiality for me," she said, casting down her eyes. "I own that I did everything in my power to make myself pleasing to him, and as far as an honest woman may, to secure his—his esteem. It was only on Friday morning that the news arrived of the death of the Governor of Coventry Island, and my Lord instantly secured the appointment for my dear husband. It was intended as a surprise for him—he was to see it in the papers to-day. Even after that horrid arrest took place (the expenses of which Lord Steyne generously said he would settle, so that I was in a manner prevented from coming to my husband's assistance), my Lord was laughing with me, and saying that my dearest Rawdon would be consoled when he read of his appointment in the paper, in that shocking spun—bailiff's house. And then—then he came home. His suspicions were excited,—the dreadful scene took place between my Lord and my cruel, cruel Rawdon—and, O my God, what will happen next? Pitt, dear Pitt! pity me, and reconcile us!" And as she spoke she flung herself down on her knees, and bursting into tears, seized hold of Pitt's hand, which she kissed passionately.

It was in this very attitude that Lady Jane, who, returning from church, ran to her husband's room directly she heard Mrs. Rawdon Crawley was closeted there, found the Baronet and his sister-in-law.

"I am surprised that woman has the audacity to enter this house," Lady Jane said, trembling in every limb and turning quite pale. (Her Ladyship had sent out her maid directly after breakfast, who had communicated with Raggles and Rawdon Crawley's household, who had told her all, and a great deal more than they knew, of that story, and many others besides). "How dare Mrs. Crawley to enter the house of—of an honest family?"

Sir Pitt started back, amazed at his wife's display of vigour. Becky still kept her kneeling posture and clung to Sir Pitt's hand.

"Tell her that she does not know all: Tell her that I am innocent, dear Pitt," she whimpered out.

"Upon-my word, my love, I think you do Mrs. Crawley injustice," Sir Pitt said; at which speech Rebecca was vastly relieved. "Indeed I believe her to be—"

“To be what?” cried out Lady Jane, her clear voice thrilling and, her heart beating violently as she spoke. “To be a wicked woman—a heartless mother, a false wife? She never loved her dear little boy, who used to fly here and tell me of her cruelty to him. She never came into a family but she strove to bring misery with her and to weaken the most sacred affections with her wicked flattery and falsehoods. She has deceived her husband, as she has deceived everybody; her soul is black with vanity, worldliness, and all sorts of crime. I tremble when I touch her. I keep my children out of her sight.

“Lady Jane!” cried Sir Pitt, starting up, “this is really language—” “I have been a true and faithful wife to you, Sir Pitt,” Lady Jane continued, intrepidly; “I have kept my marriage vow as I made it to God and have been obedient and gentle as a wife should. But righteous obedience has its limits, and I declare that I will not bear that—that woman again under my roof; if she enters it, I and my children will leave it. She is not worthy to sit down with Christian people. You—you must choose, sir, between her and me”; and with this my Lady swept out of the room, fluttering with her own audacity, and leaving Rebecca and Sir Pitt not a little astonished at it.

As for Becky, she was not hurt; nay, she was pleased. “It was the diamond-clasp you gave me,” she said to Sir Pitt, reaching him out her hand; and before she left him (for which event you may be sure my Lady Jane was looking out from her dressing-room window in the upper story) the Baronet had promised to go and seek out his brother, and endeavour to bring about a reconciliation.

Rawdon found some of the young fellows of the regiment seated in the mess-room at breakfast, and was induced without much difficulty to partake of that meal, and of the devilled legs of fowls and soda-water with which these young gentlemen fortified themselves. Then they had a conversation befitting the day and their time of life: about the next pigeon-match at Battersea, with relative bets upon Ross and Osbaldiston; about Mademoiselle Ariane of the French Opera, and who had left her, and how she was consoled by Panther Carr; and about the fight between the Butcher and the Pet, and the probabilities that it was a cross. Young Tandyman, a hero of seventeen, laboriously endeavouring to get up a pair of mustachios, had seen the fight, and spoke in the most scientific manner about the battle and the condition of the men. It was he

who had driven the Butcher on to the ground in his drag and passed the whole of the previous night with him. Had there not been foul play he must have won it. All the old files of the Ring were in it; and Tandyman wouldn't pay; no, dammy, he wouldn't pay. It was but a year since the young Cornet, now so knowing a hand in Cribb's parlour, had a still lingering liking for toffy, and used to be birched at Eton.

