

BOOK VIII.

CHAPTER I.

It was the heart of the London season, nearly four years ago, twelve months having almost elapsed since the occurrence of those painful passages at Hellingsley which closed the last book of this history, and long lines of carriages an hour before midnight, up the classic mount of St. James and along Piccadilly, intimated that the world were received at some grand entertainment in Arlington Street.

It was the town mansion of the noble family beneath whose roof at Beaumanoir we have more than once introduced the reader, to gain whose courtyard was at this moment the object of emulous coachmen, and to enter whose saloons was to reward the martyr-like patience of their lords and ladies.

Among the fortunate who had already succeeded in bowing to their hostess were two gentlemen, who, ensconced in a good position, surveyed the scene, and made their observations on the passing guests. They were gentlemen who, to judge from their general air and the great consideration with which they were treated by those who were occasionally in their vicinity, were personages whose criticism bore authority.

'I say, Jemmy,' said the eldest, a dandy who had dined with the Regent, but who was still a dandy, and who enjoyed life almost as much as in the days when Carlton House occupied the terrace which still bears its name, 'I say, Jemmy, what a load of young fellows there are! Don't know their names at all. Begin to think fellows are younger than they used to be. Amazing load of young fellows, indeed!'

At this moment an individual who came under the

fortunate designation of a young fellow, but whose assured carriage hardly intimated that this was his first season in London, came up to the junior of the two critics, and said, 'A pretty turn you played us yesterday at White's, Melton. We waited dinner nearly an hour.'

'My dear fellow, I am infinitely sorry; but I was obliged to go down to Windsor, and I missed the return train. A good dinner? Who had you?'

'A capital party, only you were wanted. We had Beaumanoir and Vere, and Jack Tufton and Spraggs.'

'Was Spraggs rich?'

'Wasn't he! I have not done laughing yet. He told us a story about the little Biron who was over here last year; I knew her at Paris; and an Indian screen. Killing! Get him to tell it you. The richest thing you ever heard!'

'Who's your friend?' inquired Mr. Melton's companion, as the young man moved away.

'Sir Charles Buckhurst.'

'A—h! That is Sir Charles Buckhurst. Glad to have seen him. They say he is going it.'

'He knows what he is about.'

'Egad! so they all do. A young fellow now of two or three and twenty knows the world as men used to do after as many years of scrapes. I wonder where there is such a thing as a greenhorn. Effie Crabbs says the reason he gives up his house is, that he has cleaned out the old generation, and that the new generation would clean him.'

'Buckhurst is not in that sort of way: he swears by Henry Sydney, a younger son of the Duke, whom you don't know; and young Coningsby; a sort of new set; new ideas and all that sort of thing. Beau tells me a good deal about it; and when I was staying with the Everinghams, at Easter, they were full of it. Coningsby had just returned from his travels, and they were quite on the *qui vive*. Lady Everingham is one of their set. I don't know what it is exactly; but I think we shall hear more of it.'

'A sort of animal magnetism, or unknown tongues, I take it from your description,' said his companion.

'Well, I don't know what it is,' said Mr. Melton; 'but it has got hold of all the young fellows who have just come out. Beau is a little bit himself. I had some idea of giving my mind to it, they made such a fuss about it at Everingham; but it requires a devilish deal of history, I believe, and all that sort of thing.'

'Ah! that's a bore,' said his companion. 'It is difficult to turn to with a new thing when you are not in the habit of it. I never could manage charades.'

Mr. Ormsby, passing by, stopped. 'They told me you had the gout, Cassilis?' he said to Mr. Melton's companion.

'So I had; but I have found out a fellow who cures the gout instant. Tom Needham sent him to me. A German fellow. Pumicestone pills; sort of a charm, I believe, and all that kind of thing: they say it rabs the gout out of you. I sent him to Luxborough, who was very bad; cured him directly. Luxborough swears by him.'

'Luxborough believes in the Millennium,' said Mr. Ormsby.

'But here's a new thing that Melton has been telling me of, that all the world is going to believe in,' said Mr. Cassilis, 'something patronised by Lady Everingham.'

'A very good patroness,' said Mr. Ormsby.

'Have you heard anything about it?' continued Mr. Cassilis. 'Young Coningsby brought it from abroad; didn't you say so, Jemmy?'

'No, no, my dear fellow; it is not at all that sort of thing.'

'But they say it requires a deuced deal of history,' continued Mr. Cassilis. 'One must brush up one's Goldsmith. Canterton used to be the fellow for history at White's. He was always boring one with William the Conqueror, Julius Cæsar, and all that sort of thing.'

'I tell you what,' said Mr. Ormsby, looking both sly and solemn, 'I should not be surprised if, some day or another, we have a history about Lady Everingham and young Coningsby.'

'Poh!' said Mr. Melton; 'he is engaged to be married to her sister, Lady Theresa.'

'The deuce!' said Mr. Ormsby; 'well, you are a friend of the family, and I suppose you know.'

'He is a devilish good-looking fellow, that young Coningsby,' said Mr. Cassilis. 'All the women are in love with him, they say. Lady Eleanor Ducie quite raves about him.'

'By-the-bye, his grandfather has been very unwell,' said Mr. Ormsby, looking mysteriously.

'I saw Lady Monmouth here just now,' said Mr. Melton.

'Oh! he is quite well again,' said Mr. Ormsby.

'Got an odd story at White's that Lord Monmouth was going to separate from her,' said Mr. Cassilis.

'No foundation,' said Mr. Ormsby, shaking his head.

'They are not going to separate, I believe,' said Mr. Melton; 'but I rather think there was a foundation for the rumour.'

Mr. Ormsby still shook his head.

'Well,' continued Mr. Melton, 'all I know is, that it was looked upon last winter at Paris as a settled thing.'

'There was some story about some Hungarian,' said Mr. Cassilis.

'No, that blew over,' said Mr. Melton; 'it was Trantsmansdorff the row was about.'

All this time Mr. Ormsby, as the friend of Lord and Lady Monmouth, remained shaking his head; but as a member of society, and therefore delighting in small scandal, appropriating the gossip with the greatest avidity.

'I should think old Monmouth was not the sort of fellow to blow up a woman,' said Mr. Cassilis.

'Provided she would leave him quietly,' said Mr. Melton.

'Yes, Lord Monmouth never could live with a woman more than two years,' said Mr. Ormsby, pensively. 'And that I thought at the time rather an objection to his marriage.'

We must now briefly revert to what befell our hero after those unhappy occurrences in the midst of whose first woe we left him.

The day after the arrival of Mr. Rigby at the Castle,

Coningsby quitted it for London, and before a week had elapsed had embarked for Cadiz. He felt a romantic interest in visiting the land to which Edith owed some blood, and in acquiring the language which he had often admired as she spoke it. A favourable opportunity permitted him in the autumn to visit Athens and the Ægean, which he much desired. In the pensive beauties of that delicate land, where perpetual autumn seems to reign, Coningsby found solace. There is something in the character of Grecian scenery which blends with the humour of the melancholy and the feelings of the sorrowful. Coningsby passed his winter at Rome. The wish of his grandfather had rendered it necessary for him to return to England somewhat abruptly. Lord Monmouth had not visited his native country since his marriage; but the period that had elapsed since that event had considerably improved the prospects of his party. The majority of the Whig Cabinet in the House of Commons by 1840 had become little more than nominal; and though it was circulated among their friends, as if from the highest authority, that 'one was enough,' there seemed daily a better chance of their being deprived even of that magical unit. For the first time in the history of this country since the introduction of the system of parliamentary sovereignty, the Government of England depended on the fate of single elections; and indeed, by a single vote, it is remarkable to observe, the fate of the Whig Government was ultimately decided.

This critical state of affairs, duly reported to Lord Monmouth, revived his political passions, and offered him that excitement which he was ever seeking, and yet for which he had often sighed. The Marquess, too, was weary of Paris. Every day he found it more difficult to be amused. Lucretia had lost her charm. He, from whom nothing could be concealed, perceived that often, while she elaborately attempted to divert him, her mind was wandering elsewhere. Lord Monmouth was quite superior to all petty jealousy and the vulgar feelings of inferior mortals,

but his sublime selfishness required devotion. He had calculated that a wife or a mistress who might be in love with another man, however powerfully their interests might prompt them, could not be so agreeable or amusing to their friends and husbands as if they had no such distracting hold upon their hearts or their fancy. Latterly at Paris, while Lucretia became each day more involved in the vortex of society, where all admired and some adored her, Lord Monmouth fell into the easy habit of dining in his private rooms, sometimes tête-à-tête with Villebecque, whose inexhaustible tales and adventures about a kind of society which Lord Monmouth had always preferred infinitely to the polished and somewhat insipid circles in which he was born, had rendered him the prime favourite of his great patron. Sometimes Villebecque, too, brought a friend, male or otherwise, whom he thought invested with the rare faculty of distraction: Lord Monmouth cared not who or what they were, provided they were diverting.

