CHAPTER C.

ALTHOUGH the past life of Endymion had, on the whole, been a happy life, and although he was destined also to a happy future, perhaps the four years which elapsed from the time he quitted office, certainly in his experience had never been exceeded, and it was difficult to imagine could be exceeded, in felicity. He had a great interest, and even growing influence in public life without any of its cares; he was united to a woman whom he had long passionately loved, and who had every quality and accomplishment to make existence delightful; he was master of a fortune which secured him all those advantages which are appreciated by men of taste and generosity. He became a father, and a family name which had been originally borne by a courtier of the elder Stuarts was now bestowed on the future lord of Princedown.

Lady Montfort herself had no thought but her husband. His happiness, his enjoyment of existence, his success and power in life, entirely absorbed her. The anxiety which she felt that in everything he should be master was touching. Once looked upon as the most imperious of women, she would not give a direction on any matter without his opinion and sanction. One would have supposed from what might be observed under their roof, that she was some beautiful but portionless maiden whom Endymion had raised to wealth and power.

All this time, however, Lady Montfort sedulously maintained that commanding position in social politics for which she was singularly fitted. Indeed, in that respect, she had no rival. She received the world with the same constancy and splendour, as if she were the wife of a minister. Animated by Waldershare, Lady Beaumaris maintained in this respect a certain degree of rivalry. She was the only hope and refuge of the Tories, and rich, attractive, and popular, her competition could not be disregarded. But Lord Beaumaris was a little freakish.

Sometimes he would sail in his yacht to odd places, and was at Algiers or in Egypt when, according to Tadpole, he ought to have been at Piccadilly Terrace. Then he occasionally got crusty about his hunting. He would hunt, whatever were the political consequences, but whether he were in Africa or Leicestershire, Imogene must be with him. He could not exist without her constant presence. There was something in her gentleness, combined with her quick and ready sympathy and playfulness of mind and manner, which alike pleased and soothed his life.

The Whigs tottered on for a year after the rude assault of Cardinal Penruddock, but they were doomed, and the Protectionists were called upon to form an administration. As they had no one in their ranks who had ever been in office except their chief, who was in the House of Lords, the affair seemed impossible. The attempt, however, could not be avoided. A dozen men, without the slightest experience of official life, had to be sworn in as privy councillors, before even they could receive the seals and insignia of their intended offices. On their knees, according to the constitutional custom, a dozen men, all in the act of genuflexion at the same moment, and headed, too, by one of the most powerful peers in the country, the Lord of Alnwick Castle himself, humbled themselves before a female Sovereign, who looked serene and imperturbable before a spectacle never seen before, and which, in all probability, will never be seen again.

One of this band, a gentleman without any official experience whatever, was not only placed in the cabinet, but was absolutely required to become the leader of the House of Commons, which had never occurred before, except in the instance of Mr. Pitt in 1782. It has been said that it was unwise in the Protectionists assuming office when, on this occasion and on subsequent ones, they were far from being certain of a majority in the House of Commons. It should, however, be remembered, that unless they had dared these ventures, they never could have formed a body of men competent, from their official experience and their practice in debate, to form a ministry. The result has rather proved

that they were right. Had they continued to refrain from incurring responsibility, they must have broken up and merged in different connections, which, for a party numerically so strong as the Protectionists, would have been a sorry business, and probably have led to disastrous results.