So they went on talking about dancers, fights, drinking, demireps, until Macmurdo came down and joined the boys and the conversation. He did not appear to think that any especial reverence was due to their boyhood; the old fellow cut in with stories, to the full as choice as any the youngest rake present had to tell—nor did his own grey hairs nor their smooth faces detain him. Old Mac was famous for his good stories. He was not exactly a lady's man; that is, men asked him to dine rather at the houses of their mistresses than of their mothers. There can scarcely be a life lower, perhaps, than his, but he was quite contented with it, such as it was, and led it in perfect good nature, simplicity, and modesty of demeanour.

By the time Mac had finished a copious breakfast, most of the others had concluded their meal. Young Lord Varinas was smoking an immense Meerschaum pipe, while Captain Hugues was employed with a cigar: that violent little devil Tandyman, with his little bull-terrier between his legs, was tossing for shillings with all his might (that fellow was always at some game or other) against Captain Deuceace; and Mac and Rawdon walked off to the Club, neither, of course, having given any hint of the business which was occupying their minds. Both, on the other hand, had joined pretty gaily in the conversation, for why should they interrupt it? Feasting, drinking, ribaldry, laughter, go on alongside of all sorts of other occupations in Vanity Fair—the crowds were pouring out of church as Rawdon and his friend passed down St. James's Street and entered into their Club.

The old bucks and habitues, who ordinarily stand gaping and grinning out of the great front window of the Club, had not arrived at their posts as yet—the newspaper-room was almost empty. One man was present whom Rawdon did not know; another to whom he owed a little score for whist, and whom, in consequence, he did not care to meet; a third was reading the Royalist (a periodical famous for its scandal and its attachment to Church and King) Sunday paper at the table, and looking

up at Crawley with some interest, said, "Crawley, I congratulate you."

"What do you mean?" said the Colonel.

"It's in the Observer and the Royalist too," said Mr. Smith.

"What?" Rawdon cried, turning very red. He thought that the affair with Lord Steyne was already in the public prints. Smith looked up wondering and smiling at the agitation which the Colonel exhibited as he took up the paper and, trembling, began to read.

Mr. Smith and Mr. Brown (the gentleman with whom Rawdon had the outstanding whist account) had been talking about the Colonel just before he came in.

"It is come just in the nick of time," said Smith. "I suppose Crawley had not a shilling in the world."

"It's a wind that blows everybody good," Mr. Brown said. "He can't go away without paying me a pony he owes me."

"What's the salary?" asked Smith.

"Two or three thousand," answered the other. "But the climate's so infernal, they don't enjoy it long. Liverseege died after eighteen months of it, and the man before went off in six weeks, I hear."

"Some people say his brother is a very clever man. I always found him a d-- bore," Smith ejaculated. "He must have good interest, though. He must have got the Colonel the place."

"He!" said Brown. with a sneer. "Pooh. It was Lord Steyne got it.

"How do you mean?"

"A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband," answered the other enigmatically, and went to read his papers.

Rawdon, for his part, read in the Royalist the following astonishing paragraph:

Governorship of Coventry island.—H.M.S. Yellowjack, Commander Jaunders, has brought letters and papers from Coventry Island. H. E. Sir Thomas Liverseege had fallen a victim to the prevailing fever at Swampton. His loss is deeply felt in the flourishing colony. We hear that the Governorship has been offered to Colonel Rawdon Crawley, C.B., a distinguished Waterloo officer. We need not only men of acknowledged bravery, but men of administrative talents to superintend the affairs of our colonies, and we have no doubt that the gentleman selected by the Colonial Office to fill the lamented vacancy which has occurred at Coventry Island is admirably calculated for the post which he is about to occupy.”

“Coventry Island! Where was it? Who had appointed him to the government? You must take me out as your secretary, old boy,” Captain Macmurdo said laughing; and as Crawley and his friend sat wondering and perplexed over the announcement, the Club waiter brought in to the Colonel a card on which the name of Mr. Wenham was engraved, who begged to see Colonel Crawley.

The Colonel and his aide-de-camp went out to meet the gentleman, rightly conjecturing that he was an emissary of Lord Steyne. “How d’ye do, Crawley? I am glad to see you,” said Mr. Wenham with a bland smile, and grasping Crawley’s hand with great cordiality.

