

BOOK VII.

CHAPTER I.

It was one of those gorgeous and enduring sunsets that seemed to linger as if they wished to celebrate the mid-period of the year. Perhaps the beautiful hour of impending twilight never exercises a more effective influence on the soul than when it descends on the aspect of some distant and splendid city. What a contrast between the serenity and repose of our own bosoms and the fierce passions and destructive cares girt in the walls of that multitude whose domes and towers rise in purple lustre against the resplendent horizon!

And yet the disturbing emotions of existence and the bitter inheritance of humanity should exercise but a modified sway, and entail but a light burden, within the circle of the city into which the next scene of our history leads us. For it is the sacred city of study, of learning, and of faith; and the declining beam is resting on the dome of the Radcliffe, lingering on the towers of Christchurch and Magdalen, sanctifying the spires and pinnacles of holy St. Mary's.

A young Oxonian, who had for some time been watching the city in the sunset, from a rising ground in its vicinity, lost, as it would seem, in meditation, suddenly rose, and looking at his watch, as if remindful of some engagement, hastened his return at a rapid pace. He reached the High Street as the Blenheim light post coach dashed up to the Star Hotel, with that brilliant precision which even the New Generation can remember, and yet which already ranks among the traditions of English manners. A peculiar and most animating spectacle used to be the arrival of a first-rate light coach in a country town! The small machine,

crowded with so many passengers, the foaming and curvetting leaders, the wheelers more steady and glossy, as if they had not done their ten miles in the hour, the triumphant bugle of the guard, and the haughty routine with which the driver, as he reached his goal, threw his whip to the obedient ostlers in attendance; and, not least, the staring crowd, a little awestruck, and looking for the moment at the lowest official of the stable with considerable respect, altogether made a picture which one recollects with cheerfulness, and misses now in many a dreary market-town.

Our Oxonian was a young man about the middle height, and naturally of a thoughtful expression and rather reserved mien. The general character of his countenance was, indeed, a little stern, but it broke into an almost bewitching smile, and a blush suffused his face, as he sprang forward and welcomed an individual about the same age, who had jumped off the Blenheim.

‘Well, Coningsby!’ he exclaimed, extending both his hands.

‘By Jove! my dear Millbank, we have met at last,’ said his friend.

And here we must for a moment revert to what had occurred to Coningsby since he so suddenly quitted Paris at the beginning of the year. The wound he had received was deep to one unused to wounds. Yet, after all, none had outraged his feelings, no one had betrayed his hopes. He had loved one who had loved another. Misery, but scarcely humiliation. And yet 'tis a bitter pang under any circumstances to find another preferred to yourself. It is about the same blow as one would probably feel if falling from a balloon. Your Icarian flight melts into a grovelling existence, scarcely superior to that of a sponge or a coral, or redeemed only from utter insensibility by your frank detestation of your rival. It is quite impossible to conceal that Coningsby had imbibed for Sidonia a certain degree of aversion, which, in these days of exaggerated phrase, might even be described as hatred. And Edith was so beautiful! And there had seemed between them a sympathy so native

and spontaneous, creating at once the charm of intimacy without any of the disenchanting attributes that are occasionally its consequence. He would recall the tones of her voice, the expression of her soft dark eye, the airy spirit and frank graciousness, sometimes even the flattering blush, with which she had ever welcomed one of whom she had heard so long and so kindly. It seemed, to use a sweet and homely phrase, that they were made for each other; the circumstances of their mutual destinies might have combined into one enchanting fate.

And yet, had she accorded him that peerless boon, her heart, with what aspect was he to communicate this consummation of all his hopes to his grandfather; ask Lord Monmouth for his blessing, and the gracious favour of an establishment for the daughter of his foe, of a man whose name was never mentioned except to cloud his visage? Ah! what was that mystery that connected the haughty house of Coningsby with the humble blood of the Lancashire manufacturer? Why was the portrait of his mother beneath the roof of Millbank? Coningsby had delicately touched upon the subject both with Edith and the Wallingers, but the result of his inquiries only involved the question in deeper gloom. Edith had none but maternal relatives: more than once she had mentioned this, and the Wallingers, on other occasions, had confirmed the remark. Coningsby had sometimes drawn the conversation to pictures, and he would remind her with playfulness of their first unconscious meeting in the gallery of the Rue Tronchet; then he remembered that Mr. Millbank was fond of pictures; then he recollected some specimens of Mr. Millbank's collection, and after touching on several which could not excite suspicion, he came to 'a portrait, a portrait of a lady; was it a portrait or an ideal countenance?'

Edith thought she had heard it was a portrait, but she was by no means certain, and most assuredly was quite unacquainted with the name of the original, if there were an original.

Coningsby addressed himself to the point with Sir Joseph.

He inquired of the uncle explicitly whether he knew anything on the subject. Sir Joseph was of opinion that it was something that Millbank had somewhere 'picked up.' Millbank used often to 'pick up' pictures.

Disappointed in his love, Coningsby sought refuge in the excitement of study, and in the brooding imagination of an aspiring spirit. The softness of his heart seemed to have quitted him for ever. He recurred to his habitual reveries of political greatness and public distinction. And as it ever seemed to him that no preparation could be complete for the career which he planned for himself, he devoted himself with increased ardour to that digestion of knowledge which converts it into wisdom. His life at Cambridge was now a life of seclusion. With the exception of a few Eton friends, he avoided all society. And, indeed, his acquisitions during this term were such as few have equalled, and could only have been mastered by a mental discipline of a severe and exalted character. At the end of the term Coningsby took his degree, and in a few days was about to quit that university where, on the whole, he had passed three serene and happy years in the society of fond and faithful friends, and in ennobling pursuits. He had many plans for his impending movements, yet none of them very mature ones. Lord Vere wished Coningsby to visit his family in the north, and afterwards to go to Scotland together: Coningsby was more inclined to travel for a year. Amid this hesitation a circumstance occurred which decided him to adopt neither of these courses.

It was Commencement, and coming out of the quadrangle of St. John's, Coningsby came suddenly upon Sir Joseph and Lady Wallinger, who were visiting the marvels and rarities of the university. They were alone. Coningsby was a little embarrassed, for he could not forget the abrupt manner in which he had parted from them; but they greeted him with so much cordiality that he instantly recovered himself, and, turning, became their companion. He hardly ventured to ask after Edith: at length, in a depressed tone and a hesitating manner, he inquired whether

they had lately seen Miss Millbank. He was himself surprised at the extreme light-heartedness which came over him the moment he heard she was in England, at Millbank, with her family. He always very much liked Lady Wallinger, but this morning he hung over her like a lover, lavished on her unceasing and the most delicate attentions, seemed to exist only in the idea of making the Wallingers enjoy and understand Cambridge; no one else was to be their guide at any place or under any circumstances. He told them exactly what they were to see; how they were to see it; when they were to see it. He told them of things which nobody did see, but which they should. He insisted that Sir Joseph should dine with him in hall; Sir Joseph could not think of leaving Lady Wallinger; Lady Wallinger could not think of Sir Joseph missing an opportunity that might never offer again. Besides, they might both join her after dinner. Except to give her husband a dinner, Coningsby evidently intended never to leave her side.

And the next morning, the occasion favourable, being alone with the lady, Sir Joseph bustling about a carriage, Coningsby said suddenly, with a countenance a little disturbed, and in a low voice, 'I was pleased, I mean surprised, to hear that there was still a Miss Millbank; I thought by this time she might have borne another name?'

Lady Wallinger looked at him with an expression of some perplexity, and then said, 'Yes, Edith was much admired; but she need not be precipitate in marrying. Marriage is for a woman *the* event. Edith is too precious to be carelessly bestowed.'

'But I understood,' said Coningsby, 'when I left Paris,' and here he became very confused, 'that Miss Millbank was engaged, on the point of marriage.'

'With whom?'

'Our friend Sidonia.'

'I am sure that Edith would never marry Monsieur de Sidonia, nor Monsieur de Sidonia, Edith. 'Tis a preposterous idea!' said Lady Wallinger.

'But he very much admired her?' said Coningsby with a searching eye.

'Possibly,' said Lady Wallinger; 'but he never even intimated his admiration.'

'But he was very attentive to Miss Millbank?'

'Not more than our intimate friendship authorized, and might expect.'

'You have known Sidonia a long time?'

'It was Monsieur de Sidonia's father who introduced us to the care of Mr. Wallinger,' said Lady Wallinger, 'and therefore I have ever entertained for his son a sincere regard. Besides, I look upon him as a compatriot. Recently he has been even more than usually kind to us, especially to Edith. While we were at Paris he recovered for her a great number of jewels which had been left to her by her uncle in Spain; and, what she prized infinitely more, the whole of her mother's correspondence which she maintained with this relative since her marriage. Nothing but the influence of Sidonia could have effected this. Therefore, of course, Edith is attached to him almost as much as I am. In short, he is our dearest friend; our counsellor in all our cares. But as for marrying him, the idea is ridiculous to those who know Monsieur Sidonia. No earthly consideration would ever induce him to impair that purity of race on which he prides himself. Besides, there are other obvious objections which would render an alliance between him and my niece utterly impossible: Edith is quite as devoted to her religion as Monsieur Sidonia can be to his race.'