Villebecque had written to Coningsby at Rome, by his grandfather's desire, to beg him to return to England and meet Lord Monmouth there. The letter was couched with all the respect and good feeling which Villebecque really entertained for him whom he addressed; still a letter on such a subject from such a person was not agreeable to Coningsby, and his reply to it was direct to his grandfather; Lord Monmouth, however, had entirely given over writing letters.

Coningsby had met at Paris, on his way to England, Lord and Lady Everingham, and he had returned with them. This revival of an old acquaintance was both agreeable and fortunate for our hero. The vivacity of a clever and charming woman pleasantly disturbed the brooding memory of Coningsby. There is no mortification however keen, no misery however desperate, which the spirit of woman cannot in some degree lighten or alleviate. About, too, to make his formal entrance into the great world, he could not have secured a more valuable and accomplished female friend. She gave him every instruction, every in-

timation that was necessary; cleared the social difficulties which in some degree are experienced on their entrance into the world even by the most highly connected, unless they have this benign assistance; planted him immediately in the position which was expedient; took care that he was invited at once to the right houses; and, with the aid of her husband, that he should become a member of the right clubs.

And who is to have the blue ribbon, Lord Eskdale?' said the Duchess to that nobleman, as he entered and approached to pay his respects.

'If I were Melbourne, I would keep it open,' replied his Lordship. 'It is a mistake to give away too quickly.'

'But suppose they go out,' said her Grace.

'Oh! there is always a last day to clear the House. But they will be in another year. The cliff will not be sapped before then. We made a mistake last year about the ladies.'

'I know you always thought so.'

'Quarrels about women are always a mistake. One should make it a rule to give up to them, and then they are sure to give up to us.'

'You have no great faith in our firmness?'

'Male firmness is very often obstinacy: women have always something better, worth all qualities; they have tact.'

'A compliment to the sex from so finished a critic as Lord Eskdale is appreciated.'

But at this moment the arrival of some guests terminated the conversation, and Lord Eskdale moved away, and approached a group which Lady Everingham was enlightening.

'My dear Lord Fitz-booby,' her Ladyship observed, 'in politics we require faith as well as in all other things.'

Lord Fitz-booby looked rather perplexed; but, possessed of considerable official experience, having held high posts, some in the cabinet, for nearly a quarter of a century, he was too versed to acknowledge that he had not understood

a single word that had been addressed to him for the last ten minutes. He looked on with the same grave, attentive stolidity, occasionally nodding his head, as he was wont of yore when he received a deputation on sugar duties or joint-stock banks, and when he made, as was his custom when particularly perplexed, an occasional note on a sheet of foolscap paper.

'An Opposition in an age of revolution,' continued Lady Everingham, 'must be founded on principles. It cannot depend on mere personal ability and party address taking advantage of circumstances. You have not enunciated a principle for the last ten years; and when you seemed on the point of acceding to power, it was not on a great question of national interest, but a technical dispute respecting the constitution of an exhausted sugar colony.'

'If you are a Conservative party, we wish to know what you want to conserve,' said Lord Vere.

'If it had not been for the Whig abolition of slavery,' said Lord Fitz-booby, goaded into repartee, 'Jamaica would not have been an exhausted sugar colony.'

'Then what you do want to conserve is slavery?' said Lord Vere.

'No,' said Lord Fitz-booby, 'I am never for retracing our steps.'

'But will you advance, will you move? And where will you advance, and how will you move?' said Lady Everingham.

'I think we have had quite enough of advancing,' said his Lordship. 'I had no idea your Ladyship was a member of the Movement party,' he added, with a sarcastic grin.

'But if it were bad, Lord Fitz-booby, to move where we are, as you and your friends have always maintained, how can you reconcile it to principle to remain there?' said Lord Vere.

'I would make the best of a bad bargain,' said Lord Fitz-booby. 'With a Conservative government, a reformed Constitution would be less dangerous.'

'Why?' said Lady Everingham. 'What are your distinctive principles that render the peril less?'

'I appeal to Lord Eskdale,' said Lord Fitz-booby; 'there is Lady Everingham turned quite a Radical, I declare. Is not your Lordship of opinion that the country must be safer with a Conservative government than with a Liberal?'

'I think the country is always tolerably secure,' said Lord Eskdale.

Lady Theresa, leaning on the arm of Mr. Lyle, came up at this moment, and unconsciously made a diversion in favour of Lord Fitz-booby.

'Pray, Theresa,' said Lady Everingham, 'where is Mr. Coningsby?'

Let us endeavour to ascertain. It so happened that on this day Coningsby and Henry Sydney dined at Grillion's, at an university club, where, among many friends whom Coningsby had not met for a long time, and among delightful reminiscences, the unconscious hours stole on. It was late when they quitted Grillion's, and Coningsby's brougham was detained for a considerable time before its driver could insinuate himself into the line, which indeed he would never have succeeded in doing had not he fortunately come across the coachman of the Duke of Agincourt, who being of the same politics as himself, belonging to the same club, and always black-balling the same men, let him in from a legitimate party feeling; so they arrived in Arlington Street at a very late hour.

Coningsby was springing up the staircase, now not so crowded as it had been, and met a retiring party; he was about to say a passing word to a gentleman as he went by, when, suddenly, Coningsby turned deadly pale. The gentleman could hardly be the cause, for it was the gracious and handsome presence of Lord Beaumanoir: the lady resting on his arm was Edith. They moved on while he was motionless; yet Edith and himself had exchanged glances. His was one of astonishment; but what was the expression of hers? She must have recognised him

before he had observed her. She was collected, and she expressed the purpose of her mind in a distant and haughty recognition. Coningsby remained for a moment stupefied; then suddenly turning back, he bounded downstairs and hurried into the cloak-room. He met Lady Wallinger; he spoke rapidly, he held her hand, did not listen to her answers, his eyes wandered about. There were many persons present, at length he recognised Edith enveloped in her mantle. He went forward, he looked at her, as if he would have read her soul; he said something. She changed colour as he addressed her, but seemed instantly by an effort to rally and regain her equanimity; replied to his inquiries with extreme brevity, and Lady Wallinger's carriage being announced, moved away with the same slight haughty salute as before, on the arm of Lord Beaumanoir.

CHAPTER II.

SADNESS fell over the once happy family of Millbank after the departure of Coningsby from Hellingsley. When the first pang was over, Edith had found some solace in the sympathy of her aunt, who had always appreciated and admired Coningsby; but it was a sympathy which aspired only to soften sorrow, and not to create hope. But Lady Wallinger, though she lengthened her visit for the sake of her niece, in time quitted them; and then the name of Coningsby was never heard by Edith. Her brother, shortly after the sorrowful and abrupt departure of his friend, had gone to the factories, where he remained, and of which, in future, it was intended that he should assume the principal direction. Mr. Millbank himself, sustained at first by the society of his friend Sir Joseph, to whom he was attached, and occupied with daily reports from his establishments and the transaction of the affairs of his numerous and busy constituents, was for a while scarcely

conscious of the alteration which had taken place in the demeanour of his daughter. But when they were once more alone together, it was impossible any longer to be blind to the great change. That happy and equable gaiety of spirit, which seemed to spring from an innocent enjoyment of existence, and which had ever distinguished Edith, was wanting. Her sunny glance was gone. She was not indeed always moody and dispirited, but she was fitful, unequal in her tone. That temper whose sweetness had been a domestic proverb had become a little uncertain. Not that her affection for her father was diminished, but there were snatches of unusual irritability which momentarily escaped her, followed by bursts of tenderness that were the creatures of compunction. And often, after some hasty word, she would throw her arms round her father's neck with the fondness of remorse. She pursued her usual avocations, for she had really too well-regulated a mind, she was in truth a person of too strong an intellect, to neglect any source of occupation and distraction. Her flowers, her pencil, and her books supplied her with these; and music soothed, and at times beguiled, her agitated thoughts. But there was no joy in the house, and in time Mr. Millbank felt it.