Mr. Bertie Tremaine having been requested to call on the Protectionist prime minister, accordingly repaired to headquarters with the list of his colleagues in his pocket. He was offered for himself a post of little real importance, but which secured to him the dignity of the privy council. Mr. Tremaine Bertie and several of his friends had assembled at his house, awaiting with anxiety his return. He had to communicate to them that he had been offered a privy councillor's post, and to break to them that it was not proposed to provide for any other member of his party. Their indignation was extreme; but they naturally supposed that he had rejected the offer to himself with becoming scorn. Their leader, however, informed them that he had not felt it his duty to be so peremptory. They should remember that the recognition of their political status by such an offer to their chief was a considerable event. For his part, he had for some time been painfully aware that the influence of the House of Commons in the constitutional scheme was fast waning, and that the plan of Sir William Temple for the reorganisation of the privy council, and depositing in it the real authority of the State, was that to which we should be obliged to have recourse. This offer to him of a seat in the council was, perhaps, the beginning of the end. It was a crisis; they must look to seats in the privy council, which, under Sir William Temple's plan, would be accompanied with ministerial duties and salaries. What they had all, at one time, wished, had not exactly been accomplished, but he had felt it his duty to his friends not to shrink from responsibility. So he had accepted the minister's offer.

Mr. Bertie Tremaine was not long in the busy enjoyment of his easy post. Then the country was governed for two years by all its ablest men, who, by the end of that term, had succeeded, by their coalesced genius, in reducing that country to a

state of desolation and despair. 'I did not think it would have lasted even so long,' said Lady Montfort; 'but then I was acquainted with their mutual hatreds and their characteristic weaknesses. What is to happen now? Somebody must be found of commanding private character and position, and with as little damaged a public one as in this wreck of reputations is possible. I see nobody but Sidney Wilton. Everybody likes him, and he is the only man who could bring people together.'

And everybody seemed to be saying the same thing at the same time. The name of Sidney Wilton was in everybody's mouth. It was unfortunate that he had been a member of the defunct ministry, but then it had always been understood that he had always disapproved of all their measures. There was not the slightest evidence of this, but everybody chose to believe it.

Sidney Wilton was chagrined with life, and had become a martyr to the gout, which that chagrin had aggravated; but he was a great gentleman, and too chivalric to refuse a royal command when the Sovereign was in distress. Sidney Wilton became Premier, and the first colleague he recommended to fill the most important post after his own, the Secretaryship of State for Foreign Affairs, was Mr. Ferrars.

'It ought to last ten years,' said Lady Montfort. 'I see no danger except his health. I never knew a man so changed. At his time of life five years ought to make no difference in a man. I cannot believe he is the person who used to give us those charming parties at Gaydene. Whatever you may say, Endymion, I feel convinced that something must have passed between your sister and him. Neither of them ever gave me a hint of such a matter, or of the possibility of its ever happening, but feminine instinct assures me that something took place. He always had the gout, and his ancestors have had the gout for a couple of centuries; and all prime ministers have the gout. I dare say you will not escape, darling, but I hope it will never make you look as if you had just lost paradise, or, what would be worst, become the last man.'

Lady Montfort was right. The ministry was strong and it

was popular. There were no jealousies in it; every member was devoted to his chief, and felt that he was rightly the chief, whereas, as Lady Montfort said, the Whigs never had a ministry before in which there were not at least a couple of men who had been prime ministers, and as many more who thought they ought to be.

There were years of war, and of vast and critical negotiations. Ferrars was equal to the duties, for he had much experience, and more thought, and he was greatly aided by the knowledge of affairs, and the clear and tranquil judgment of the chief minister. There was only one subject on which there was not between them that complete and cordial unanimity which was so agreeable and satisfactory. And even in this case, there was no difference of opinion, but rather of sentiment and feeling. It was when Prince Florestan expressed his desire to join the grand alliance, and become our active military ally. It was perhaps impossible, under any circumstances, for the Powers to refuse such an offer, but Endymion was strongly in favour of accepting it. It consolidated our interests in a part of Europe where we required sympathy and support, and it secured for us the aid and influence of the great Liberal party of the continent as distinguished from the secret societies and the socialist republicans. The Count of Ferroll, also, whose opinion weighed much with Her Majesty's Government, was decidedly in favour of the combination. The English prime minister listened to their representations frigidly; it was difficult to refute the arguments which were adverse to his own feelings, and to resist the unanimous opinion not only of his colleagues, but of our allies. But he was cold and silent, or made discouraging remarks.