A ray of light flashed on the brain of Coningsby as Lady Wallinger said these words. The agitated interview, which never could be explained away, already appeared in quite a different point of view. He became pensive, remained silent, was relieved when Sir Joseph, whose return he had hitherto deprecated, reappeared. Coningsby learnt in the course of the day that the Wallingers were about to make, and immediately, a visit to Hellingsley; their first visit; indeed, this was the first year that Mr. Millbank had taken

up his abode there. He did not much like the change of life, Sir Joseph told Coningsby, but Edith was delighted with Hellingsley, which Sir Joseph understood was a very distinguished place, with fine gardens, of which his niece was particularly fond.

When Coningsby returned to his rooms, those rooms which he was soon about to quit for ever, in arranging some papers preparatory to his removal, his eye lighted on a too-long unanswered letter of Oswald Millbank. Coningsby had often projected a visit to Oxford, which he much desired to make, but hitherto it had been impossible for him to effect it, except in the absence of Millbank; and he had frequently postponed it that he might combine his first visit to that famous seat of learning with one to his old schoolfellow and friend. Now that was practicable. And immediately Coningsby wrote to apprise Millbank that he had taken his degree, was free, and prepared to pay to him immediately the long-projected visit. Three years and more had elapsed since they had quitted Eton. How much had happened in the interval! What new ideas, now feelings, vast and novel knowledge! Though they had not met, they were nevertheless familiar with the progress and improvement of each other's minds. Their suggestive correspondence was too valuable to both of them to have been otherwise than cherished. And now they were to meet on the eve of entering that world for which they had made so sedulous a preparation.

CHAPTER II.

THESE are few things in life more interesting than an unrestrained interchange of ideas with a congenial spirit, and there are few things more rare. How very seldom do you encounter in the world a man of great abilities, acquirements, experience, who will unmask his mind, unbutton his brains, and pour forth in careless and picturesque

phrase all the results of his studies and observation; his knowledge of men, books, and nature. On the contrary, if a man has by any chance what he conceives an original idea, he hoards it as if it were old gold; and rather avoids the subject with which he is most conversant, from fear that you may appropriate his best thoughts. One of the principal causes of our renowned dulness in conversation is our extreme intellectual jealousy. It must be admitted that in this respect authors, but especially poets, bear the palm. They never think they are sufficiently appreciated, and live in tremor lest a brother should distinguish himself. Artists have the repute of being nearly as bad. And as for a small rising politician, a clever speech by a supposed rival or suspected candidate for office destroys his appetite and disturbs his slumbers.

One of the chief delights and benefits of travel is, that one is perpetually meeting men of great abilities, of original mind, and rare acquirements, who will converse without reserve. In these discourses the intellect makes daring leaps and marvellous advances. The tone that colours our after-life is often caught in these chance colloquies, and the bent given that shapes a career.

And yet perhaps there is no occasion when the heart is more open, the brain more quick, the memory more rich and happy, or the tongue more prompt and eloquent, than when two school-day friends, knit by every sympathy of intelligence and affection, meet at the close of their college careers, after a long separation, hesitating, as it were, on the verge of active life, and compare together their conclusions of the interval; impart to each other all their thoughts and secret plans and projects; high fancies and noble aspirations; glorious visions of personal fame and national regeneration.

Ah! why should such enthusiasm ever die! Life is too short to be little. Man is never so manly as when he feels deeply, acts boldly, and expresses himself with frankness and with fervour.

Most assuredly there never was a congress of friendship

wherein more was said and felt than in this meeting, so long projected, and yet perhaps on the whole so happily procrastinated, between Coningsby and Millbank. In a moment they seemed as if they had never parted. Their faithful correspondence indeed had maintained the chain of sentiment unbroken. But details are only for conversation. Each poured forth his mind without stint. Not an author that had influenced their taste or judgment but was canvassed and criticised; not a theory they had framed or a principle they had adopted that was not confessed. Often, with boyish glee still lingering with their earnest purpose, they shouted as they discovered that they had formed the same opinion or adopted the same conclusion. They talked all day and late into the night. They condensed into a week the poignant conclusions of three years of almost unbroken study. And one night, as they sat together in Millbank's rooms at Oriel, their conversation having for some time taken a political colour, Millbank said,

'Now tell me, Coningsby, exactly what you conceive to be the state of parties in this country; for it seems to me that if we penetrate the surface, the classification must be more simple than their many names would intimate.'

'The principle of the exclusive constitution of England having been conceded by the Acts of 1827-8-32,' said Coningsby, 'a party has arisen in the State who demand that the principle of political liberalism shall consequently be carried to its extent; which it appears to them is impossible without getting rid of the fragments of the old constitution that remain. This is the destructive party; a party with distinct and intelligible principles. They seek a specific for the evils of our social system in the general suffrage of the population.'

'They are resisted by another party, who, having given up exclusion, would only embrace as much liberalism as is necessary for the moment; who, without any embarrassing promulgation of principles, wish to keep things as they find them as long as they can, and then will manage them as they find them as well as they can; but as a party must

have the semblance of principles, they take the names of the things that they have destroyed. Thus they are devoted to the prerogatives of the Crown, although in truth the Crown has been stripped of every one of its prerogatives; they affect a great veneration for the constitution in Church and State, though every one knows that the constitution in Church and State no longer exists; they are ready to stand or fall with the "independence of the Upper House of Parliament," though, in practice, they are perfectly aware that, with their sanction, "the Upper House" has abdicated its initiatory functions, and now serves only as a court of review of the legislation of the House of Commons. Whenever public opinion, which this party never attempts to form, to educate, or to lead, falls into some violent perplexity, passion, or caprice, this party yields without a struggle to the impulse, and, when the storm has passed, attempts to obstruct and obviate the logical and, ultimately, the inevitable results of the very measures they have themselves originated, or to which they have consented. This is the Conservative party.

'I care not whether men are called Whigs or Tories, Radicals or Chartists, or by what nickname a bustling and thoughtless race may designate themselves; but these two divisions comprehend at present the English nation.

'With regard to the first school, I for one have no faith in the remedial qualities of a government carried on by a neglected democracy, who, for three centuries, have received no education. What prospect does it offer us of those high principles of conduct with which we have fed our imaginations and strengthened our will? I perceive none of the elements of government that should secure the happiness of a people and the greatness of a realm.

'But in my opinion, if Democracy be combated only by Conservatism, Democracy must triumph, and at no distant date. This, then, is our position. The man who enters public life at this epoch has to choose between Political Infidelity and a Destructive Creed.'

'This, then,' said Millbank, 'is the dilemma to which we

are brought by nearly two centuries of Parliamentary Monarchy and Parliamentary Church.'

'Tis true,' said Coningsby. 'We cannot conceal it from ourselves, that the first has made Government detested, and the second Religion disbelieved.'

'Many men in this country,' said Millbank, 'and especially in the class to which I belong, are reconciled to the contemplation of democracy; because they have accustomed themselves to believe, that it is the only power by which we can sweep away those sectional privileges and interests that impede the intelligence and industry of the community.'

'And yet,' said Coningsby, 'the only way to terminate what, in the language of the present day, is called Class Legislation, is not to entrust power to classes. You would find a locofoco majority as much addicted to Class Legislation as a factitious aristocracy. The only power that has no class sympathy is the Sovereign.'

'But suppose the case of an arbitrary Sovereign, what would be your check against him?'

'The same as against an arbitrary Parliament.'

'But a Parliament is responsible.'

'To whom?'

'To their constituent body.'

'Suppose it was to vote itself perpetual?'

'But public opinion would prevent that.'

'And is public opinion of less influence on an individual than on a body?'

'But public opinion may be indifferent. A nation may be misled, may be corrupt.'

'If the nation that elects the Parliament be corrupt, the elected body will resemble it. The nation that is corrupt deserves to fall. But this only shows that there is something to be considered beyond forms of government, national character. And herein mainly should we repose our hopes. If a nation be led to aim at the good and the great, depend upon it, whatever be its form, the government will respond to its convictions and its sentiments.'

‘Do you then declare against Parliamentary government.’

‘Far from it: I look upon political change as the greatest of evils, for it comprehends all. But if we have no faith in the permanence of the existing settlement; if the very individuals who established it are, year after year, proposing their modifications or their reconstructions; so also, while we uphold what exists, ought we to prepare ourselves for the change we deem impending?’

‘Now I would not that either ourselves, or our fellow-citizens, should be taken unawares as in 1832, when the very men who opposed the Reform Bill offered contrary objections to it which destroyed each other, so ignorant were they of its real character, its historical causes, its political consequences. We should now so act that, when the occasion arrives, we should clearly comprehend what we want, and have formed an opinion as to the best means by which that want can be supplied.’

‘For this purpose I would accustom the public mind to the contemplation of an existing though torpid power in the constitution, capable of removing our social grievances, were we to transfer to it those prerogatives which the Parliament has gradually usurped, and used in a manner which has produced the present material and moral disorganisation. The House of Commons is the house of a few; the Sovereign is the sovereign of all. The proper leader of the people is the individual who sits upon the throne.’