Mr. Millbank was vexed, irritated, grieved. Edith, his Edith, the pride and delight of his existence, who had been to him only a source of exultation and felicity, was no longer happy, was perhaps pining away; and there was the appearance, the unjust appearance that he, her fond father, was the cause and occasion of all this wretchedness. It would appear that the name of Coningsby, to which he now owed a great debt of gratitude, was still doomed to bear him mortification and misery. Truly had the young man said that there was a curse upon their two families. And yet, on reflection, it still seemed to Mr. Millbank that he had acted with as much wisdom and real kindness as decision. How otherwise was he to have acted? The union was impossible; the speedier their separation, therefore, clearly the better. Unfortunate, indeed, had been his

absence from Hellingsley; unquestionably his presence might have prevented the catastrophe. Oswald should have hindered all this. And yet Mr. Millbank could not shut his eyes to the devotion of his son to Coningsby. He felt he could count on no assistance in this respect from that quarter. Yet how hard upon him that he should seem to figure as a despot or a tyrant to his own children, whom he loved, when he had absolutely acted in an inevitable manner! Edith seemed sad, Oswald sullen; all was changed. All the objects for which this clear-headed, strong-minded, kind-hearted man had been working all his life, seemed to be frustrated. And why? Because a young man had made love to his daughter, who was really in no manner entitled to do so.

As the autumn drew on, Mr. Millbank found Hellingsley, under existing circumstances, extremely wearisome; and he proposed to his daughter that they should pay a visit to their earlier home. Edith assented without difficulty, but without interest. And yet, as Mr. Millbank immediately perceived, the change was a judicious one; for certainly the spirits of Edith seemed to improve after her return to their valley. There were more objects of interest: change, too, is always beneficial. If Mr. Millbank had been aware that Oswald had received a letter from Coningsby, written before he quitted Spain, perhaps he might have recognised a more satisfactory reason for the transient liveliness of his daughter which had so greatly gratified him.

About a month after Christmas, the meeting of Parliament summoned Mr. Millbank up to London; and he had wished Edith to accompany him. But London in February to Edith, without friends or connections, her father always occupied and absent from her day and night, seemed to them all, on reflection, to be a life not very conducive to health or cheerfulness, and therefore she remained with her brother. Oswald had heard from Coningsby again from Rome; but at the period he wrote he did not anticipate his return to England. His tone was affectionate, but dispirited.

Lady Wallinger went up to London after Easter for the season, and Mr. Millbank, now that there was a constant companion for his daughter, took a house and carried Edith back with him to London. Lady Wallinger, who had great wealth and great tact, had obtained by degrees a not inconsiderable position in society. She had a fine house in a fashionable situation, and gave profuse entertainments. The Whigs were under obligations to her husband, and the great Whig ladies were gratified to find in his wife a polished and pleasing person, to whom they could be courteous without any annoyance. So that Edith, under the auspices of her aunt, found herself at once in circles which otherwise she might not easily have entered, but which her beauty, grace, and experience of the most refined society of the Continent, qualified her to shine in. One evening they met the Marquis of Beaumanoir, their friend of Rome and Paris, and admirer of Edith, who from that time was seldom from their side. His mother, the Duchess, immediately called both on the Millbanks and the Wallingers; glad, not only to please her son, but to express that consideration for Mr. Millbank which the Duke always wished to show. It was, however, of no use; nothing would induce Mr. Millbank ever to enter what he called aristocratic society. He liked the House of Commons; never paired off; never missed a moment of it; worked at committees all the morning, listened attentively to debates all the night; always dined at Bellamy's when there was a house; and when there was not, liked dining at the Fishmongers' Company, the Russia Company, great Emigration banquets, and other joint-stock festivities. That was his idea of rational society; business and pleasure combined; a good dinner, and good speeches afterwards.

Edith was aware that Coningsby had returned to England, for her brother had heard from him on his arrival; but Oswald had not heard since. A season in London only represented in the mind of Edith the chance, perhaps the certainty, of meeting Coningsby again; of communing together over the catastrophe of last summer; of soothing

and solacing each other's unhappiness, and perhaps, with the sanguine imagination of youth, foreseeing a more felicitous future. She had been nearly a fortnight in town, and though moving frequently in the same circles as Coningsby, they had not yet met. It was one of those results which could rarely occur; but even chance enters too frequently in the league against lovers. The invitation to the assembly at — House was therefore peculiarly gratifying to Edith, since she could scarcely doubt that if Coningsby were in town, which her casual inquiries of Lord Beaumanoir induced her to believe was the case, he would be present. Never, therefore, had she repaired to an assembly with such a fluttering spirit; and yet there was a fascinating anxiety about it that bewilders the young heart.

In vain Edith surveyed the rooms to catch the form of that being, whom for a moment she had never ceased to cherish and muse over. He was not there; and at the very moment when, disappointed and mortified, she most required solace, she learned from Mr. Melton that Lady Theresa Sydney, whom she chanced to admire, was going to be married, and to Mr. Coningsby!

What a revelation! His silence, perhaps his shunning of her were no longer inexplicable. What a return for all her romantic devotion in her sad solitude at Hellingsley. Was this the end of their twilight rambles, and the sweet pathos of their mutual loves? There seemed to be no truth in man, no joy in life! All the feelings that she had so generously lavished, all returned upon herself. She could have burst into a passion of tears and buried herself in a cloister.

Instead of that, civilisation made her listen with a serene though tortured countenance; but as soon as it was in her power, pleading a headache to Lady Wallinger, she effected, or thought she had effected, her escape from a scene which harrowed her heart.

As for Coningsby, he passed a sleepless night, agitated by the unexpected presence of Edith and distracted by the

manner in which she had received him. To say that her appearance had revived all his passionate affection for her would convey an unjust impression of the nature of his feelings. His affection had never for a moment swerved; it was profound and firm. But unquestionably this sudden vision had brought before him, in startling and more vivid colours, the relations that subsisted between them. There was the being whom he loved and who loved him; and whatever were the barriers which the circumstances of life placed against their union, they were partakers of the solemn sacrament of an unpolluted heart.

Coningsby, as we have mentioned, had signified to Oswald his return to England: he had hitherto omitted to write again; not because his spirit faltered, but he was wearied of whispering hope without foundation, and mourning over his chagrined fortunes. Once more in England, once more placed in communication with his grandfather, he felt with increased conviction the difficulties which surrounded him. The society of Lady Everingham and her sister, who had been at the same time her visitor, had been a relaxation, and a beneficial one, to a mind suffering too much from the tension of one idea. But Coningsby had treated the matrimonial project of his gay-minded hostess with the courteous levity in which he believed it had at first half originated. He admired and liked Lady Theresa; but there was a reason why he could not marry her, even had his own heart not been absorbed by one of those passions from which men of deep and earnest character never emancipate themselves.

After musing and meditating again and again over everything that had occurred, Coningsby fell asleep when the morning had far advanced, resolved to rise when a little refreshed and find out Lady Wallinger, who, he felt sure, would receive him with kindness.

Yet it was fated that this step should not be taken, for while he was at breakfast, his servant brought him a letter from Monmouth House, apprising him that his grandfather wished to see him as soon as possible on urgent business.

CHAPTER III.

LORD MONMOUTH was sitting in the same dressing-room in which he was first introduced to the reader; on the table were several packets of papers that were open and in course of reference; and he dictated his observations to Monsieur Villebecque, who was writing at his left hand.

Thus were they occupied when Coningsby was ushered into the room.

'You see, Harry,' said Lord Monmouth, 'that I am much occupied to-day, yet the business on which I wish to communicate with you is so pressing that it could not be postponed.' He made a sign to Villebecque, and his secretary instantly retired.