'Can you trust him?' he would say. 'Remember he himself has been, and still is, a member of the very secret societies whose baneful influence we are now told he will neutralise or subdue. Whatever the cabinet decides, and I fear that with this strong expression of opinion on the part of our allies we have little option left, remember I gave you my warning. I know the gentleman, and I do not trust him.'

After this, the prime minister had a most severe attack of the

gout, remained for weeks at Gaydene, and saw no one on business except Endymion and Baron Sergius.

While the time is elapsing which can alone decide whether the distrust of Mr. Wilton were well-founded or the reverse, let us see how the world is treating the rest of our friends.

Lord Waldershare did not make such a pattern husband as Endymion, but he made a much better one than the world ever supposed he would. Had he married Berengaria, the failure would have been great; but he was united to a being capable of deep affection and very sensitive, yet grateful for kindness from a husband to a degree not easily imaginable. And Waldershare had really a good heart, though a bad temper, and he was a gentleman. Besides, he had a great admiration and some awe of his father-in-law, and Lord Hainault, with his good-natured irony, and consummate knowledge of men and things, quite controlled him. With Lady Hainault he was a favourite. He invented plausible theories and brilliant paradoxes for her, which left her always in a state of charmed wonder, and when she met him again, and adopted or refuted them, for her intellectual power was considerable, he furnished her with fresh dogmas and tenets, which immediately interested her intelligence, though she generally forgot to observe that they were contrary to the views and principles of the last visit. Between Adriana and Imogene there was a close alliance, and Lady Beaumaris did everything in her power to develop Lady Waldershare advantageously before her husband; and so, not forgetting that Waldershare, with his romance, and imagination, and fancy, and taste, and caprice, had a considerable element of worldliness in his character, and that he liked to feel that, from living in lodgings, he had become a Monte Cristo, his union with Adriana may be said to be a happy and successful one.

The friendship between Sir Peter Vigo and his brother M.P., Mr. Rodney, never diminished, and Mr. Rodney became richer every year. He experienced considerable remorse at sitting in opposition to the son of his right honourable friend, the late William Pitt Ferrars, and frequently consulted Sir Peter on his embarrassment and difficulty. Sir Peter, who never declined

arranging any difficulty, told his friend to be easy, and that he, Sir Peter, saw his way. It became gradually understood, that if ever the government was in difficulties, Mr. Rodney's vote might be counted on. He was peculiarly situated, for, in a certain sense, his friend the Right Honourable William Pitt Ferrars had entrusted the guardianship of his child to his care. But whenever the ministry was not in danger, the ministry must not depend upon his vote.

Trenchard had become Secretary of the Treasury in the Wilton administration, had established his reputation, and was looked upon as a future minister. Jawett, without forfeiting his post and promotion at Somerset House, had become the editor of a new periodical magazine, called the 'Privy Council.' It was established and maintained by Mr. Bertie Tremaine, and was chiefly written by that gentleman himself. It was full of Greek quotations, to show that it was not Grub Street, and written in a style as like that of Sir William Temple, as a paper in 'Rejected Addresses' might resemble the classic lucubrations of the statesman-sage who, it is hoped, will be always remembered by a grateful country for having introduced into these islands the Moor Park apricot. What the pages of the 'Privy Council' meant no human being had the slightest conception except Mr. Tremaine Bertie.

Mr. Thornberry remained a respected member of the cabinet. It was thought his presence there secured the sympathies of advanced Liberalism throughout the country; but that was a tradition rather than a fact. Statesmen in high places are not always so well acquainted with the changes and gradations of opinion in political parties at home as they are with those abroad. We hardly mark the growth of the tree we see every day. Mr. Thornberry had long ceased to be popular with his former friends, and the fact that he had become a minister was one of the causes of this change of feeling. That was unreasonable, but in politics unreasonable circumstances are elements of the problem to be solved. It was generally understood that, on the next election, Mr. Thornberry would have to look out for another seat; his chief constituents, those who are locally

styled the leaders of the party, were still faithful to him, for they were proud of having a cabinet minister for their member, to be presented by him at court, and occasionally to dine with him; but the 'masses,' who do not go to court, and are never asked to dinner, required a member who would represent their whims, and it was quite understood that, on the very first occasion, this enlightened community had resolved to send up to Westminster—Mr. Enoch Craggs.