‘Then you abjure the Representative principle?’

‘Why so? Representation is not necessarily, or even in a principal sense, Parliamentary. Parliament is not sitting at this moment, and yet the nation is represented in its highest as well as in its most minute interests. Not a grievance escapes notice and redress. I see in the newspaper this morning that a pedagogue has brutally chastised his pupil. It is a fact known over all England. We must not forget that a principle of government is reserved for our days that we shall not find in our Aristotles, or even in the forests of Tacitus, nor in our Saxon Wittenagemotes, nor in our Plantagenet parliaments. Opinion is now

supreme, and Opinion speaks in print. The representation of the Press is far more complete than the representation of Parliament. Parliamentary representation was the happy device of a ruder age, to which it was admirably adapted: an age of semi-civilisation, when there was a leading class in the community; but it exhibits many symptoms of desuetude. It is controlled by a system of representation more vigorous and comprehensive; which absorbs its duties and fulfils them more efficiently, and in which discussion is pursued on fairer terms, and often with more depth and information.'

'And to what power would you entrust the function of Taxation?'

'To some power that would employ it more discreetly than in creating our present amount of debt, and in establishing our present system of imposts.

'In a word, true wisdom lies in the policy that would effect its ends by the influence of opinion, and yet by the means of existing forms. Nevertheless, if we are forced to revolutions, let us propose to our consideration the idea of a free monarchy, established on fundamental laws, itself the apex of a vast pile of municipal and local government, ruling an educated people, represented by a free and intellectual press. Before such a royal authority, supported by such a national opinion, the sectional anomalies of our country would disappear. Under such a system, where qualification would not be parliamentary, but personal, even statesmen would be educated; we should have no more diplomatists who could not speak French, no more bishops ignorant of theology, no more generals-in-chief who never saw a field.

'Now there is a polity adapted to our laws, our institutions, our feelings, our manners, our traditions; a polity capable of great ends and appealing to high sentiments; a polity which, in my opinion, would render government an object of national affection, which would terminate sectional anomalies, assuage religious heats, and extinguish Chartism.'

'You said to me yesterday,' said Milbank after a pause, 'quoting the words of another, which you adopted, that Man was made to adore and to obey. Now you have shown to me the means by which you deem it possible that government might become no longer odious to the subject; you have shown how man may be induced to obey. But there are duties and interests for man beyond political obedience, and social comfort, and national greatness, higher interests and greater duties. How would you deal with their spiritual necessities? You think you can combat political infidelity in a nation by the principle of enlightened loyalty; how would you encounter religious infidelity in a state? By what means is the principle of profound reverence to be revived? How, in short, is man to be led to adore?'

'Ah! that is a subject which I have not forgotten,' replied Coningsby. 'I know from your letters how deeply it has engaged your thoughts. I confess to you that it has often filled mine with perplexity and depression. When we were at Eton, and both of us impregnated with the contrary prejudices in which we had been brought up, there was still between us one common ground of sympathy and trust; we reposed with confidence and affection in the bosom of our Church. Time and thought, with both of us, have only matured the spontaneous veneration of our boyhood. But time and thought have also shown me that the Church of our heart is not in a position, as regards the community, consonant with its original and essential character, or with the welfare of the nation.'

'The character of a Church is universality,' replied Millbank. 'Once the Church in this country was universal in principle and practice; when wedded to the State, it continued at least universal in principle, if not in practice. What is it now? All ties between the State and the Church are abolished, except those which tend to its danger and degradation.'

'What can be more anomalous than the present connection between State and Church? Every condition on

which it was originally consented to has been cancelled. That original alliance was, in my view, an equal calamity for the nation and the Church; but, at least, it was an intelligible compact. Parliament, then consisting only of members of the Established Church, was, on ecclesiastical matters, a lay synod, and might, in some points of view, be esteemed a necessary portion of Church government. But you have effaced this exclusive character of Parliament; you have determined that a communion with the Established Church shall no longer be part of the qualification for sitting in the House of Commons. There is no reason, so far as the constitution avails, why every member of the House of Commons should not be a dissenter. But the whole power of the country is concentrated in the House of Commons. The House of Lords, even the Monarch himself, has openly announced and confessed, within these ten years, that the will of the House of Commons is supreme. A single vote of the House of Commons, in 1832, made the Duke of Wellington declare, in the House of Lords, that he was obliged to abandon his sovereign in "the most difficult and distressing circumstances." The House of Commons is absolute. It is the State. "L'État c'est moi." The House of Commons virtually appoints the bishops. A sectarian assembly appoints the bishops of the Established Church. They may appoint twenty Hoadleys. James II. was expelled the throne because he appointed a Roman Catholic to an Anglican see. A Parliament might do this to-morrow with impunity. And this is the constitution in Church and State which Conservative dinners toast! The only consequences of the present union of Church and State are, that, on the side of the State, there is perpetual interference in ecclesiastical government, and on the side of the Church a sedulous avoidance of all those principles on which alone Church government can be established, and by the influence of which alone can the Church of England again become universal.'

'But it is urged that the State protects its revenues?'

'No ecclesiastical revenues should be safe that require protection. Modern history is a history of Church spoliation. And by whom? Not by the people; not by the democracy. No; it is the emperor, the king, the feudal baron, the court minion. The estate of the Church is the estate of the people, so long as the Church is governed on its real principles. The Church is the medium by which the despised and degraded classes assert the native equality of man, and vindicate the rights and power of intellect. It made, in the darkest hour of Norman rule, the son of a Saxon pedlar Primate of England, and placed Nicholas Breakspear, a Hertfordshire peasant, on the throne of the Cæsars. It would do as great things now, if it were divorced from the degrading and tyrannical connection that enchains it. You would have other sons of peasants Bishops of England, instead of men appointed to that sacred office solely because they were the needy scions of a factitious aristocracy; men of gross ignorance, profligate habits, and grinding extortion, who have disgraced the episcopal throne, and profaned the altar.'

'But surely you cannot justly extend such a description to the present bench?'

'Surely not: I speak of the past, of the past that has produced so much present evil. We live in decent times; frigid, latitudinarian, alarmed, decorous. A priest is scarcely deemed in our days a fit successor to the authors of the gospels, if he be not the editor of a Greek play; and he who follows St. Paul must now at least have been private tutor of some young nobleman who has taken a good degree! And then you are all astonished that the Church is not universal! Why! nothing but the indestructibility of its principles, however feebly pursued, could have maintained even the disorganised body that still survives.

'And yet, my dear Coningsby, with all its past errors and all its present deficiencies, it is by the Church; I would have said until I listened to you to-night; by the Church alone that I see any chance of regenerating the national character. The parochial system, though shaken

by the fatal poor-law, is still the most ancient, the most comprehensive, and the most popular institution of the country; the younger priests are, in general, men whose souls are awake to the high mission which they have to fulfil, and which their predecessors so neglected; there is, I think, a rising feeling in the community, that parliamentary intercourse in matters ecclesiastical has not tended either to the spiritual or the material elevation of the humbler orders. Divorce the Church from the State, and the spiritual power that struggled against the brute force of the dark ages, against tyrannical monarchs and barbarous barons, will struggle again in opposition to influences of a different form, but of a similar tendency; equally selfish, equally insensible, equally barbarising. The priests of God are the tribunes of the people. O, ignorant! that with such a mission they should ever have cringed in the antechambers of ministers, or bowed before parliamentary committees!

'The Utilitarian system is dead,' said Coningsby. 'It has passed through the heaven of philosophy like a hail-storm, cold, noisy, sharp, and peppering, and it has melted away. And yet can we wonder that it found some success, when we consider the political ignorance and social torpor which it assailed? Anointed kings turned into chief magistrates, and therefore much overpaid; estates of the realm changed into parliaments of virtual representation, and therefore requiring real reform; holy Church transformed into national establishment, and therefore grumbled at by all the nation for whom it was not supported. What an inevitable harvest of sedition, radicalism, infidelity! I really think there is no society, however great its resources, that could long resist the united influences of chief magistrate, virtual representation, and Church establishment!'

'I have immense faith in the new generation,' said Millbank, eagerly.

'It is a holy thing to see a state saved by its youth,' said Coningsby; and then he added, in a tone of humility, if not of depression. 'But what a task! What a variety of

qualities, what a combination of circumstances is requisite! What bright abilities and what noble patience! What confidence from the people, what favour from the Most High!

'But He will favour us,' said Millbank. 'And I say to you as Nathan said unto David, "Thou art the man!" You were our leader at Eton; the friends of your heart and boyhood still cling and cluster round you! they are all men whose position forces them into public life. It is a nucleus of honour, faith, and power. You have only to dare. And will you not dare? It is our privilege to live in an age when the career of the highest ambition is identified with the performance of the greatest good. Of the present epoch it may be truly said, "Who dares to be good, dares to be great."''

'Heaven is above all,' said Coningsby. 'The curtain of our fate is still undrawn. We are happy in our friends, dear Millbank, and whatever lights, we will stand together. For myself, I prefer fame to life; and yet, the consciousness of heroic deeds to the most wide-spread celebrity.'