'I was right in pressing your return to England,' continued Lord Monmouth to his grandson, who was a little anxious as to the impending communication, which he could not in any way anticipate. 'These are not times when young men should be out of sight. Your public career will commence immediately. The Government have resolved on a dissolution. My information is from the highest quarter. You may be astonished, but it is a fact. They are going to dissolve their own House of Commons. Notwithstanding this and the Queen's name, we can beat them; but the race requires the finest jockeying. We can't give a point. Tadpole has been here to me about Darlford; he came specially with a message, I may say an appeal, from one to whom I can refuse nothing; the Government count on the seat, though with the new Registration 'tis nearly a tie. If we had a good candidate we could win. But Rigby won't do. He is too much of the old clique; used up; a hack; besides, a beaten horse. We are assured the name of Coningsby would be a host; there is a considerable section who support the present fellow who will not vote against a Coningsby. They have thought of you as a fit person, and I have approved of the suggestion. You will, therefore, be

the candidate for Darlford with my entire sanction and support, and I have no doubt you will be successful. You may be sure I shall spare nothing: and it will be very gratifying to me, after being robbed of all our boroughs, that the only Coningsby who cares to enter Parliament, should nevertheless be able to do so as early as I could fairly desire.'

Coningsby the rival of Mr. Millbank on the hustings of Darlford! Vanquished or victorious, equally a catastrophe! The fierce passions, the gross insults, the hot blood and the cool lies, the ruffianism and the ribaldry, perhaps the domestic discomforture and mortification, which he was about to be the means of bringing on the roof he loved best in the world, occurred to him with anguish. The countenance of Edith, haughty and mournful as last night, rose to him again. He saw her canvassing for her father, and against him. Madness! And for what was he to make this terrible and costly sacrifice? For his ambition? Not even for that Divinity or Dæmon for which we all immolate so much! Mighty ambition, forsooth, to succeed to the Rigbys! To enter the House of Commons a slave and a tool; to move according to instructions, and to labour for the low designs of petty spirits, without even the consolation of being a dupe. What sympathy could there exist between Coningsby and the 'great Conservative party,' that for ten years in an age of revolution had never promulgated a principle; whose only intelligible and consistent policy seemed to be an attempt, very grateful of course to the feelings of an English Royalist, to revive Irish Puritanism; who when in power in 1835 had used that power only to evince their utter ignorance of Church principles; and who were at this moment, when Coningsby was formally solicited to join their ranks, in open insurrection against the prerogatives of the English Monarchy?

'Do you anticipate then an immediate dissolution, sir?' inquired Coningsby after a moment's pause.

'We must anticipate it; though I think it doubtful. It may be next month; it may be in the autumn; they may

tide over another year, as Lord Eskdale thinks, and his opinion always weighs with me. He is very safe. Tadpole believes they will dissolve at once. But whether they dissolve now, or in a month's time, or in the autumn, or next year, our course is clear. We must declare our intentions immediately. We must hoist our flag. Monday next, there is a great Conservative dinner at Darlford. You must attend it; that will be the finest opportunity in the world for you to announce yourself.'

'Don't you think, sir,' said Coningsby, 'that such an announcement would be rather premature? It is, in fact, embarking in a contest which may last a year; perhaps more.'

'What you say is very true,' said Lord Monmouth; 'no doubt it is very troublesome; very disgusting; any canvassing is. But we must take things as we find them. You cannot get into Parliament now in the good old gentlemanlike way; and we ought to be thankful that this interest has been fostered for our purpose.'

Coningsby looked on the carpet, cleared his throat as if about to speak, and then gave something like a sigh.

'I think you had better be off the day after to-morrow,' said Lord Monmouth. 'I have sent instructions to the steward to do all he can in so short a time, for I wish you to entertain the principal people.'

'You are most kind, you are always most kind to me, dear sir,' said Coningsby, in a hesitating tone, and with an air of great embarrassment, 'but, in truth, I have no wish to enter Parliament.'

'What?' said Lord Monmouth.

'I feel that I am not yet sufficiently prepared for so great a responsibility as a seat in the House of Commons,' said Coningsby.

'Responsibility!' said Lord Monmouth, smiling. 'What responsibility is there? How can any one have a more agreeable seat? The only person to whom you are responsible is your own relation, who brings you in. And I don't suppose there can be any difference on any point between us. You are certainly still young; but I was younger by

nearly two years when I first went in; and I found no difficulty. There can be no difficulty. All you have got to do is to vote with your party. As for speaking, if you have a talent that way, take my advice; don't be in a hurry. Learn to know the House; learn the House to know you. If a man be discreet, he cannot enter Parliament too soon.'

'It is not exactly that, sir,' said Coningsby.

'Then what is it, my dear Harry? You see to-day I have much to do; yet as your business is pressing, I would not postpone seeing you an hour. I thought you would have been very much gratified.'

'You mentioned that I had nothing to do but to vote with my party, sir,' replied Coningsby. 'You mean, of course, by that term what is understood by the Conservative party.'

'Of course; our friends.'

'I am sorry,' said Coningsby, rather pale, but speaking with firmness, 'I am sorry that I could not support the Conservative party.'

'By —!' exclaimed Lord Monmouth, starting in his seat, 'some woman has got hold of him, and made him a Whig!'

'No, my dear grandfather,' said Coningsby, scarcely able to repress a smile, serious as the interview was becoming, 'nothing of the kind, I assure you. No person can be more anti-Whig.'

'I don't know what you are driving at, sir,' said Lord Monmouth, in a hard, dry tone.

'I wish to be frank, sir,' said Coningsby, 'and am very sensible of your goodness in permitting me to speak to you on the subject. What I mean to say is, that I have for a long time looked upon the Conservative party as a body who have betrayed their trust; more from ignorance, I admit, than from design; yet clearly a body of individuals totally unequal to the exigencies of the epoch, and indeed unconscious of its real character.'

'You mean giving up those Irish corporations?' said Lord Monmouth. 'Well, between ourselves, I am quite of the same opinion. But we must mount higher; we must

go to '28 for the real mischief. But what is the use of lamenting the past? Peel is the only man; suited to the times and all that; at least we must say so, and try to believe so; we can't go back. And it is our own fault that we have let the chief power out of the hands of our own order. It was never thought of in the time of your great-grandfather, sir. And if a commoner were for a season permitted to be the nominal Premier to do the detail, there was always a secret committee of great 1688 nobles to give him his instructions.'

'I should be very sorry to see secret committees of great 1688 nobles again,' said Coningsby.

'Then what the devil do you want to see?' said Lord Monmouth.

'Political faith,' said Coningsby, 'instead of political infidelity.'

'Hem!' said Lord Monmouth.

'Before I support Conservative principles,' continued Coningsby, 'I merely wish to be informed what those principles aim to conserve. It would not appear to be the prerogative of the Crown, since the principal portion of a Conservative oration now is an invective against a late royal act which they describe as a Bed-chamber plot. Is it the Church which they wish to conserve? What is a threatened Appropriation Clause against an actual Church Commission in the hands of Parliamentary Laymen? Could the Long Parliament have done worse? Well, then, if it is neither the Crown nor the Church, whose rights and privileges this Conservative party propose to vindicate, is it your House, the House of Lords, whose powers they are prepared to uphold? Is it not notorious that the very man whom you have elected as your leader in that House, declares among his Conservative adherents, that henceforth the assembly that used to furnish those very Committees of great revolution nobles that you mention, is to initiate nothing; and, without a struggle, is to subside into that undisturbed repose which resembles the Imperial tranquillity that secured the frontiers by paying tribute?'

‘All this is vastly fine,’ said Lord Monmouth; ‘but I see no means by which I can attain my object but by supporting Peel. After all, what is the end of all parties and all politics? To gain your object. I want to turn our coronet into a ducal one, and to get your grandmother’s barony called out of abeyance in your favour. It is impossible that Peel can refuse me. I have already purchased an ample estate with the view of entailing it on you and your issue. You will make a considerable alliance; you may marry, if you please, Lady Theresa Sydney. I hear the report with pleasure. Count on my at once entering into any arrangement conducive to your happiness.’

‘My dear grandfather, you have ever been to me only too kind and generous.’

‘To whom should I be kind but to you, my own blood, that has never crossed me, and of whom I have reason to be proud? Yes, Harry, it gratifies me to hear you admired and to learn your success. All I want now is to see you in Parliament. A man should be in Parliament early. There is a sort of stiffness about every man, no matter what may be his talents, who enters Parliament late in life; and now, fortunately, the occasion offers. You will go down on Friday; feed the notabilities well; speak out; praise Peel; abuse O’Connell and the ladies of the Bed-chamber; anathematise all waverers; say a good deal about Ireland; stick to the Irish Registration Bill, that’s a good card; and, above all, my dear Harry, don’t spare that fellow Millbank. Remember, in turning him out you not only gain a vote for the Conservative cause and our coronet, but you crush my foe. Spare nothing for that object; I count on you, boy.’