“You come, I suppose, from—”

“Exactly,” said Mr. Wenham.

“Then this is my friend Captain Macmurdo, of the Life Guards Green.”

“Delighted to know Captain Macmurdo, I’m sure,” Mr. Wenham said and tendered another smile and shake of the hand to the second, as he had done to the principal. Mac put out one finger, armed with a buckskin glove, and made a very frigid bow to Mr. Wenham over his tight cravat. He was, perhaps, discontented at being put in communication with a pekin, and thought that Lord Steyne should have sent him a Colonel at the very least.

“As Macmurdo acts for me, and knows what I mean,” Crawley said, “I had better retire and leave you together.”

“Of course,” said Macmurdo.

“By no means, my dear Colonel,” Mr. Wenham said; “the interview which I had the honour of requesting was with you personally, though the company of Captain Macmurdo cannot fail to be also most pleasing. In fact, Captain, I hope that our conversation will lead to none but the most agreeable results, very different from those which my friend Colonel Crawley appears to anticipate.”

“Humph!” said Captain Macmurdo. He hanged to these civilians, he thought to himself, they are always for arranging and speechifying. Mr. Wenham took a chair which was not offered to him—took a paper from his pocket, and resumed—

“You have seen this gratifying announcement in the papers this morning, Colonel? Government has secured a most valuable servant, and you, if you accept office, as I presume you will, an excellent appointment. Three thousand a year, delightful climate, excellent government-house, all your own way in the Colony, and a certain promotion. I congratulate you with all my heart. I presume you know, gentlemen, to whom my friend is indebted for this piece of patronage?”

“Hanged if I know,” the Captain said; his principal turned very red.

“To one of the most generous and kindest men in the world, as he is one of the greatest—to my excellent friend, the Marquis of Steyne.”

“I’ll see him d— before I take his place,” growled out Rawdon.

“You are irritated against my noble friend,” Mr. Wenham calmly resumed; “and now, in the name of common sense and justice, tell me why?”

“Why?” cried Rawdon in surprise.

“Why? Dammy!” said the Captain, ringing his stick on the ground.

“Dammy, indeed,” said Mr. Wenham with the most agreeable smile; “still, look at the matter as a man of the world—as an honest man— and see if you have not been in the wrong. You come home from a journey,

and find—what?—my Lord Steyne supping at your house in Curzon Street with Mrs. Crawley. Is the circumstance strange or novel? Has he not been a hundred times before in the same position? Upon my honour and word as a gentleman”—Mr. Wenham here put his hand on his waistcoat with a parliamentary air—”I declare I think that your suspicions are monstrous and utterly unfounded, and that they injure an honourable gentleman who has proved his good-will towards you by a thousand benefactions—and a most spotless and innocent lady.”

“You don’t mean to say that—that Crawley’s mistaken?” said Mr. Macmurdo.

“I believe that Mrs. Crawley is as innocent as my wife, Mrs. Wenham,” Mr. Wenham said with great energy. “I believe that, misled by an infernal jealousy, my friend here strikes a blow against not only an infirm and old man of high station, his constant friend and benefactor, but against his wife, his own dearest honour, his son’s future reputation, and his own prospects in life.”

“I will tell you what happened,” Mr. Wenham continued with great solemnity; “I was sent for this morning by my Lord Steyne, and found him in a pitiable state, as, I need hardly inform Colonel Crawley, any man of age and infirmity would be after a personal conflict with a man of your strength. I say to your face; it was a cruel advantage you took of that strength, Colonel Crawley. It was not only the body of my noble and excellent friend which was wounded—his heart, sir, was bleeding. A man whom he had loaded with benefits and regarded with affection had subjected him to the foulest indignity. What was this very appointment, which appears in the journals of to-day, but a proof of his kindness to you? When I saw his Lordship this morning I found him in a state pitiable indeed to see, and as anxious as you are to revenge the outrage committed upon him, by blood. You know he has given his proofs, I presume, Colonel Crawley?”

“He has plenty of pluck,” said the Colonel. “Nobody ever said he hadn’t.”

“His first order to me was to write a letter of challenge, and to carry it to Colonel Crawley. One or other of us,” he said, “must not survive the outrage of last night.”

Crawley nodded. “You’re coming to the point, Wenham,” he said.