CHAPTER III.

THE beautiful light of summer had never shone on a scene and surrounding landscape which recalled happier images of English nature, and better recollections of English manners, than that to which we would now introduce our readers. One of those true old English Halls, now unhappily so rare, built in the time of the Tudors, and in its elaborate timber-framing and decorative woodwork indicating, perhaps, the scarcity of brick and stone at the period of its structure, as much as the grotesque genius of its fabricator, rose on a terrace surrounded by ancient and very formal gardens. The hall itself, during many generations, had been vigilantly and tastefully preserved by its proprietors. There was not a point which was not as fresh as if it had been renovated but yesterday. It

stood a huge and strange blending of Grecian, Gothic, and Italian architecture, with a wild dash of the fantastic in addition. The lantern watch-towers of a baronial castle were placed in juxtaposition with Doric columns employed for chimneys, while under oriel windows might be observed Italian doorways with Grecian pediments. Beyond the extensive gardens an avenue of Spanish chestnuts at each point of the compass approached the mansion, or led into a small park which was table-land, its limits opening on all sides to beautiful and extensive valleys, sparkling with cultivation, except at one point, where the river Darl formed the boundary of the domain, and then spread in many a winding through the rich country beyond.

Such was Hellingsley, the new home that Oswald Millbank was about to visit for the first time. Coningsby and himself had travelled together as far as Darlford, where their roads diverged, and they had separated with an engagement on the part of Coningsby to visit Hellingsley on the morrow. As they had travelled along, Coningsby had frequently led the conversation to domestic topics; gradually he had talked, and talked much, of Edith. Without an obtrusive curiosity, he extracted, unconsciously to his companion, traits of her character and early days, which filled him with a wild and secret interest. The thought that in a few hours he was to meet her again, infused into his being a degree of transport, which the very necessity of repressing before his companion rendered more magical and thrilling. How often it happens in life that we have with a grave face to discourse of ordinary topics, while all the time our heart and memory are engrossed with some enchanting secret!

The castle of his grandfather presented a far different scene on the arrival of Coningsby from that which it had offered on his first visit. The Marquess had given him a formal permission to repair to it at his pleasure, and had instructed the steward accordingly. But he came without notice, at a season of the year when the absence of all sports made his arrival unexpected. The scattered and

sauntering household roused themselves into action, and contemplated the conviction that it might be necessary to do some service for their wages. There was a stir in that vast, sleepy castle. At last the steward was found, and came forward to welcome their young master, whose simple wants were limited to the rooms he had formerly occupied.

Coningsby reached the castle a little before sunset, almost the same hour that he had arrived there more than three years ago. How much had happened in the interval! Coningsby had already lived long enough to find interest in pondering over the past. That past too must inevitably exercise a great influence over his present. He recalled his morning drive with his grandfather, to the brink of that river which was the boundary between his own domain and Hellingsley. Who dwelt at Hellingsley now?

Restless, excited, not insensible to the difficulties, perhaps the dangers, of his position, yet full of an entrancing emotion in which all thoughts and feelings seemed to merge, Coningsby went forth into the fair gardens to muse over his love amid objects as beautiful. A rosy light hung over the rare shrubs and tall fantastic trees; while a rich yet darker tint suffused the distant woods. This euthanasia of the day exercises a strange influence on the hearts of those who love. Who has not felt it? Magical emotions that touch the immortal part!

But as for Coningsby, the mitigating hour that softens the heart made his spirit brave. Amid the ennobling sympathies of nature, the pursuits and purposes of worldly prudence and conventional advantage subsided into their essential nothingness. He willed to blend his life and fate with a being beautiful as that nature that subdued him, and he felt in his own breast the intrinsic energies that in spite of all obstacles should mould such an imagination into reality.

He descended the slopes, now growing dimmer in the fleeting light, into the park. The stillness was almost supernatural; the jocund sounds of day had died, and the

voices of the night had not commenced. His heart too was still. A sacred calm had succeeded to that distraction of emotion which had agitated him the whole day, while he had mused over his love and the infinite and insurmountable barriers that seemed to oppose his will. Now he felt one of those strong groundless convictions that are the inspirations of passion, that all would yield to him as to one holding an enchanted wand.

Onward he strolled; it seemed without purpose, yet always proceeding. A pale and then gleaming tint stole over the masses of mighty timber; and soon a glittering light flooded the lawns and glades. The moon was high in her summer heaven, and still Coningsby strolled on. He crossed the broad lawns, he traversed the bright glades: amid the gleaming and shadowy woods, he traced his prescient way.

He came to the bank of a rushing river, foaming in the moonlight, and wafting on its blue breast the shadow of a thousand stars.

'O river!' he said, 'that rollest to my mistress, bear her, bear her my heart!'

CHAPTER IV.

LADY WALLINGER and Edith were together in the morning room of Hellingsley, the morrow after the arrival of Oswald. Edith was arranging flowers in a vase, while her aunt was embroidering a Spanish peasant in correct costume. The daughter of Millbank looked as bright and fragrant as the fair creations that surrounded her. Beautiful to watch her as she arranged their forms and composed their groups; to mark her eye glance with gratification at some happy combination of colour, or to listen to her delight as they wafted to her in gratitude their perfume. Oswald and Sir Joseph were surveying the stables; Mr. Millbank,

who had been daily expected for the last week from the factories, had not yet arrived.

'I must say he gained my heart from the first,' said Lady Wallinger.

'I wish the gardener would send us more roses,' said Edith.

'He is so very superior to any young man I ever met,' continued lady Wallinger.

'I think we must have this vaso ontirely of roses; don't you think so, aunt?' inquired her niece.

'I am fond of roses,' said Lady Wallinger. 'What beautiful bouquets Mr. Coningsby gave us at Paris, Edith!'

'Beautiful!'

'I must say, I was very bappy when I met Mr. Coningsby again at Cambridge,' said Lady Wallinger. 'It gave me much greater pleasure than seeing any of the colleges.'

'How delighted Oswald seems at having Mr. Coningsby for a companion again!' said Edith.

'And very naturally,' said Lady Wallinger. 'Oswald ought to deem himself fortunate in having such a friend. I am sure the kindness of Mr. Coningsby when we met him at Cambridge is what I never shall forget. But he always was my favourite from the first time I saw him at Paris. Do you know, Edith, I liked him best of all your admirers.'

'Oh! no, aunt,' said Edith, smiling, 'not more than Lord Beaumanoir; you forget your great favourite, Lord Beaumanoir.'

'But I did not know Mr. Coningsby at Rome,' said Lady Wallinger; 'I cannot agree that anybody is equal to Mr. Coningsby. I cannot tell you how pleased I am that he is our neighbour!'

As Lady Wallinger gave a finishing stroke to the jacket of her Andalusian, Edith, vividly blushing, yet speaking in a voice of affected calmness, said,

'Here is Mr. Coningsby, aunt.'

And, truly, at this moment our hero might be discerned, approaching the hall by one of the avenues; and in a few minutes there was a ringing at the hall bell, and then,

after a short pause, the servants announced Mr. Coningsby, and ushered him into the morning room.

Edith was embarrassed ; the frankness and the gaiety of her manner had deserted her ; Coningsby was rather earnest than self-possessed. Each felt at first that the presence of Lady Wallinger was a relief. The ordinary topics of conversation were in sufficient plenty ; reminiscences of Paris, impressions of Hellingsley, his visit to Oxford, Lady Wallinger's visit to Cambridge. In ten minutes their voices seemed to sound to each other as they did in the Rue de Rivoli, and their mutual perplexity had in a great degree subsided.

Oswald and Sir Joseph now entered the room, and the conversation became general. Hellingsley was the subject on which Coningsby dwelt ; he was charmed with all that he had seen ! wished to see more. Sir Joseph was quite prepared to accompany him ; but Lady Wallinger, who seemed to read Coningsby's wishes in his eyes, proposed that the inspection should be general ; and in the course of half an hour Coningsby was walking by the side of Edith, and sympathising with all the natural charms to which her quick taste and lively expression called his notice and appreciation. Few things more delightful than a country ramble with a sweet companion ! Exploring woods, wandering over green commons, loitering in shady lanes, resting on rural stiles ; the air full of perfume, the heart full of bliss !

It seemed to Coningsby that he had never been happy before. A thrilling joy pervaded his being. He could have sung like a bird. His heart was as sunny as the summer scene. Past and Future were absorbed in the flowing hour ; not an allusion to Paris, not a speculation on what might arrive ; but infinite expressions of agreement, sympathy ; a multitude of slight phrases, that, however couched, had but one meaning, congeniality. He felt each moment his voice becoming more tender ; his heart gushing in soft expressions ; each moment he was more fascinated ; her step was grace, her glance was beauty. Now she

touched him by some phrase of sweet simplicity ; or carried him spell-bound by her airy merriment.

Oswald assumed that Coningsby remained to dine with them. There was not even the ceremony of invitation. Coningsby could not but remember his dinner at Millbank, and the timid hostess whom he then addressed so often in vain, as he gazed upon the bewitching and accomplished woman whom he now passionately loved. It was a most agreeable dinner. Oswald, happy in his friend being his guest, under his own roof, indulged in unwonted gaiety.