‘I should grieve to be backward in anything that concerned your interest or your honour, sir,’ said Coningsby, with an air of great embarrassment.

‘I am sure you would, I am sure you would,’ said Lord Monmouth, in a tone of some kindness.

‘And I feel at this moment,’ continued Coningsby, ‘that there is no personal sacrifice which I am not prepared to

make for them, except one. My interests, my affections, they should not be placed in the balance, if yours, sir, were at stake, though there are circumstances which might involve me in a position of as much mental distress as a man could well endure; but I claim for my convictions, my dear grandfather, a generous tolerance.'

'I can't follow you, sir,' said Lord Monmouth, again in his hard tone. 'Our interests are inseparable, and therefore there can never be any sacrifice of conduct on your part. What you mean by sacrifice of affections, I don't comprehend; but as for your opinions, you have no business to have any other than those I uphold. You are too young to form opinions.'

'I am sure I wish to express them with no unbecoming confidence,' replied Coningsby; 'I have never intruded them on your ear before; but this being an occasion when you yourself said, sir, I was about to commence my public career, I confess I thought it was my duty to be frank; I would not entail on myself long years of mortification by one of those ill-considered entrances into political life which so many public men have cause to deplore.'

'You go with your family, sir, like a gentleman; you are not to consider your opinions, like a philosopher or a political adventurer.'

'Yes, sir,' said Coningsby, with animation, 'but men going with their families like gentlemen, and losing sight of every principle on which the society of this country ought to be established produced the Reform Bill.'

'D—— the Reform Bill!' said Lord Monmouth; 'if the Duke had not quarrelled with Lord Grey on a Coal Committee, we should never have had the Reform Bill. And Grey would have gone to Ireland.'

'You are in as great peril now as you were in 1830,' said Coningsby.

'No, no, no,' said Lord Monmouth; 'the Tory party is organised now; they will not catch us napping again: these Conservative Associations have done the business.'

'But what are they organised for?' said Coningsby.

'At the best to turn out the Whigs. And when you have turned out the Whigs, what then? You may get your ducal coronet, sir. But a duke now is not so great a man as a baron was but a century back. We cannot struggle against the irresistible stream of circumstances. Power has left our order; this is not an age for factitious aristocracy. As for my grandmother's barony, I should look upon the termination of its abeyance in my favour as the act of my political extinction. What we want, sir, is not to fashion new dukes and furbish up old baronies, but to establish great principles which may maintain the realm and secure the happiness of the people. Let me see authority once more honoured; a solemn reverence again the habit of our lives; let me see property acknowledging, as in the old days of faith, that labour is his twin brother, and that the essence of all tenure is the performance of duty; let results such as these be brought about, and let me participate, however feebly, in the great fulfilment, and public life then indeed becomes a noble career, and a seat in Parliament an enviable distinction.'

'I tell you what it is, Harry,' said Lord Monmouth, very drily, 'members of this family may think as they like, but they must act as I please. You must go down on Friday to Darlford and declare yourself a candidate for the town, or I shall reconsider our mutual positions. I would say, you must go to-morrow; but it is only courteous to Rigby to give him a previous intimation of your movement. And that cannot be done to-day. I sent for Rigby this morning on other business which now occupies me, and find he is out of town. He will return to-morrow; and will be here at three o'clock, when you can meet him. You will meet him, I doubt not, like a man of sense,' added Lord Monmouth, looking at Coningsby with a glance such as he had never before encountered, 'who is not prepared to sacrifice all the objects of life for the pursuit of some fantastical puerilities.'

His Lordship rang a bell on his table for Villebecque; and to prevent any further conversation, resumed his papers.

CHAPTER IV.

It would have been difficult for any person, unconscious of crime, to have felt more dejected than Coningsby when he rode out of the court-yard of Monmouth House. The love of Edith would have consoled him for the destruction of his prosperity; the proud fulfilment of his ambition might in time have proved some compensation for his crushed affections; but his present position seemed to offer no single source of solace. There came over him that irresistible conviction that is at times the dark doom of all of us, that the bright period of our life is past; that a future awaits us only of anxiety, failure, mortification, despair; that none of our resplendent visions can ever be realised; and that we add but one more victim to the long and dreary catalogue of baffled aspirations.

Nor could he indeed by any combination see the means to extricate himself from the perils that were encompassing him. There was something about his grandfather that defied persuasion. Prone as eloquent youth generally is to believe in the resistless power of its appeals, Coningsby despaired at once of ever moving Lord Monmouth. There had been a callous dryness in his manner, an unswerving purpose in his spirit, that at once baffled all attempts at influence. Nor could Coningsby forget the look he received when he quitted the room. There was no possibility of mistaking it; it said at once, without periphrasis, 'Cross my purpose, and I will crush you!'

This was the moment when the sympathy, if not the counsels, of friendship might have been grateful. A clever woman might have afforded even more than sympathy; some happy device that might have even released him from the mesh in which he was involved. And once Coningsby had turned his horse's head to Park Lane to call on Lady Everingham. But surely if there were a sacred secret in the world, it was the one which subsisted between himself

and Edith. No, that must never be violated. Then there was Lady Wallinger; he could at least speak with freedom to her. He resolved to tell her all. He looked in for a moment at a club to take up the 'Court Guide' and find her direction. A few men were standing in a bow window. He heard Mr. Cassilis say,

'So Beau, they say, is booked at last; the new beauty, have you heard?'

'I saw him very sweet on her last night,' rejoined his companion. 'Has she any tin?'

'Deuced deal, they say,' replied Mr. Cassilis. 'The father is a cotton lord, and they all have loads of tin, you know. Nothing like them now.'

'He is in Parliament, is not he?'

'Gad, I believe he is,' said Mr. Cassilis; 'I never know who is in Parliament in these days. I remember when there were only ten men in the House of Commons who were not either members of Brookes' or this place. Everything is so deuced changed.'

'I hear 'tis an old affair of Beau,' said another gentleman.

'It was all done a year ago at Rome or Paris.'

'They say she refused him then,' said Mr. Cassilis.

'Well, that is tolerably cool for a manufacturer's daughter,' said his friend. 'What next?'

'I wonder how the Duke likes it?' said Mr. Cassilis.

'Or the Duchess?' added one of his friends.

'Or the Everinghams?' added the other.

'The Duke will be deuced glad to see Beau settled, I take it,' said Mr. Cassilis.

'A good deal depends on the tin,' said his friend.

Coningsby threw down the 'Court Guide' with a sinking heart. In spite of every insuperable difficulty, hitherto the end and object of all his aspirations and all his exploits, sometimes even almost unconsciously to himself, was Edith. It was over. The strange manner of last night was fatally explained. The heart that once had been his was now another's. To the man who still loves there is in that conviction the most profound and desolate sorrow of which our

nature is capable. All the recollection of the past, all the once-cherished prospects of the future, blend into one bewildering anguish. Coningsby quitted the club, and mounting his horse, rode rapidly out of town, almost unconscious of his direction. He found himself at length in a green lane near Willesden, silent and undisturbed; he pulled up his horse, and summoned all his mind to the contemplation of his prospects.

Edith was lost. Now, should he return to his grandfather, accept his mission, and go down to Darlford on Friday? Favour and fortune, power, prosperity, rank, distinction would be the consequence of this step; might not he add even vengeance? Was there to be no term to his endurance? Might not he teach this proud, prejudiced manufacturer, with all his virulence and despotic caprices, a memorable lesson? And his daughter, too, this betrothed, after all, of a young noble, with her flush futurity of splendour and enjoyment, was she to hear of him only, if indeed she heard of him at all, as of one toiling or trifling in the humbler positions of existence; and wonder, with a blush, that he ever could have been the hero of her romantic girlhood? What degradation in the idea? His cheek burnt at the possibility of such ignominy!

It was a conjuncture in his life that required decision. He thought of his companions who looked up to him with such ardent anticipations of his fame, of delight in his career, and confidence in his leading; were all these high and fond fancies to be balked? On the very threshold of life was he to blunder? 'Tis the first step that leads to all, and his was to be a wilful error. He remembered his first visit to his grandfather, and the delight of his friends at Eton at his report on his return. After eight years of initiation was he to lose that favour then so highly prized, when the results which they had so long counted on were on the very eve of accomplishment? Parliament and riches, and rank and power; these were facts, realities, substances, that none could mistake. Was he to sacrifice them for speculations, theories, shadows, perhaps the

vapours of a green and conceited brain? No, by heaven, no! He was like Cæsar by the starry river's side, watching the image of the planets on its fatal waters. The die was cast.