“I tried my utmost to calm Lord Steyne. Good God! sir,” I said, “how I regret that Mrs. Wenham and myself had not accepted Mrs. Crawley’s invitation to sup with her!”

“She asked you to sup with her?” Captain Macmurdo said.

“After the opera. Here’s the note of invitation—stop—no, this is another paper—I thought I had h, but it’s of no consequence, and I pledge you my word to the fact. If we had come—and it was only one of Mrs. Wenham’s headaches which prevented us—she suffers under them a good deal, especially in the spring—if we had come, and you had returned home, there would have been no quarrel, no insult, no suspicion—and so it is positively because my poor wife has a headache that you are to bring death down upon two men of honour and plunge two of the most excellent and ancient families in the kingdom into disgrace and sorrow.”

Mr. Macmurdo looked at his principal with the air of a man profoundly puzzled, and Rawdon felt with a kind of rage that his prey was escaping him. He did not believe a word of the story, and yet, how discredit or disprove it?

Mr. Wenham continued with the same fluent oratory, which in his place in Parliament he had so often practised—“I sat for an hour or more by Lord Steyne’s bedside, beseeching, imploring Lord Steyne to forego his intention of demanding a meeting. I pointed out to him that the circumstances were after all suspicious—they were suspicious. I acknowledge it—any man in your position might have been taken in—I said that a man furious with jealousy is to all intents and purposes a madman, and should be as such regarded—that a duel between you must lead to the disgrace of all parties concerned—that a man of his Lordship’s exalted station had no right in these days, when the most atrocious revolutionary principles, and the most dangerous levelling doctrines are preached among the vulgar, to create a public scandal; and that, however innocent, the common people would insist that he was guilty. In fine, I implored him not to send the challenge.”

“I don’t believe one word of the whole story,” said Rawdon, grinding his teeth. “I believe it a d— lie, and that you’re in it, Mr. Wenham. If the

challenge don't come from him, by Jove it shall come from me."

Mr. Wenham turned deadly pale at this savage interruption of the Colonel and looked towards the door.

But he found a champion in Captain Macmurdo. That gentleman rose up with an oath and rebuked Rawdon for his language. "You put the affair into my hands, and you shall act as I think fit, by Jove, and not as you do. You have no right to insult Mr. Wenham with this sort of language; and dammy, Mr. Wenham, you deserve an apology. And as for a challenge to Lord Steyne, you may get somebody else to carry it, I won't. If my lord, after being thrashed, chooses to sit still, dammy let him. And as for the affair with—with Mrs. Crawley, my belief is, there's nothing proved at all: that your wife's innocent, as innocent as Mr. Wenham says she is; and at any rate that you would be a d—fool not to take the place and hold your tongue."

"Captain Macmurdo, you speak like a man of sense," Mr. Wenham cried out, immensely relieved—"I forget any words that Colonel Crawley has used in the irritation of the moment."

"I thought you would," Rawdon said with a sneer.

"Shut your mouth, you old stoopid," the Captain said good-naturedly. "Mr. Wenham ain't a fighting man; and quite right, too."

"This matter, in my belief," the Steyne emissary cried, "ought to be buried in the most profound oblivion. A word concerning it should never pass these doors. I speak in the interest of my friend, as well as of Colonel Crawley, who persists in considering me his enemy."

"I suppose Lord Steyne won't talk about it very much," said Captain Macmurdo; "and I don't see why our side should. The affair ain't a very pretty one, any way you take it, and the less said about it the better. It's you are thrashed, and not us; and if you are satisfied, why, I think, we should be."

Mr. Wenham took his hat, upon this, and Captain Macmurdo following him to the door, shut it upon himself and Lord Steyne's agent, leaving Rawdon chafing within. When the two were on the other side,

Macmurdo looked hard at the other ambassador and with an expression of anything but respect on his round jolly face.

“You don’t stick at a trifle, Mr. Wenham,” he said.

“You flatter me, Captain Macmurdo,” answered the other with a smile. “Upon my honour and conscience now, Mrs. Crawley did ask us to sup after the opera.”

“Of course; and Mrs. Wenham had one of her head-aches. I say, I’ve got a thousand-pound note here, which I will give you if you will give me a receipt, please; and I will put the note up in an envelope for Lord Steyne. My man shan’t fight him. But we had rather not take his money.”