The ladies withdrew ; Sir Joseph began to talk politics, although the young men had threatened their fair companions immediately to follow them. This was the period of the *Bed-Chamber Plot*, when Sir Robert Peel accepted and resigned power in the course of three days. Sir Joseph, who had originally made up his mind to support a Conservative government when he deemed it inevitable, had for the last month endeavoured to compensate for this trifling error by vindicating the conduct of his friends, and reprobating the behaviour of those who would deprive her Majesty of the 'friends-of-her-youth.' Sir Joseph was a most chivalrous champion of the 'friends-of-her-youth' principle. Sir Joseph, who was always moderate and conciliatory in his talk, though he would go, at any time, any lengths for his party, expressed himself to-day with extreme sobriety, as he was determined not to hurt the feelings of Mr. Coningsby, and he principally confined himself to urging temperate questions, somewhat in the following fashion :—

'I admit that, on the whole, under ordinary circumstances, it would perhaps have been more convenient that these appointments should have remained with Sir Robert ; but don't you think that, under the peculiar circumstances, being friends of her Majesty's youth ?' &c. &c.

Sir Joseph was extremely astonished when Coningsby replied that he thought, under no circumstances, should any appointment in the Royal Household be dependent on the voice of the House of Commons, though he was far

from admiring the 'friends-of-her-youth' principle, which he looked upon as impertinent.

'But surely,' said Sir Joseph, 'the Minister being responsible to Parliament, it must follow that all great offices of State should be filled at his discretion.'

'But where do you find this principle of Ministerial responsibility?' inquired Coningsby.

'And is not a Minister responsible to his Sovereign?' inquired Millbank.

Sir Joseph seemed a little confused. He had always heard that Ministers were responsible to Parliament; and he had a vague conviction, notwithstanding the reanimating loyalty of the Bed-Chamber Plot, that the Sovereign of England was a nonentity. He took refuge in indefinite expressions, and observed, 'The Responsibility of Ministers is surely a constitutional doctrine.'

'The Ministers of the Crown are responsible to their master; they are not the Ministers of Parliament.'

'But then you know virtually,' said Sir Joseph, 'the Parliament, that is, the House of Commons, governs the country.'

'It did before 1832,' said Coningsby; 'but that is all past now. We got rid of that with the Venetian Constitution.'

'The Venetian Constitution!' said Sir Joseph.

'To be sure,' said Millbank. 'We were governed in this country by the Venetian Constitution from the accession of the House of Hanover. But that yoke is past. And now I hope we are in a state of transition from the Italian Dogeship to the English Monarchy.'

'King, Lords, and Commons, the Venetian Constitution!' exclaimed Sir Joseph.

'But they were phrases,' said Coningsby, 'not facts. The King was a Doge; the Cabinet the Council of Ten. Your Parliament, that you call Lords and Commons, was nothing more than the Great Council of Nobles.'

'The resemblance was complete,' said Millbank, 'and no wonder, for it was not accidental; the Venetian Constitution was intentionally copied.'

'We should have had the Venetian Republic in 1640,' said Coningsby, 'had it not been for the Puritans. Geneva beat Venice.'

'I am sure these ideas are not very generally known,' said Sir Joseph, bewildered.

'Because you have had your history written by the Venetian party,' said Coningsby, 'and it has been their interest to conceal them.'

'I will venture to say that there are very few men on our side in the House of Commons,' said Sir Joseph, 'who are aware that they were born under a Venetian Constitution.'

'Let us go to the ladies,' said Millbank, smiling.

Edith was reading a letter as they entered.

'A letter from papa,' she exclaimed, looking up at her brother with great animation. 'We may expect him every day; and yet, alas! he cannot fix one.'

They now all spoke of Millbank, and Coningsby was happy that he was familiar with the scene. At length he ventured to say to Edith, 'You once made me a promise which you never fulfilled. I shall claim it to-night.'

'And what can that be?'

'The song that you promised me at Millbank more than three years ago.'

'Your memory is good.'

'It has dwelt upon the subject.'

Then they spoke for awhile of other recollections, and then Coningsby appealing to Lady Wallinger for her influence, Edith rose and took up her guitar. Her voice was rich and sweet; the air she sang gay, even fantastically frolic, such as the girls of Granada chaunt trooping home from some country festival; her soft, dark eye brightened with joyous sympathy; and ever and anon, with an arch grace, she beat the guitar, in chorus, with her pretty hand.

The moon wanes; and Coningsby must leave these enchanted halls. Oswald walked homeward with him until he reached the domain of his grandfather. Then mounting

his horse, Coningsby bade his friend farewell till the morrow, and made his best way to the Castle.

CHAPTER V.

THERE is a romance in every life. The emblazoned page of Coningsby's existence was now open. It had been prosperous before, with some moments of excitement, some of delight; but they had all found, as it were, their origin in worldly considerations, or been inevitably mixed up with them. At Paris, for example, he loved, or thought he loved. But there not an hour could elapse without his meeting some person, or hearing something, which disturbed the beauty of his emotions, or broke his spell-bound thoughts. There was his grandfather hating the Millbanks, or Sidonia loving them; and common people, in the common world, making common observations on them; asking who they were, or telling who they were; and brushing the bloom off all life's fresh delicious fancies with their coarse handling.

But now his feelings were ethereal. He loved passionately, and he loved in a scene and in a society as sweet, as pure, and as refined as his imagination and his heart. There was no malicious gossip, no callous chatter to profane his ear and desecrate his sentiment. All that he heard or saw was worthy of the summer sky, the still green woods, the gushing river, the gardens and terraces, the stately and fantastic dwellings, among which his life now glided as in some dainty and gorgeous masque.

All the soft, social, domestic sympathies of his nature, which, however abundant, had never been cultivated, were developed by the life he was now leading. It was not merely that he lived in the constant presence, and under the constant influence of one whom he adored, that made him so happy. He was surrounded by beings who found felicity in the interchange of kind feelings and kind words,

in the cultivation of happy talents and refined tastes, and the enjoyment of a life which their own good sense and their own good hearts made them both comprehend and appreciate. Ambition lost much of its splendour, even his lofty aspirations something of their hallowing impulse of paramount duty, when Coningsby felt how much ennobling delight was consistent with the seclusion of a private station; and mused over an existence to be passed amid woods and waterfalls with a fair hand locked in his, or surrounded by his friends in some ancestral hall.

The morning after his first visit to Hellingsley Coningsby rejoined his friends, as he had promised Oswald at their breakfast-table; and day after day he came with the early sun, and left them only when the late moon silvered the keep of Coningsby Castle. Mr. Millbank, who wrote daily, and was daily to be expected, did not arrive. A week, a week of unbroken bliss, had vanished away, passed in long rides and longer walks, sunset saunterings, and sometimes moonlit strolls; talking of flowers, and thinking of things even sweeter; listening to delicious songs, and sometimes reading aloud some bright romance or some inspiring lay.

One day Coningsby, who arrived at the hall unexpectedly late; indeed it was some hours past noon, for he had been detained by despatches which arrived at the Castle from Mr. Rigby, and which required his interposition; found the ladies alone, and was told that Sir Joseph and Oswald were at the fishing-cottage where they wished him to join them. He was in no haste to do this; and Lady Wallinger proposed that when they felt inclined to ramble they should all walk down to the fishing-cottage together. So, seating himself by the side of Edith, who was tinting a sketch which she had made of a rich oriel of Hellingsley, the morning passed away in that slight and yet subtle talk in which a lover delights, and in which, while asking a thousand questions, that seem at the first glance sufficiently trifling, he is indeed often conveying a meaning that is not expressed, or attempting to discover a feeling that is hidden. And these are occasions when glances meet and glances are

withdrawn: the tongue may speak idly, the eye is more eloquent, and often more true.

Coningsby looked up; Lady Wallinger, who had more than once announced that she was going to put on her bonnet, was gone. Yet still he continued to talk trifles; and still Edith listened.

'Of all that you have told me,' said Edith, 'nothing pleases me so much as your description of St. Geneviève. How much I should like to catch the deer at sunset on the heights! What a pretty drawing it would make!'

'You would like Eustace Lyle,' said Coningsby. 'He is so shy and yet so ardent.'

'You have such a band of friends! Oswald was saying this morning there was no one who had so many devoted friends.'

'We are all united by sympathy. It is the only bond of friendship; and yet friendship ——'

'Edith,' said Lady Wallinger, looking into the room from the garden, with her bonnet on, 'you will find me roaming on the terrace.'

'We come, dear aunt.'

And yet they did not move. There were yet a few pencil touches to be given to the tinted sketch; Coningsby would cut the pencils.

'Would you give me,' he said, 'some slight memorial of Hellingsley and your art? I would not venture to hope for anything half so beautiful as this; but the slightest sketch. It would make me so happy when away to have it hanging in my room.'

A blush suffused the cheek of Edith; she turned her head a little aside, as if she were arranging some drawings. And then she said, in a somewhat hushed and hesitating voice

'I am sure I will do so; and with pleasure. A view of the Hall itself; I think that would be the best memorial. Where shall we take it from? We will decide in our walk?' and she rose, and promising immediately to return, left the room.