It is difficult to say, whether in his private life Job found affairs altogether more satisfactory than in his public. His wife had joined the Roman Communion. An ingrained perverseness which prevented his son from ever willingly following the advice or example of his parents, had preserved John Hampden to the Anglican faith, but he had portraits of Laud and Strafford over his mantelpiece, and embossed in golden letters on a purple ground the magical word 'THOROUGH.' His library chiefly consisted of the 'Tracts for the Times,' and a colossal edition of the Fathers gorgeously bound. He was a very clever fellow, this young Thornberry, a natural orator, and was leader of the High Church party in the Oxford Union. He brought home his friends occasionally to Hurstley, and Job had the opportunity of becoming acquainted with a class and school of humanity—with which, notwithstanding his considerable experience of life, he had no previous knowledge—young gentlemen, apparently half-starved and dressed like priests, and sometimes an enthusiastic young noble, in much better physical condition, and in costume becoming a cavalier, ready to raise the royal standard at Edgehill. What a little annoyed Job was that his son always addressed him as 'Squire,' a habit even pedantically followed by his companions. He was, however, justly entitled to this ancient and reputable honour, for Job had been persuaded to purchase Hurstley, was a lord of several thousand acres, and had the boar's head carried in procession at Christmas in his ancient hall. It is strange, but he was rather perplexed than annoyed by all these marvellous metamorphoses in his life and family. His intelligence was as clear as ever, and his views on all subjects unchanged; but he was, like many other men,

governed at home by his affections. He preferred the new arrangement, if his wife and family were happy and contented, to a domestic system founded on his own principles, accompanied by a sullen or shrewish partner of his life and rebellious offspring.

What really vexed him, among comparatively lesser matters, was the extraordinary passion which in time his son imbibed for game-preserving. He did at last interfere on this matter, but in vain. John Hampden announced that he did not value land if he was only to look at it, and that sport was the patriotic pastime of an English gentleman. 'You used in old days never to be satisfied with what I got out of the land,' said the old grandfather to Job, with a little amiable malice; 'there is enough at any rate now for the hares and rabbits, but I doubt for anybody else.'

We must not forget our old friend St. Barbe. Whether he had written himself out or had become lazy in the luxurious life in which he now indulged, he rarely appealed to the literary public, which still admired him. He was, by way of intimating that he was engaged in a great work, which, though written in his taking prose, was to be really the epopee of social life in this country. Dining out every day, and ever arriving, however late, at those 'small and earlies,' which he once despised; he gave to his friends frequent intimations that he was not there for pleasure, but rather following his profession; he was in his studio, observing and reflecting on all the passions and manners of mankind, and gathering materials for the great work which was eventually to enchant and instruct society, and immortalise his name.

'The fact is, I wrote too early,' he would say. 'I blush when I read my own books, though compared with those of the brethren, they might still be looked on as classics. They say no artist can draw a camel, and I say no author ever drew a gentleman. How can they, with no opportunity of ever seeing one? And so with a little caricature of manners, which they catch second-hand, they are obliged to have recourse to outrageous nonsense, as if polished life consisted only of

bigamists, and that ladies of fashion were in the habit of paying black mail to returned convicts. However, I shall put an end to all this. I have now got the materials, or am accumulating them daily. You hint that I give myself up too much to society. You are talking of things you do not understand. A dinner party is a chapter. I catch the Cynthia of the minute, sir, at a *soirée*. If I only served a grateful country, I should be in the proudest position of any of its sons; if I had been born in any country but this, I should have been decorated, and perhaps made secretary of state like Addison, who did not write as well as I do, though his style somewhat resembles mine.'