The sun set; the twilight spell fell upon his soul; the exaltation of his spirit died away. Beautiful thoughts, full of sweetness and tranquillity and consolation, came clustering round his heart like seraphs. He thought of Edith in her hours of fondness; he thought of the pure and solemn moments when to mingle his name with the heroes of humanity was his aspiration, and to achieve immortal fame the inspiring purpose of his life. What were the tawdry accidents of vulgar ambition to him? No domestic despot could deprive him of his intellect, his knowledge, the sustaining power of an unpolluted conscience. If he possessed the intelligence in which he had confidence, the world would recognise his voice even if not placed upon a pedestal. If the principles of his philosophy were true, the great heart of the nation would respond to their expression. Coningsby felt at this moment a profound conviction which never again deserted him, that the conduct which would violate the affections of the heart, or the dictates of the conscience, however it may lead to immediate success, is a fatal error. Conscious that he was perhaps verging on some painful vicissitude of his life, he devoted himself to a love that seemed hopeless, and to a fame that was perhaps a dream.

It was under the influence of these solemn resolutions that he wrote, on his return home, a letter to Lord Monmouth, in which he expressed all that affection which he really felt for his grandfather, and all the pangs which it cost him to adhere to the conclusions he had already announced. In terms of tenderness, and even humility, he declined to become a candidate for Darlford, or even to enter Parliament, except as the master of his own conduct

CHAPTER V.

LADY MONMOUTH was reclining on a sofa in that beautiful boudoir which had been fitted up under the superintendence of Mr. Rigby, but as he then believed for the Princess Colonna. The walls were hung with amber satin, painted by Delaroche with such subjects as might be expected from his brilliant and picturesque pencil. Fair forms, heroes and heroines in dazzling costume, the offspring of chivalry merging into what is commonly styled civilisation, moved in graceful or fantastic groups amid palaces and gardens. The ceiling, carved in the deep honeycomb fashion of the Saracens, was richly gilt and picked out in violet. Upon a violet carpet of velvet was represented the marriage of Cupid and Psyche.

It was about two hours after Coningsby had quitted Monmouth House, and Flora came in, sent for by Lady Monmouth as was her custom, to read to her as she was employed with some light work.

'Tis a new book of Sue,' said Lucretia. 'They say it is good.'

Flora, seated by her side, began to read. Reading was an accomplishment which distinguished Flora; but to-day her voice faltered, her expression was uncertain; she seemed but imperfectly to comprehend her page. More than once Lady Monmouth looked round at her with an inquisitive glance. Suddenly Flora stopped and burst into tears.

'O! madam,' she at last exclaimed, 'if you would but speak to Mr. Coningsby, all might be right!'

'What is this?' said Lady Monmouth, turning quickly on the sofa; then, collecting herself in an instant, she continued with less abruptness, and more suavity than usual, 'Tell me, Flora, what is it; what is the matter?'

'My Lord, sobbed Flora, 'has quarrelled with Mr. Coningsby.'

An expression of eager interest came over the countenance of Lucretia.

‘Why have they quarrelled?’

‘I do not know they have quarrelled; it is not, perhaps, a right term; but my Lord is very angry with Mr. Coningsby.’

‘Not very angry, I should think, Flora; and about what?’

‘Oh! very angry, madam,’ said Flora, shaking her head mournfully. ‘My Lord told M. Villebecque that perhaps Mr. Coningsby would never enter the house again.’

‘Was it to-day?’ asked Lucretia.

‘This morning. Mr. Coningsby has only left this hour or two. He will not do what my Lord wishes, about some seat in the Chamber. I do not know exactly what it is; but my Lord is in one of his moods of terror: my father is frightened even to go into his room when he is so.’

‘Has Mr. Rigby been here to-day?’ asked Lucretia.

‘Mr. Rigby is not in town. My father went for Mr. Rigby this morning before Mr. Coningsby came, and he found that Mr. Rigby was not in town. That is why I know it.’

Lady Monmouth rose from her sofa, and walked once or twice up and down the room. Then turning to Flora, she said, ‘Go away now: the book is stupid; it does not amuse me. Stop: find out all you can for me about the quarrel before I speak to Mr. Coningsby.’

Flora quitted the room. Lucretia remained for some time in meditation; then she wrote a few lines, which she despatched at once to Mr. Rigby.

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT a great man was the Right Honourable Nicholas Rigby! Here was one of the first peers of England, and one of the finest ladies in London, both waiting with equal anxiety his return to town; and unable to transact two affairs of vast importance, yet wholly unconnected, without his interposition! What was the secret of the influence of

this man, confided in by everybody, trusted by none? His counsels were not deep, his expedients were not felicitous; he had no feeling, and he could create no sympathy. It is that, in most of the transactions of life, there is some portion which no one cares to accomplish, and which everybody wishes to be achieved. This was always the portion of Mr. Rigby. In the eye of the world he had constantly the appearance of being mixed up with high dealings, and negotiations and arrangements of fine management, whereas in truth, notwithstanding his splendid livery and the airs he gave himself in the servants' hall, his real business in life had ever been, to do the dirty work.

Mr. Rigby had been shut up much at his villa of late. He was concocting, you could not term it composing, an article, a 'very slashing article,' which was to prove that the penny postage must be the destruction of the aristocracy. It was a grand subject, treated in his highest style. His parallel portraits of Rowland Hill the conqueror of Almazec and Rowland Hill the deviser of the cheap postage was enormously fine. It was full of passages in italics, little words in great capitals, and almost drew tears. The statistical details also were highly interesting and novel. Several of the old postmen, both twopenny and general, who had been in office with himself, and who were inspired with an equal zeal against that spirit of reform of which they had alike been victims, supplied him with information which nothing but a breach of ministerial duty could have furnished. The prophetic peroration as to the irresistible progress of democracy was almost as powerful as one of Rigby's speeches on Aldborough or Amersham. There never was a fellow for giving a good hearty kick to the people like Rigby. Himself sprung from the dregs of the populace, this was disinterested. What could be more patriotic and magnanimous than his Jeremiads over the fall of the Montmorencis and the Crillons, or the possible catastrophe of the Percys and the Manners! The truth of all this hullabaloo was that Rigby had a sly pension which, by an inevitable association of ideas, he always connectèd

with the maintenance of an aristocracy. All his rigmarole dissertations on the French revolution were impelled by this secret influence; and when he wailed over 'la guerre aux châteaux,' and moaned like a mandrake over Nottingham Castle in flames, the roguo had an eye all the while to quarter-day!

Arriving in town the day after Coningsby's interview with his grandfather, Mr. Rigby found a summons to Monmouth House waiting him, and an urgent note from Lucretia begging that he would permit nothing to prevent him seeing her for a few minutes before he called on the Marquess.

Lucretia, acting on the unconscious intimation of Flora, had in the course of four-and-twenty hours obtained pretty ample and accurate details of the cause of contention between Coningsby and her husband. She could inform Mr. Rigby not only that Lord Monmouth was highly incensed against his grandson, but that the cause of their misunderstanding arose about a seat in the House of Commons, and that seat too the one which Mr. Rigby had long appropriated to himself, and over whose registration he had watched with such affectionate solicitude.

Lady Monmouth arranged this information like a first-rate artist, and gave it a grouping and a colour which produced the liveliest effect upon her confederate. The countenance of Rigby was almost ghastly as he received the intelligence: a grin, half of malice, half of terror, played over his features.

'I told you to beware of him long ago,' said Lady Monmouth. 'He is, he has ever been, in the way of both of us.'

'He is in my power,' said Rigby. 'We can crush him!'
'How?'

'He is in love with the daughter of Millbank, the man who bought Hellingsley.'

'Hah!' exclaimed Lady Monmouth, in a prolonged tone.

'He was at Coningsby all last summer, hanging about her. I found the younger Millbank quite domiciliated at the

Castle; a fact which, of itself, if known to Lord Monmouth, would ensure the lad's annihilation.'

'And you kept this fine news for a winter campaign, my good Mr. Rigby,' said Lady Monmouth, with a subtle smile. 'It was a weapon of service. I give you my compliments.'