Coningsby leant over the mantel-piece in deep abstraction, gazing vacantly on a miniature of the father of Edith. A light step roused him; she had returned. Unconsciously he greeted her with a glance of ineffable tenderness.

They went forth; it was a grey, sultry day. Indeed it was the covered sky which had led to the fishing scheme of the morning. Sir Joseph was an expert and accomplished angler, and the Darl was renowned for its sport. They lingered before they reached the terrace where they were to find Lady Wallinger, observing the different points of view which the Hall presented, and debating which was to form the subject of Coningsby's drawing; for already it was to be not merely a sketch, but a drawing, the most finished that the bright and effective pencil of Edith could achieve. If it really were to be placed in his room, and were to be a memorial of Hellingsley, her artistic reputation demanded a masterpiece.

They reached the terrace: Lady Wallinger was not there, nor could they observe her in the vicinity. Coningsby was quite certain that she had gone onward to the fishing-cottage, and expected them to follow her; and he convinced Edith of the justness of his opinion. To the fishing-cottage, therefore, they bent their steps. They emerged from the gardens into the park, sauntering over the table land, and seeking as much as possible the shade, in the soft but oppressive atmosphere. At the limit of the table land their course lay by a wild but winding path through a gradual and wooded declivity. While they were yet in this craggy and romantic woodland, the big fervent drops began to fall. Coningsby urged Edith to seek at once a natural shelter; but she, who knew the country, assured him that the fishing-cottage was close by, and that they might reach it before the rain could do them any harm.

And truly, at this moment emerging from the wood, they found themselves in the valley of the Darl. The river here was narrow and winding, but full of life; rushing, and clear but for the dark sky it reflected; with high

banks of turf and tall trees; the silver birch, above all others, in clustering groups; infinitely picturesque. At the turn of the river, about two hundred yards distant, Coningsby observed the low, dark roof of the fishing-cottage on its banks. They descended from the woods to the margin of the stream by a flight of turfen steps, Coningsby holding Edith's hand as he guided her progress.

The drops became thicker. They reached, at a rapid pace, the cottage. The absent boat indicated that Sir Joseph and Oswald were on the river. The cottage was an old building of rustic logs, with a shelving roof, so that you might obtain sufficient shelter without entering its walls. Coningsby found a rough garden seat for Edith. The shower was now violent.

Nature, like man, sometimes weeps from gladness. It is the joy and tenderness of her heart that seek relief; and these are summer showers. In this instance the vehemence of her emotion was transient, though the tears kept stealing down her cheek for a long time, and gentle sighs and sobs might for some period be distinguished. The oppressive atmosphere had evaporated; the grey, sullen tint had disappeared; a soft breeze came dancing up the stream; a glowing light fell upon the woods and waters; the perfume of trees and flowers and herbs floated around. There was a carolling of birds; a hum of happy insects in the air; freshness and stir, and a sense of joyous life, pervaded all things; it seemed that the heart of all creation opened.

Coningsby, after repeatedly watching the shower with Edith, and speculating on its progress, which did not much annoy them, had seated himself on a log almost at her feet. And assuredly a maiden and a youth more beautiful and engaging had seldom met before in a scene more fresh and fair. Edith on her rustic seat watched the now blue and foaming river, and the birch-trees with a livelier tint, and quivering in the sunset air; an expression of tranquil bliss suffused her beautiful brow, and spoke from the thrilling tenderness of her soft dark eye. Coningsby gazed on that countenance with a glance of entranced rapture. His cheek

was flushed, his eye gleamed with dazzling lustre. She turned her head; she met that glance, and, troubled, she withdrew her own.

'Edith!' he said in a tone of tremulous passion, 'Let me call you Edith! Yes,' he continued, gently taking her hand, 'let me call you my Edith! I love you!'

She did not withdraw her hand; but turned away a face flushed as the impending twilight.

CHAPTER VI.

It was past the dinner hour when Edith and Coningsby reached the Hall; an embarrassing circumstance, but mitigated by the conviction that they had not to encounter a very critical inspection. What, then, were their feelings when the first servant that they met informed them that Mr. Millbank had arrived! Edith never could have believed that the return of her beloved father to his home could ever have been to her other than a cause of delight. And yet now she trembled when she heard the announcement. The mysteries of love were fast involving her existence. But this was not the season of meditation. Her heart was still agitated by the tremulous admission that she responded to that fervent and adoring love whose eloquent music still sounded in her ear, and the pictures of whose fanciful devotion flitted over her agitated vision. Unconsciously she pressed the arm of Coningsby as the servant spoke, and then, without looking into his face, whispering him to be quick, she sprang away.

As for Coningsby, notwithstanding the elation of his heart, and the ethereal joy which flowed in all his veins, the name of Mr. Millbank sounded something like a knell. However, this was not the time to reflect. He obeyed the hint of Edith; made the most rapid toilet that ever was consummated by a happy lover, and in a few minutes entered the drawing-room of Hellingsley, to encounter the gentleman whom he

hoped by some means or other, quite inconceivable, might some day be transformed into his father-in-law, and the fulfilment of his consequent duties towards whom he had commenced by keeping him waiting for dinner.

'How do you do, sir,' said Mr. Millbank, extending his hand to Coningsby. 'You seem to have taken a long walk.'

Coningsby looked round to the kind Lady Wallinger, and half addressed his murmured answer to her, explaining how they had lost her, and their way, and were caught in a storm or a shower, which, as it terminated about three hours back, and the fishing cottage was little more than a mile from the Hall, very satisfactorily accounted for their not being in time for dinner.

Lady Wallinger then said something about the lowering clouds having frightened her from the terrace, and Sir Joseph and Oswald talked a little of their sport, and of their having seen an otter; but there was, or at least there seemed to Coningsby, a tone of general embarrassment which distressed him. The fact is, keeping people from dinner under any circumstances is distressing. They are obliged to talk at the very moment when they wish to use their powers of expression for a very different purpose. They are faint, and conversation makes them more exhausted. A gentleman, too, fond of his family, who in turn are devoted to him, making a great and inconvenient effort to reach them by dinner time, to please and surprise them; and finding them all dispersed, dinner so late that he might have reached home in good time without any great inconvenient effort; his daughter, whom he has wished a thousand times to embrace, taking a singularly long ramble with no other companion than a young gentleman, whom he did not exactly expect to see; all these are circumstances, individually perhaps slight, and yet, encountered collectively, it may be doubted whether they would not a little ruffle even the sweetest temper.

Mr. Millbank, too, had not the sweetest temper, though not a bad one; a little quick and fiery. But then he had a kind heart. And when Edith, who had providentially sent

down a message to order dinner, entered and embraced him at the very moment that dinner was announced, her father forgot everything in his joy in seeing her, and his pleasure in being surrounded by his friends. He gave his hand to Lady Wallinger, and Sir Joseph led away his niece. Coningsby put his arm around the astonished neck of Oswald, as if they were once more in the playing fields of Eton.

'By Jove! my dear fellow,' he exclaimed, 'I am so sorry we kept your father from dinner.'

As Edith headed her father's table, according to his rigid rule, Coningsby was on one side of her. They never spoke so little; Coningsby would have never unclosed his lips, had he followed his humour. He was in a stupor of happiness; the dining room took the appearance of the fishing-cottage; and he saw nothing but the flowing river. Lady Wallinger was however next to him, and that was a relief; for he felt always she was his friend. Sir Joseph, a good-hearted man, and on subjects with which he was acquainted full of sound sense, was invaluable to-day, for he entirely kept up the conversation, speaking of things which greatly interested Mr. Millbank. And so their host soon recovered his good temper; he addressed several times his observations to Coningsby, and was careful to take wine with him. On the whole, affairs went on flowingly enough. The gentlemen, indeed, stayed much longer over their wine than on the preceding days, and Coningsby did not venture on the liberty of quitting the room before his host. It was as well. Edith required repose. She tried to seek it on the bosom of her aunt, as she breathed to her the delicious secret of her life. When the gentlemen returned to the drawing-room the ladies were not there.

This rather disturbed Mr. Millbank again; he had not seen enough of his daughter; he wished to hear her sing. But Edith managed to reappear; and even to sing. Then Coningsby went up to her and asked her to sing the song of the Girls of Granada. She said in a low voice, and with a fond yet serious look

‘I am not in the mood for such a song, but if you wish me ——’

She sang it, and with inexpressible grace, and with an arch vivacity, that to a fine observer would have singularly contrasted with the almost solemn and even troubled expression of her countenance a moment afterwards.

The day was about to die; the day the most important, the most precious in the lives of Harry Coningsby and Edith Millbank. Words had been spoken, vows breathed, which were to influence their careers for ever. For them hereafter there was to be but one life, one destiny, one world. Each of them was still in such a state of tremulous excitement, that neither had found time or occasion to ponder over the mighty result. They both required solitude; they both longed to be alone. Coningsby rose to depart. He pressed the soft hand of Edith, and his glance spoke his soul.