Notwithstanding these great plans, it came in time to Endymion's ear, that poor St. Barbe was in terrible straits. Endymion delicately helped him and then obtained for him a pension, and not an inconsiderable one. Relieved from anxiety, St. Barbe resumed his ancient and natural vein. He passed his days in decrying his friend and patron, and comparing his miserable pension with the salary of a secretary of state, who, so far as his experience went, was generally a second-rate man. Endymion, though he knew St. Barbe was always decrying him, only smiled, and looked upon it all as the necessary consequence of his organisation, which involved a singular combination of vanity and envy in the highest degree. St. Barbe was not less a guest in Carlton Terrace than heretofore, and was even kindly invited to Princedown to profit by the distant sea-breeze. Lady Montfort, whose ears some of his pranks had reached, was not so tolerant as her husband. She gave him one day her views of his conduct. St. Barbe was always a little afraid of her, and on this occasion entirely lost himself; vented the most solemn affirmations that there was not a grain of truth in these charges; that he was the victim, as he had been all his life, of slander and calumny—the sheer creatures of envy, and then began to fawn upon his hostess, and declared that he had ever thought there was something godlike in the character of her husband.

'And what is there in yours, Mr. St. Barbe?' asked Lady Montfort.

The ministry had lasted several years; its foreign policy had been successful; it had triumphed in war and secured peace. The military conduct of the troops of King Florestan had contributed to these results, and the popularity of that sovereign in England was for a foreigner unexampled. During this agitated interval, Endymion and Myra had met more than once through the providential medium of those favoured spots of nature—German baths.

There had arisen a public feeling, that the ally who had served us so well should be invited to visit again a country wherein he had so long sojourned, and where he was so much appreciated. The only evidence that the Prime Minister gave that he was conscious of this feeling was an attack of gout. Endymion himself, though in a difficult and rather painful position in this matter, did everything to shield and protect his chief, but the general sentiment became so strong, sanctioned too, as it was understood, in the highest quarter, that it could no longer be passed by unnoticed; and, in due time, to the great delight and satisfaction of the nation, an impending visit from our faithful ally King Florestan and his beautiful wife, Queen Myra, was authoritatively announced.

Every preparation was made to show them honour. They were the guests of our Sovereign; but from the palace which they were to inhabit, to the humblest tenement in the meanest back street, there was only one feeling of gratitude, and regard, and admiration. The English people are the most enthusiastic people in the world; there are other populations which are more excitable, but there is no nation, when it feels, where the sentiment is so profound and irresistible.

The hour arrived. The season and the weather were favourable. From the port where they landed to their arrival at the metropolis, the hole country seemed poured out into the open air; triumphal arches, a way of flags and banners, and bits of bunting on every hovel. The King and Queen were received

at the metropolitan station by Princes of the blood, and accompanied to the palace, where the great officers of state and the assembled ministry were gathered together to do them honour. A great strain was thrown upon Endymion throughout these proceedings, as the Prime Minister, who had been suffering the whole season, and rarely present in his seat in parliament, was, at this moment, in his worst paroxysm. He could not therefore be present at the series of balls and banquets, and brilliant public functions, which greeted the royal guests. Their visit to the City, when they dined with the Lord Mayor, and to which they drove in royal carriages through a sea of population tumultuous with devotion, was the most gratifying of all these splendid receptions, partly from the associations of mysterious power and magnificence connected with the title and character of LORD MAYOR. The Duke of St. Angelo, the Marquis of Vallombrosa, and the Prince of Montserrat, quite lost their presence of mind. Even the Princess of Montserrat, with more quarterings on her own side than any house in Europe, confessed that she trembled when Her Serene Highness courtesied before the Lady Mayoress. Perhaps, however, the most brilliant, the most fanciful, infinitely the most costly entertainment that was given on this memorable occasion, was the festival at Hainault. The whole route from town to the forest was lined with thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, of spectators; a thousand guests were received at the banquet, and twelve palaces were raised by that true magician, Mr. Benjamin Edgington, in the park, for the countless visitors in the evening. At night the forest was illuminated. Everybody was glad except Lady Hainault, who sighed, and said, 'I have no doubt the Queen would have preferred her own room, and that we should have had a quiet dinner, as in old days, in the little Venetian parlour.'