'The time is not always ripe,' said Mr. Rigby.

'But it is now most mature. Let us not conceal it from ourselves that, since his first visit to Coningsby, we have neither of us really been in the same position which we then occupied, or believed we should occupy. My Lord, though you would scarcely believe it, has a weakness for this boy; and though I by my marriage, and you by your zealous ability, have apparently secured a permanent hold upon his habits, I have never doubted that when the crisis comes we shall find that the golden fruit is plucked by one who has not watched the garden. You take me? There is no reason why we two should clash together: we can both of us find what we want, and more securely if we work in company.'

'I trust my devotion to you has never been doubted, dear madam.'

'Nor to yourself, dear Mr. Rigby. Go now: the game is before you. Rid me of this Coningsby, and I will secure you all that you want. Doubt not me. There is no reason. I want a firm ally. There must be two.'

'It shall be done,' said Rigby; 'it must be done. If once the notion gets wind that one of the Castle family may perchance stand for Darlford, all the present combinations will be disorganised. It must be done at once. I know that the Government will dissolve.'

'So I hear for certain,' said Lucretia. 'Be sure there is no time to lose. What does he want with you to-day?'

'I know not: there are so many things.'

'To be sure; and yet I cannot doubt he will speak of this quarrel. Let not the occasion be lost. Whatever his mood, the subject may be introduced. If good, you will guide him more easily; if dark, the love for the Hellingsley

girl, the fact of the brother being in his castle, drinking his wine, riding his horses, ordering about his servants; you will omit no details: a Millbank quite at home at Coningsby will lash him to madness! 'Tis quite ripe. Not a word that you have seen me. Go, go, or he may hear that you have arrived. I shall be at home all the morning. It will be but gallant that you should pay me a little visit when you have transacted your business. You understand. *Au revoir!*'

Lady Monmouth took up again her French novel; but her eyes soon glanced over the page, unattached by its contents. Her own existence was too interesting to find any excitement in fiction. It was nearly three years since her marriage; that great step which she ever had a conviction was to lead to results still greater. Of late she had often been filled with a presentiment that they were near at hand; never more so than on this day. Irresistible was the current of associations that led her to meditate on freedom, wealth, power; on a career which should at the same time dazzle the imagination and gratify her heart. Notwithstanding the gossip of Paris, founded on no authentic knowledge of her husband's character or information, based on the haphazard observations of the floating multitude, Lucretia herself had no reason to fear that her influence over Lord Monmouth, if exerted, was materially diminished. But satisfied that he had formed no other tie, with her ever the test of her position, she had not thought it expedient, and certainly would have found it irksome, to maintain that influence by any ostentatious means. She knew that Lord Monmouth was capricious, easily wearied, soon palled; and that on men who have no affections, affection has no hold. Their passions or their fancies, on the contrary, as it seemed to her, are rather stimulated by neglect or indifference, provided that they are not systematic; and the circumstance of a wife being admired by one who is not her husband sometimes wonderfully revives the passion or renovates the respect of him who should be devoted to her.

The health of Lord Monmouth was the subject which never was long absent from the vigilance or meditation of Lucretia. She was well assured that his life was no longer secure. She knew that after their marriage he had made a will, which secured to her a large portion of his great wealth in case of their having no issue, and after the accident at Paris all hope in that respect was over. Recently the extreme anxiety which Lord Monmouth had evinced about terminating the abeyance of the barony to which his first wife was a co-heiress in favour of his grandson, had alarmed Lucretia. To establish in the land another branch of the house of Coningsby was evidently the last excitement of Lord Monmouth, and perhaps a permanent one. If the idea were once accepted, notwithstanding the limit to its endowment which Lord Monmouth might at the first start contemplate, Lucretia had sufficiently studied his temperament to be convinced that all his energies and all his resources would ultimately be devoted to its practical fulfilment. Her original prejudice against Coningsby and jealousy of his influence had therefore of late been considerably aggravated; and the intelligence that for the first time there was a misunderstanding between Coningsby and her husband filled her with excitement and hope. She knew her Lord well enough to feel assured that the cause for the displeasure in the present instance could not be a light one; she resolved instantly to labour that it should not be transient; and it so happened that she had applied for aid in this endeavour to the very individual in whose power it rested to accomplish all her desire, while in doing so he felt at the same time he was defending his own position and advancing his own interests.

Lady Monmouth was now awaiting with some excitement the return of Mr. Rigby. His interview with his patron was of unusual length. An hour, and more than an hour, had elapsed. Lady Monmouth again threw aside the book which more than once she had discarded. She paced the room, restless rather than disquieted. She had complete confidence in Rigby's ability for the occasion; and with her

knowledge of Lord Monmouth's character, she could not contemplate the possibility of failure, if the circumstances were adroitly introduced to his consideration. Still time stole on: the harassing and exhausting process of suspense was acting on her nervous system. She began to think that Rigby had not found the occasion favourable for the catastrophe; that Lord Monmouth, from apprehension of disturbing Rigby and entailing explanations on himself, had avoided the necessary communication; that her skilful combination for the moment had missed. Two hours had now elapsed, and Lucretia, in a state of considerable irritation, was about to inquire whether Mr. Rigby were with his Lordship, when the door of her boudoir opened, and that gentleman appeared.

'How long you have been!' exclaimed Lady Monmouth. 'Now sit down and tell me what has passed.'

Lady Monmouth pointed to the seat which Flora had occupied.

'I thank your Ladyship,' said Mr. Rigby, with a somewhat grave and yet perplexed expression of countenance, and seating himself at some little distance from his companion, 'but I am very well here.'

There was a pause. Instead of responding to the invitation of Lady Monmouth to communicate with his usual readiness and volubility, Mr. Rigby was silent, and, if it were possible to use such an expression with regard to such a gentleman, apparently embarrassed.

'Well,' said Lady Monmouth, 'does he know about the Millbanks?'

'Everything,' said Mr. Rigby.

'And what did he say?'

'His Lordship was greatly shocked,' replied Mr. Rigby, with a pious expression of features. 'Such monstrous ingratitude! As his Lordship very justly observed, "It is impossible to say what is going on under my own roof, or to what I can trust."''

'But he made an exception in your favour, I dare say, my dear Mr. Rigby,' said Lady Monmouth.

'Lord Monmouth was pleased to say that I possessed his entire confidence,' said Mr. Rigby, 'and that he looked to me in his difficulties.'

'Very sensible of him. And what is to become of Mr. Coningsby?'

'The steps which his Lordship is about to take with reference to the establishment generally,' said Mr. Rigby, 'will allow the connection that at present subsists between that gentleman and his noble relative, now that Lord Monmouth's eyes are open to his real character, to terminate naturally, without the necessity of any formal explanation.'

'But what do you mean by the steps he is going to take in his establishment generally?'

'Lord Monmouth thinks he requires change of scene.'

'Oh! is he going to drag me abroad again?' exclaimed Lady Monmouth, with great impatience.

'Why, not exactly,' said Mr. Rigby, rather demurely.

'I hope he is not going again to that dreadful castle in Lancashire.'

'Lord Monmouth was thinking that, as you were tired of Paris, you might find some of the German Baths agreeable.'

'Why, there is nothing that Lord Monmouth dislikes so much as a German bathing-place!'

'Exactly,' said Mr. Rigby.

'Then how capricious in him wanting to go to them?'

'He does not want to go to them!'

'What do you mean, Mr. Rigby?' said Lady Monmouth, in a lower voice, and looking him full in the face with a glance seldom bestowed.

There was a churlish and unusual look about Rigby. It was as if malignant, and yet at the same time a little frightened, he had screwed himself into doggedness.

'I mean what Lord Monmouth means. He suggests that if your Ladyship were to pass the summer at Kissen-gen, for example, and a paragraph in the *Morning Post* were to announce that his Lordship was about to join you there, all awkwardness would be removed; and no one

could for a moment take the liberty of supposing, even if his Lordship did not ultimately reach you, that anything like a separation had occurred.'

'A separation!' said Lady Monmouth.

'Quite amicable,' said Mr. Rigby. 'I would never have consented to interfere in the affair, but to secure that most desirable point.'

'I will see Lord Monmouth at once,' said Lucretia, rising, her natural pallor aggravated into a ghoul-like tint.