‘We shall see you at breakfast to-morrow, Coningsby!’ said Oswald, very loud, knowing that the presence of his father would make Coningsby hesitate about coming. Edith’s heart fluttered; but she said nothing. It was with delight she heard her father, after a moment’s pause, say

‘Oh! I beg we may have that pleasure.’

‘Not quite at so early an hour,’ said Coningsby; ‘but if you will permit me, I hope to have the pleasure of hearing from you to-morrow, sir, that your journey has not fatigued you.’

CHAPTER VII.

To be alone; to have no need of feigning a tranquillity he could not feel; of coining common-place courtesies when his heart was gushing with rapture; this was a great relief to Coningsby, though gained by a separation from Edith.

The deed was done; he had breathed his long-brooding passion, he had received the sweet expression of her sym-

pathy, he had gained the long-coveted heart. Youth, beauty, love, the innocence of unsophisticated breasts, and the inspiration of an exquisite nature, combined to fashion the spell that now entranced his life. He turned to gaze upon the moonlit towers and peaked roofs of Hellingsley. Silent and dreamlike, the picturesque pile rested on its broad terrace flooded with the silver light and surrounded by the quaint bowers of its fantastic gardens tipped with the glittering beam. Half hid in deep shadow, half sparkling in the midnight blaze, he recognised the oriel window that had been the subject of the morning's sketch. Almost he wished there should be some sound to assure him of his reality. But nothing broke the all-pervading stillness. Was his life to be as bright and as tranquil? And what was to be his life?

Whither was he to bear the beautiful bride he had gained? Were the portals of Coningsby the proud and hospitable gates that were to greet her? How long would they greet him after the achievement of the last four-and-twenty hours was known to their lord? Was this the return for the confiding kindness of his grandsire? That he should pledge his troth to the daughter of that grandsire's foe?

Away with such dark and scaring visions! Is it not the noon of a summer night fragrant with the breath of gardens, bright with the beam that lovers love, and soft with the breath of Ausonian breezes? Within that sweet and stately residence, dwells there not a maiden fair enough to revive chivalry; who is even now thinking of him as she leans on her pensive hand, or, if perchance she dream, recalls him in her visions? And himself, is he one who would cry craven with such a lot? What avail his golden youth, his high blood, his daring and devising spirit, and all his stores of wisdom, if they help not now? Does not he feel the energy divine that can confront Fate and carve out fortunes? Besides it is nigh Midsummer Eve, and what should fairies reign for but to aid such a bright pair as this?

He recalls a thousand times the scene, the moment, in

which but a few hours past he dared to tell her that he loved; he recalls a thousand times the still, small voice, that murmured her agitated felicity: more than a thousand times, for his heart clenched the idea as a diver grasps a gem, he recalls the enraptured yet gentle embrace, that had sealed upon her blushing cheek his mystical and delicious sovereignty.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE morning broke lowering and thunderous; small white clouds, dull and immovable, studded the leaden sky; the waters of the rushing Darl seemed to have become black and almost stagnant; the terraces of Hellingsley looked like the hard lines of a model; and the mansion itself had a harsh and metallic character. Before the chief portal of his Hall, the elder Millbank, with an air of some anxiety, surveyed the landscape and the heavens, as if he were speculating on the destiny of the day.

Often his eye wandered over the park; often with an uneasy and restless step he paced the raised walk before him. The clock of Hellingsley church had given the chimes of noon. His son and Coningsby appeared at the end of one of the avenues. His eye lightened; his lip became compressed; he advanced to meet them.

‘Are you going to fish to-day, Oswald?’ he inquired of his son.

‘We had some thoughts of it, sir.’

‘A fine day for sport, I should think,’ he observed, as he turned towards the Hall with them.

Coningsby remarked the fanciful beauty of the portal; its twisted columns, and Caryatides carved in dark oak.

‘Yes, it’s very well,’ said Millbank; ‘but I really do not know why I came here; my presence is an effort. Oswald does not care for the place; none of us do, I believe.’

‘Oh! I like it now, father; and Edith doats on it.’

'She was very happy at Millbank,' saith the father, rather sharply.

'We are all of us happy at Millbank,' said Oswald.

'I was much struck with the valley and the whole settlement when I first saw it,' said Coningsby.

'Suppose you go and see about the tackle, Oswald,' said Mr. Millbank, 'and Mr. Coningsby and I will take a stroll on the terrace in the meantime.'

The habit of obedience, which was supreme in this family, instantly carried Oswald away, though he was rather puzzled why his father should be so anxious about the preparation of the fishing-tackle, as he rarely used it. His son had no sooner departed than Mr. Millbank turned to Coningsby, and said very abruptly

'You have never seen my own room here, Mr. Coningsby; step in, for I wish to say a word to you.' And thus speaking, he advanced before the astonished, and rather agitated Coningsby, and led the way through a door and long passage to a room of moderate dimensions, partly furnished as a library, and full of parliamentary papers and blue-books. Shutting the door with some earnestness and pointing to a chair, he begged his guest to be seated. Both in their chairs, Mr. Millbank, clearing his throat, said without preface, 'I have reason to believe, Mr. Coningsby, that you are attached to my daughter?'

'I have been attached to her for a long time most ardently,' replied Coningsby, in a calm and rather measured tone, but looking very pale.

'And I have reason to believe that she returns your attachment?' said Mr. Millbank.

'I believe she deigns not to disregard it,' said Coningsby, his white cheek becoming scarlet.

'It is then a mutual attachment, which, if cherished, must produce mutual unhappiness,' said Mr. Millbank.

'I would fain believe the reverse,' said Coningsby.

'Why?' inquired Mr. Millbank.

'Because I believe she possesses every charm, quality, and virtue, that can bless man; and because, though I can

make her no equivalent return, I have a heart, if I know myself, that would struggle to deserve her.'

'I know you to be a man of sense; I believe you to be a man of honour,' replied Mr. Millbank. 'As the first, you must feel that an union between you and my daughter is impossible; what then should be your duty as a man of correct principle is obvious.'

'I could conceive that our union might be attended with difficulties,' said Coningsby, in a somewhat deprecating tone.

'Sir, it is impossible,' repeated Mr. Millbank, interrupting him, though not with harshness; 'that is to say, there is no conceivable marriage which could be effected at greater sacrifices, and which would occasion greater misery.'

'The sacrifices are more apparent to me than the misery,' said Coningsby, 'and even they may be imaginary.'

'The sacrifices and the misery are certain and inseparable,' said Mr. Millbank. 'Come now, see how we stand! I speak without reserve, for this is a subject which cannot permit misconception, but with no feelings towards you, sir, but fair and friendly ones. You are the grandson of my Lord Monmouth; at present enjoying his favour, but dependent on his bounty. You may be the heir of his wealth to-morrow, and to-morrow you may be the object of his hatred and persecution. Your grandfather and myself are foes; bitter, irreclaimable, to the death. It is idle to mince phrases; I do not vindicate our mutual feelings, I may regret that they have ever arisen; I may regret it especially at this exigency. They are not the feelings of good Christians; they may be altogether to be deplored and unjustifiable; but they exist, mutually exist; and have not been confined to words. Lord Monmouth would crush me, had he the power, like a worm; and I have curbed his proud fortunes often. Were it not for this feeling I should not be here; I purchased this estate merely to annoy him, as I have done a thousand other acts merely for his discomfort and mortification. In our long encounter I have done him infinitely more injury than he could do me; I

have been on the spot, I am active, vigilant, the maker of my fortunes. He is an epicurean, continually in foreign parts, obliged to leave the fulfilment of his will to others. But, for these very reasons, his hate is more intense. I can afford to hate him less than he hates me; I have injured him more. Here are feelings to exist between human beings! But they do exist; and now you are to go to this man, and ask his sanction to marry my daughter!

‘But I would appease these hatreds; I would allay these dark passions, the origin of which I know not, but which never could justify the end, and which lead to so much misery. I would appeal to my grandfather; I would show him Edith.’

‘He has looked upon as fair even as Edith,’ said Mr. Millbank, rising suddenly from his seat, and pacing the room, ‘and did that melt his heart? The experience of your own lot should have guarded you from the perils that you have so rashly meditated encountering, and the misery which you have been preparing for others besides yourself. Is my daughter to be treated like your mother? And by the same hand? Your mother’s family were not Lord Monmouth’s foes. They were simple and innocent people, free from all the bad passions of our nature, and ignorant of the world’s ways. But because they were not noble, because they could trace no mystified descent from a foreign invader, or the sacrilegious minion of some spoliating despot, their daughter was hunted from the family which should have exulted to receive her, and the land of which she was the native ornament. Why should a happier lot await you than fell to your parents? You are in the same position as your father; you meditate the same act. The only difference being aggravating circumstances in your case, which, even if I were a member of the same order as my Lord Monmouth, would prevent the possibility of a prosperous union. Marry Edith, and you blast all the prospects of your life, and entail on her a sense of unceasing humiliation. Would you do this? Should I permit you to do this?’

Coningsby, with his head resting on his arm, his face a

little shaded, his eyes fixed on the ground, listened in silence. There was a pause; broken by Coningsby, as in a low voice, without changing his posture or raising his glance, he said, 'It seems, sir, that you were acquainted with my mother!'

