

CHAPTER II

“NOT GOING TO HAVE IT”

IN the office of ‘The Outlook’ Mr. Blythe had just been in conversation with one of those great business men who make such deep impression on all to whom they voice their views in strict confidence. If Sir Thomas Lockit did not precisely monopolise the control of manufacture in Great Britain, he, like others, caused almost any one to think so—his knowledge was so positive and his emphasis so cold. In his view the Country must resume the position held before the Great War. It all hinged on coal—a question of this seven hours a day ; and they were “not going to have it.” A shilling, perhaps two shillings, off the cost of coal. They were “not going to have” Europe doing without British produce. Very few people knew Sir Thomas Lockit’s mind ; but nearly all who did were extraordinarily gratified.

Mr. Blythe, however, was biting his finger, and spitting out the result.

“Who was that fellow with the grey moustache ?” asked Michael.

“Lockit. He’s ‘not going to have it.’”

“Oh !” said Michael, in some surprise.

“One sees more and more, Mont, that the really dangerous people are not the politicians, who want things with public passion—that is, mildly, slowly ; but the big business men, who want things with private passion, strenuously, quickly. They know their own minds ; and if we don’t look out they’ll wreck the country.”

"What are they up to now?" said Michael.

"Nothing for the moment; but it's brewing. One sees in Lockit the futility of will-power. He's not going to have what it's entirely out of his power to prevent. He'd like to break Labour and make it work like a nigger from sheer necessity. Before that we shall be having civil war. Some of the Labour people, of course, are just as bad—they want to break everybody. It's a bee nuisance. If we're all to be plunged into industrial struggles again, how are we to get on with Foggartism?"

"I've been thinking about the Country," said Michael. "Aren't we beating the air, Blythe? Is it any good telling a man who's lost a lung, that what he wants is a new one?"

Mr. Blythe puffed out one cheek.

"Yes," he said, "the Country had a hundred very settled years—Waterloo to the War—to get into its present state; it's got its line of life so fixed and its habits so settled that nobody—neither editors, politicians, nor business men—can think except in terms of its bloated town industrialism. The Country's got beyond the point of balance in that hundred settled years, and it'll want fifty settled years to get back to that point again. The real trouble is that we're not going to get fifty settled years. Some bee thing or other—war with Turkey or Russia, trouble in India, civil ructions, to say nothing of another general flare-up—may knock the bottom out of any settled plans any time. We've struck a disturbed patch of history, and we know it in our bones, and live from hand to mouth, according."

"Well, then!" said Michael, glumly, thinking of what the Minister had said to him at Lippinghall.

Mr. Blythe puffed out the other cheek.

"No backsliding, young man! In Foggartism we have

the best goods we can see before us, and we must be well deliver them, as best we can. We've outgrown all the old hats.”

“Have you seen Aubrey Greene's cartoon?”

“I have.”

“Good—isn't it? But what I really came in to tell you, is that this beastly libel case of ours will be on next week.”

Mr. Blythe's ears moved.

“I'm sorry for that. Win or lose—nothing's worse for public life than private ructions. You're not going to have it, are you?”

“We can't help it. But our defence is to be confined to an attack on the new morality.”

“One can't attack what isn't,” said Mr. Blythe.

“D'you mean to say,” said Michael, grinning, “that you haven't noticed the new morality?”

“Certainly not. Formulate it if you can.”

“‘Don't be stupid, don't be dull.’”

Mr. Blythe grunted. “The old morality used to be: ‘Behave like a gentleman.’”

“Yes! But in modern thought there ain't no sich an animal.”

“There are fragments lying about; they reconstructed Neanderthal man from half a skull.”

“A word that's laughed at can't be used, Blythe.”

“Ah!” said Mr. Blythe. “The chief failings of your generation, young Mont, are sensitiveness to ridicule, and terror of being behind the times. It's bee weak-minded.”

Michael grinned.

“I know it. Come down to the House. Parsham's Electrification Bill is due. We may get some lights on Unemployment.”

Having parted from Mr. Blythe in the Lobby, Michael came on his father walking down a corridor with a short bright old man in a trim grey beard.

"Ah! Michael, we've been seeking you. Marquess, my hopeful son! The marquess wants to interest you in electricity."

Michael removed his hat.

"Will you come to the reading-room, sir."

This, as he knew, was Marjorie Ferrar's grandfather, and might be useful. In a remote corner of a room lighted so that nobody could see any one else reading, they sat down in triangular formation.

"You know about electricity, Mr. Mont?" said the marquess.

"No, sir, except that more of it would be desirable in this room."

"Everywhere, Mr. Mont. I've read about your Foggartism; if you'll allow me to say so, it's quite possibly the policy of the future; but nothing will be done with it till you've electrified the country. I should like you to start by supporting this Bill of Parsham's."

And, with an engaging distinction of syllable, the old peer proceeded to darken Michael's mind.

"I see, sir," said Michael, at last. "This Bill ought to add considerably to Unemployment."

"Temporarily."

"I wonder if I ought to take on any more temporary trouble. I'm finding it difficult enough to interest people in the future as it is—they seem to think the present so important."

Sir Lawrence whinnied.

"You must give him time and pamphlets, Marquess. But, my dear fellow, while your Foggartism is confined to the stable, you'll want a second horse."

“I’ve been advised already to take up the state of the traffic or penny postage. And, by the way, sir, that case of yours is coming into Court, next week.”

Sir Lawrence’s loose eyebrow shot up :

“Oh !” he said. “Do you remember, Marquess—your granddaughter and my daughter-in-law ? I came to you about it.”

“Somethirg to do with lions ? A libel, was it ?” said the old peer. “My aunt——”

While Michael was trying to decide whether this was an ejaculation or the beginning of a reminiscence, his father broke in :

“Ah ! yes, an interesting case that, Marquess—it’s all in Betty Montecourt’s Memoirs.”

“Libels,” resumed the marquess, “had flavour in those days. The words complained of were : ‘Her crinoline covers her considerable obliquity.’”

“If anything’s to be done to save scandal,” muttered Michael, “it must be done now. We’re at a deadlock.”

“Could you put in a word, sir ?” said Sir Lawrence.

The marquess’s beard quivered.

“I see from the papers that my granddaughter is marrying a man called MacGown, a Member of this House. Is he about ?”

“Probably,” said Michael. “But I had a row with him. I think, sir, there would be more chance with her.”

The marquess rose. “I’ll ask her to breakfast. I dislike publicity. Well, I hope you’ll vote for this Bill, Mr. Mont, and think over the question of electrifying the Country. We want young men interested. I’m going to the Peers’ Gallery, now. Good-bye !”

When briskly he had gone, Michael said to his father : “If he’s not going to have it, I wish he’d ask Fleur to breakfast too. There are two parties to this quarrel.”