When Endymion returned home at night, he found a summons to Gaydene; the Prime Minister being, it was feared, in a dangerous state.

The next day, late in the afternoon, there was a rumour that the Prime Minister had resigned. Then it was authoritatively

contradicted, and then at night another rumour rose that the minister had resigned, but that the resignation would not be accepted until after the termination of the royal visit. The King and Queen had yet to remain a short week.

The fact is, the resignation had taken place, but it was known only to those who then could not have imparted the intelligence. The public often conjectures the truth, though it clothes its impression or information in the vague shape of a rumour. In four-and-twenty hours the great fact was authoritatively announced in all the journals, with leading articles speculating on the successor to the able and accomplished minister of whose services the Sovereign and the country were so unhappily deprived. Would his successor be found in his own cabinet? And then several names were mentioned; Rawchester, to Lady Montfort's disgust. Rawchester was a safe man, and had had much experience, which, as with most safe men, probably left him as wise and able as before he imbibed it. Would there be altogether a change of parties? Would the Protectionists try again? They were very strong, but always in a minority, like some great continental powers, who have the finest army in the world, and yet get always beaten. Would that band of self-admiring geniuses, who had upset every cabinet with whom they were ever connected, return on the shoulders of the people, as they always dreamed, though they were always the persons of whom the people never seemed to think?

Lady Montfort was in a state of passive excitement. She was quite pale, and she remained quite pale for hours. She would see no one. She sat in Endymion's room, and never spoke, while he continued writing and transacting his affairs. She thought she was reading the 'Morning Post,' but really could not distinguish the advertisements from leading articles.

There was a knock at the library door, and the groom of the chambers brought in a note for Endymion. He glanced at the handwriting of the address, and then opened it, as pale

as his wife. Then he read it again, and then he gave it to her. She threw her eyes over it, and then her arms around his neck.

'Order my brougham at three o'clock.'

CHAPTER CI.

ENDYMION was with his sister.

'How dear of you to come to me,' she said, 'when you cannot have a moment to yourself.'

'Well, you know,' he replied, 'it is not like forming a government. That is an affair. I have reason to think all my colleagues will remain with me. I shall summon them for this afternoon, and if we agree, affairs will go on as before. I should like to get down to Gaydene to-night.'

'To-night!' said the queen musingly. 'We have only one day left, and I wanted you to do something for me.'

'It shall be done, if possible; I need not say that.'

'It is not difficult to do, if we have time—if we have to-morrow morning, and early. But if you go to Gaydene you will hardly return to-night, and I shall lose my chance,—and yet it is to me a business most precious.'

'It shall be managed; tell me then.'

'I learnt that Hill Street is not occupied at this moment. I want to visit the old house with you, before I leave England, probably for ever. I have only got the early morn to-morrow, but with a veil and your brougham, I think we might depart unobserved, before the crowd begins to assemble. Do you think you could be here at nine o'clock?'

So it was settled, and being hurried, he departed.

And next morning he was at the palace before nine o'clock; and the queen, veiled, entered his brougham. There were al-

ready some loiterers, but the brother and sister passed through the gates unobserved.

They reached Hill Street. The queen visited all the principal rooms, and made many remarks appropriate to many memories. 'But,' she said, 'it was not to see these rooms I came, though I was glad to do so, and the corridor on the second story whence I called out to you when you returned, and for ever, from Eton, and told you there was bad news. What I came for was to see our old nursery, where we lived so long together, and so fondly! Here it is; here we are. All I have desired, all I have dreamed, have come to pass. Darling, beloved of my soul, by all our sorrows, by all our joys, in this scene of our childhood and bygone days, let me give you my last embrace.'

THE END.