'I knew sufficient of her,' replied Mr. Millbank, with a kindling cheek, 'to learn the misery that a woman may entail on herself by marrying out of her condition. I have bred my children in a respect for their class. I believe they have imbibed my feeling; though it is strange how in the commerce of the world, chance, in their friendships, has apparently baffled my designs.'

'Oh! do not say it is chance, sir,' said Coningsby, looking up, and speaking with much fervour. 'The feelings that animate me towards your family are not the feelings of chance: they are the creation of sympathy; tried by time, tested by thought. And must they perish? Can they perish? They were inevitable; they are indestructible. Yes, sir, it is in vain to speak of the enmities that are fostered between you and my grandfather; the love that exists between your daughter and myself is stronger than all your hatreds.'

'You speak like a young man, and a young man that is in love,' said Mr. Millbank. 'This is mere rhapsody; it will vanish in an instant before the reality of life. And you have arrived at that reality,' he continued, speaking with emphasis, leaning over the back of his chair, and looking steadily at Coningsby with his grey, sagacious eye; 'my daughter and yourself can meet no more.'

'It is impossible you can be so cruel!' exclaimed Coningsby.

'So kind; kind to you both; for I wish to be kind to you as well as to her. You are entitled to kindness from us all; though I will tell you now, that, years ago, when the news arrived that my son's life had been saved, and had been saved by one who bore the name of Coningsby, I had a presentiment, great as was the blessing, that it might lead to unhappiness.'

'I can answer for the misery of one,' said Coningsby, in

a tone of great despondency. 'I feel as if my sun were set. Oh! why should there be such wretchedness? Why are there family hatreds and party feuds? Why am I the most wretched of men?'

'My good young friend, you will live, I doubt not, to be a happy one. Happiness is not, as we are apt to fancy, entirely dependent on these contingencies. It is the lot of most men to endure what you are now suffering, and they can look back to such conjunctures through the vista of years with calmness.'

'I may see Edith now?'

'Frankly, I should say, no. My daughter is in her room; I have had some conversation with her. Of course she suffers not less than yourself. To see her again will only aggravate woe. You leave under this roof, sir, some sad memories, but no unkind ones. It is not likely that I can serve you, or that you may want my aid; but whatever may be in my power, remember you may command it; without reserve and without restraint. If I control myself now, it is not because I do not respect your affliction, but because, in the course of my life, I have felt too much not to be able to command my feelings.'

'You never could have felt what I feel now,' said Coningsby, in a tone of anguish.

'You touch on delicate ground,' said Millbank; 'yet from me you may learn to suffer. There was a being once, not less fair than the peerless girl that you would fain call your own, and her heart was my proud possession. There were no family feuds to baffle our union, nor was I dependent on anything, but the energies which had already made me flourishing. What happiness was mine! It was the first dream of my life, and it was the last; my solitary passion, the memory of which softens my heart. Ah! you dreaming scholars, and fine gentlemen who saunter through life, you think there is no romance in the loves of a man who lives in the toil and turmoil of business. You are in deep error. Amid my career of travail, there was ever a bright form which animated exertion, inspired my invention,

nerved my energy, and to gain whose heart and life I first made many of those discoveries, and entered into many of those speculations, that have since been the foundation of my wide prosperity.

'Her faith was pledged to me; I lived upon her image; the day was even talked of when I should bear her to the home that I had proudly prepared for her.

'There came a young noble, a warrior who had never seen war, glittering with gewgaws. He was quartered in the town where the mistress of my heart, and who was soon to share my life and my fortunes, resided. The tale is too bitter not to be brief. He saw her, he sighed; I will hope that he loved her; she gave him with rapture the heart which perhaps she found she had never given to me; and instead of bearing the name I had once hoped to have called her by, she pledged her faith at the altar to one who, like you, was called, CONINGSBY.'

'My mother!'

'You see, I too have had my griefs.'

'Dear sir,' said Coningsby, rising and taking Mr. Millbank's hand, 'I am most wretched; and yet I wish to part from you even with affection. You have explained circumstances that have long perplexed me. A curse, I fear, is on our families. I have not mind enough at this moment even to ponder on my situation. My head is a chaos. I go; yes, I quit this Hellingsley, where I came to be so happy, where I have been so happy. Nay, let me go, dear sir! I must be alone, I must try to think. And tell her, no, tell her nothing. God will guard over us!'

Proceeding down the avenue with a rapid and dis-tempered step, his countenance lost, as it were, in a wild abstraction, Coningsby encountered Oswald Millbank. He stopped, collected his turbulent thoughts, and throwing on Oswald one look that seemed at the same time to communicate woe and to demand sympathy, flung himself into his arms.

'My friend!' he exclaimed, and then added, in a broken voice, 'I need a friend.'

Then in a hurried, impassioned, and somewhat incoherent strain, leaning on Oswald's arm, as they walked on together, he poured forth all that had occurred, all of which he had dreamed; his baffled bliss, his actual despair. Alas! there was little room for solace, and yet all that earnest affection could inspire, and a sagacious brain and a brave spirit, were offered for his support, if not his consolation, by the friend who was devoted to him.

In the midst of this deep communion, toeming with every thought and sentiment that could enchain and absorb the spirit of man, they came to one of the park-gates of Coningsby. Millbank stopped. The command of his father was peremptory, that no member of his family, under any circumstances, or for any consideration, should set his foot on that domain. Lady Wallinger had once wished to have seen the Castle, and Coningsby was only too happy in the prospect of escorting her and Edith over the place; but Oswald had then at once put his veto on the project, as a thing forbidden; and which, if put in practice, his father would never pardon. So it passed off, and now Oswald himself was at the gates of that very domain with his friend who was about to enter them, his friend whom he might never see again; that Coningsby who, from their boyish days, had been the idol of his life; whom he had lived to see appeal to his affections and his sympathy, and whom Oswald was now going to desert in the midst of his lonely and unsolaced woe.

'I ought not to enter here,' said Oswald, holding the hand of Coningsby as he hesitated to advance; 'and yet there are duties more sacred even than obedience to a father. I cannot leave you thus, friend of my best heart!'

The morning passed away in unceasing yet fruitless speculation on the future. One moment something was to happen, the next nothing could occur. Sometimes a beam of hope flashed over the fancy of Coningsby, and jumping up from the turf, on which they were reclining, he seemed to exult in his renovated energies; and then this sanguine paroxysm was succeeded by a fit of depression so dark and

dejected that nothing but the presence of Oswald seemed to prevent Coningsby from flinging himself into the waters of the Darl.

The day was fast declining, and the inevitable moment of separation was at hand. Oswald wished to appear at the dinner-table of Hollingsley, that no suspicion might arise in the mind of his father of his having accompanied Coningsby home. But just as he was beginning to mention the necessity of his departure, a flash of lightning seemed to transfix the heavens. The sky was very dark; though studded here and there with dingy spots. The young men sprang up at the same time.

'We had better get out of these trees,' said Oswald.

'We had better get to the Castle,' said Coningsby.

A clap of thunder that seemed to make the park quake broke over their heads, followed by some thick drops. The Castle was close at hand; Oswald had avoided entering it; but the impending storm was so menacing that, hurried on by Coningsby, he could make no resistance; and, in a few minutes, the companions were watching the tempest from the windows of a room in Coningsby Castle.

The fork-lightning flashed and scintillated from every quarter of the horizon: the thunder broke over the Castle, as if the keep were rocking with artillery: amid the momentary pauses of the explosion, the rain was heard descending like dissolving water-spouts.

Nor was this one of those transient tempests that often agitate the summer. Time advanced, and its fierceness was little mitigated. Sometimes there was a lull, though the violence of the rain never appeared to diminish; but then, as in some pitched fight between contending hosts, when the fervour of the field seems for a moment to allay, fresh squadrons arrive and renew the hottest strife, so a low moaning wind that was now at intervals faintly heard bore up a great reserve of electric vapour, that formed, as it were, into field in the space between the Castle and Hellingsley, and then discharged its violence on that fated district.

Coningsby and Oswald exchanged looks. 'You must not think of going home at present, my dear fellow,' said the first. 'I am sure your father would not be displeased. There is not a being here who even knows you, and if they did, what then?'

The servant entered the room, and inquired whether the gentlemen were ready for dinner.

'By all means; come, my dear Millbank, I feel reckless as the tempest; let us drown our cares in wine!'

Coningsby, in fact, was exhausted by all the agitation of the day, and all the harassing spectres of the future. He found wine a momentary solace. He ordered the servants away, and for a moment felt a degree of wild satisfaction in the company of the brother of Edith.

Thus they sat for a long time, talking only of one subject, and repeating almost the same things, yet both felt happier in being together. Oswald had risen, and opening the window, examined the approaching night. The storm had lulled, though the rain still fell; in the west was a streak of light. In a quarter of an hour, he calculated on departing. As he was watching the wind he thought he heard the sound of wheels, which reminded him of Coningsby's promise to lend him a light carriage for his return.

They sat down once more; they had filled their glasses for the last time; to pledge to their faithful friendship, and the happiness of Coningsby and Edith; when the door of the room opened, and there appeared, Mr. RIGBY;