“It was all a mistake—all a mistake, my dear sir,” the other said with the utmost innocence of manner; and was bowed down the Club steps by Captain Macmurdo, just as Sir Pitt Crawley ascended them. There was a slight acquaintance between these two gentlemen, and the Captain, going back with the Baronet to the room where the latter’s brother was, told Sir Pitt, in confidence, that he had made the affair all right between Lord Steyne and the Colonel.

Sir Pitt was well pleased, of course, at this intelligence, and congratulated his brother warmly upon the peaceful issue of the affair, making appropriate moral remarks upon the evils of duelling and the unsatisfactory nature of that sort of settlement of disputes.

And after this preface, he tried with all his eloquence to effect a reconciliation between Rawdon and his wife. He recapitulated the statements which Becky had made, pointed out the probabilities of their truth, and asserted his own firm belief in her innocence.

But Rawdon would not hear of it. “She has kep money concealed from me these ten years,” he said “She swore, last night only, she had none from Steyne. She knew it was all up, directly I found it. If she’s not guilty, Pitt, she’s as bad as guilty, and I’ll never see her again—never.” His head sank down on his chest as he spoke the words, and he looked quite broken and sad.

“Poor old boy,” Macmurdo said, shaking his head.

Rawdon Crawley resisted for some time the idea of taking the place which had been procured for him by so odious a patron, and was also for removing the boy from the school where Lord Steyne's interest had placed him. He was induced, however, to acquiesce in these benefits by the entreaties of his brother and Macmurdo, but mainly by the latter, pointing out to him what a fury Steyne would be in to think that his enemy's fortune was made through his means.

When the Marquis of Steyne came abroad after his accident, the Colonial Secretary bowed up to him and congratulated himself and the Service upon having made so excellent an appointment. These congratulations were received with a degree of gratitude which may be imagined on the part of Lord Steyne.

The secret of the rencontre between him and Colonel Crawley was buried in the profoundest oblivion, as Wenham said; that is, by the seconds and the principals. But before that evening was over it was talked of at fifty dinner-tables in Vanity Fair. Little Cackleby himself went to seven evening parties and told the story with comments and emendations at each place. How Mrs. Washington White revelled in it! The Bishopess of Ealing was shocked beyond expression; the Bishop went and wrote his name down in the visiting-book at Gaunt House that very day. Little Southdown was sorry; so you may be sure was his sister Lady Jane, very sorry. Lady Southdown wrote it off to her other daughter at the Cape of Good Hope. It was town-talk for at least three days, and was only kept out of the newspapers by the exertions of Mr. Wagg, acting upon a hint from Mr. Wenham.

The bailiffs and brokers seized upon poor Raggles in Curzon Street, and the late fair tenant of that poor little mansion was in the meanwhile—where? Who cared! Who asked after a day or two? Was she guilty or not? We all know how charitable the world is, and how the verdict of Vanity Fair goes when there is a doubt. Some people said she had gone to Naples in pursuit of Lord Steyne, whilst others averred that his Lordship quitted that city and fled to Palermo on hearing of Becky's arrival; some said she was living in Bierstadt, and had become a dame d'honneur to the Queen of Bulgaria; some that she was at Boulogne; and others, at a boarding-house at Cheltenham.

Rawdon made her a tolerable annuity, and we may be sure that she was a

woman who could make a little money go a great way, as the saying is. He would have paid his debts on leaving England, could he have got any Insurance Office to take his life, but the climate of Coventry Island was so bad that he could borrow no money on the strength of his salary. He remitted, however, to his brother punctually, and wrote to his little boy regularly every mail. He kept Macmurdo in cigars and sent over quantities of shells, cayenne pepper, hot pickles, guava jelly, and colonial produce to Lady Jane. He sent his brother home the Swamp Town Gazette, in which the new Governor was praised with immense enthusiasm; whereas the Swamp Town Sentinel, whose wife was not asked to Government House, declared that his Excellency was a tyrant, compared to whom Nero was an enlightened philanthropist. Little Rawdon used to like to get the papers and read about his Excellency.

His mother never made any movement to see the child. He went home to his aunt for Sundays and holidays; he soon knew every bird's nest about Queen's Crawley, and rode out with Sir Huddleston's hounds, which he admired so on his first well-remembered visit to Hampshire.