'His Lordship has gone out,' said Mr. Rigby, rather stubbornly.

'Our conversation, sir, then finishes: I wait his return.' She bowed haughtily.

'His Lordship will never return to Monmouth House again.'

Lucretia sprang from the sofa.

'Miserable craven!' she exclaimed. 'Has the cowardly tyrant fled? And he really thinks that I am to be crushed by such an instrument as this! Pah! He may leave Monmouth House, but I shall not. Begone, sir!'

'Still anxious to secure an amicable separation,' said Mr. Rigby, 'your Ladyship must allow me to place the circumstances of the case fairly before your excellent judgment. Lord Monmouth has decided upon a course: you know as well as I that he never swerves from his resolutions. He has left peremptory instructions, and he will listen to no appeal. He has empowered me to represent to your Ladyship that he wishes in every way to consider your convenience. He suggests that everything, in short, should be arranged as if his Lordship were himself unhappily no more; that your Ladyship should at once enter into your jointure, which shall be made payable quarterly to your order, provided you can find it convenient to live upon the Continent,' added Mr. Rigby, with some hesitation.

'And suppose I cannot?'

'Why, then, we will leave your Ladyship to the assertion of your rights.'

'We!'

'I beg your Ladyship's pardon. I speak as the friend of the family, the trustee of your marriage settlement, well known also as Lord Monmouth's executor,' said Mr. Rigby, his countenance gradually regaining its usual callous confidence, and some degree of self-complacency, as he remembered the good things which he enumerated.

'I have decided,' said Lady Monmouth. 'I will assert my rights. Your master has mistaken my character and his own position. He shall rue the day that he assailed me.'

'I should be sorry if there were any violence,' said Mr. Rigby, 'especially as everything is left to my management and control. An office, indeed, which I only accepted for your mutual advantage. I think, upon reflection, I might put before your Ladyship some considerations which might induce you, on the whole, to be of opinion that it will be better for us to draw together in this business, as we have hitherto, indeed, throughout an acquaintance now of some years.' Rigby was resuming all his usual tone of brazen familiarity.

'Your self-confidence exceeds even Lord Monmouth's estimate of it,' said Lucretia.

'Now, now, you are unkind. Your Ladyship mistakes my position. I am interfering in this business for your sake. I might have refused the office. It would have fallen to another, who would have fulfilled it without any delicacy and consideration for your feelings. View my interposition in that light, my dear Lady Monmouth, and circumstances will assume altogether a new colour.'

'I beg that you will quit the house, sir.'

Mr. Rigby shook his head. 'I would with pleasure, to oblige you, were it in my power; but Lord Monmouth has particularly desired that I should take up my residence here permanently. The servants are now my servants. It is useless to ring the bell. For your Ladyship's sake, I wish everything to be accomplished with tranquillity, and, if possible, friendliness and good feeling. You can have even a week for the preparations for your departure, if

necessary. I will take that upon myself. Any carriages, too, that you desire; your jewels, at least all those that are not at the bankers'. The arrangement about your jointure, your letters of credit, even your passport, I will attend to myself; only too happy if, by this painful interference, I have in any way contributed to soften the annoyance which, at the first blush, you may naturally experience, but which, like everything else, take my word, will wear off.'

'I shall send for Lord Eskdale,' said Lady Monmouth. 'He is a gentleman.'

'I am quite sure,' said Mr. Rigby, 'that Lord Eskdale will give you the same advice as myself, if he only reads your Ladyship's letters,' he added slowly, 'to Prince Trautsmandorff.'

'My letters?' said Lady Monmouth.

'Pardon me,' said Rigby, putting his hand in his pocket, as if to guard some treasure, 'I have no wish to revive painful associations; but I have them, and I must act upon them, if you persist in treating me as a foe, who am in reality your best friend; which indeed I ought to be, having the honour of acting as trustee under your marriage settlement, and having known you so many years.'

'Leave me for the present alone,' said Lady Monmouth. 'Send me my servant, if I have one. I shall not remain here the week which you mention, but quit at once this house, which I wish I had never entered. Adieu! Mr. Rigby, you are now lord of Monmouth House, and yet I cannot help feeling you too will be discharged before he dies.'

Mr. Rigby made Lady Monmouth a bow such as became the master of the house, and then withdrew.

CHAPTER VII

A PARAGRAPH in the *Morning Post*, a few days after his interview with his grandfather, announcing that Lord and Lady Monmouth had quitted town for the baths of Kissingen, startled Coningsby, who called the same day at Monmouth House in consequence. There he learnt more authentic details of their unexpected movements. It appeared that Lady Monmouth had certainly departed; and the porter, with a rather sceptical visage, informed Coningsby that Lord Monmouth was to follow; but when, he could not tell. At present his Lordship was at Brighton, and in a few days was about to take possession of a villa at Richmond, which had for some time been fitting up for him under the superintendance of Mr. Rigby, who, as Coningsby also learnt, now permanently resided at Monmouth House. All this intelligence made Coningsby ponder. He was sufficiently acquainted with the parties concerned to feel assured that he had not learnt the whole truth. What had really taken place, and what was the real cause of the occurrences, were equally mystical to him: all he was convinced of was, that some great domestic revolution had been suddenly effected.

Coningsby entertained for his grandfather a sincere affection. With the exception of their last unfortunate interview, he had experienced from Lord Monmouth nothing but kindness both in phrase and deed. There was also something in Lord Monmouth, when he pleased it, rather fascinating to young men; and as Coningsby had never occasioned him any feelings but pleasurable ones, he was always disposed to make himself delightful to his grandson. The experience of a consummate man of the world, advanced in life, detailed without rigidity to youth, with frankness and facility, is bewitching. Lord Monmouth was never garrulous: he was always pithy, and could be picturesque. He revealed a character in a sentence, and

detected the ruling passion with the hand of a master. Besides, he had seen everybody and had done everything; and though, on the whole, too indolent for conversation, and loving to be talked to, these were circumstances which made his too rare communications the more precious.

With these feelings, Coningsby resolved, the moment that he learned that his grandfather was established at Richmond, to pay him a visit. He was informed that Lord Monmouth was at home, and he was shown into a drawing-room, where he found two French ladies in their bonnets, whom he soon discovered to be actresses. They also had come down to pay a visit to his grandfather, and were by no means displeased to pass the interval that must elapse before they had that pleasure in chatting with his grandson. Coningsby found them extremely amusing; with the finest spirits in the world, imperturbable good temper, and an unconscious practical philosophy that defied the devil Care and all his works. And well it was that he found such agreeable companions, for time flowed on, and no summons arrived to call him to his grandfather's presence, and no herald to announce his grandfather's advent. The ladies and Coningsby had exhausted badinage; they had examined and criticised all the furniture, had rifled the vases of their prettiest flowers; and Clotilde, who had already sung several times, was proposing a duet to Ermenegarde, when a servant entered, and told the ladies that a carriage was in attendance to give them an airing, and after that Lord Monmouth hoped they would return and dine with him; then turning to Coningsby, he informed him, with his lord's compliments, that Lord Monmouth was sorry he was too much engaged to see him.

Nothing was to be done but to put a tolerably good face upon it. 'Embrace Lord Monmouth for me,' said Coningsby to his fair friends, 'and tell him I think it very unkind that he did not ask me to dinner with you.'

Coningsby said this with a gay air, but really with a depressed spirit. He felt convinced that his grandfather was deeply displeased with him; and as he rode away from

the villa, he could not resist the strong impression that he was destined never to re-enter it. Yet it was decreed otherwise. It so happened that the idle message which Coningsby had left for his grandfather, and which he never seriously supposed for a moment that his late companions would have given their host, operated entirely in his favour. Whatever were the feelings with respect to Coningsby at the bottom of Lord Monmouth's heart, he was actuated in his refusal to see him not more from displeasure than from an anticipatory horror of something like a scene. Even a surrender from Coningsby without terms, and an offer to declare himself a candidate for Darlford, or to do anything else that his grandfather wished, would have been disagreeable to Lord Monmouth in his present mood. As in politics a revolution is often followed by a season of torpor, so in the case of Lord Monmouth the separation from his wife, which had for a long period occupied his meditation, was succeeded by a vein of mental dissipation. He did not wish to be reminded by anything or any person that he had still in some degree the misfortune of being a responsible member of society. He wanted to be surrounded by individuals who were above or below the conventional interests of what is called 'the World.' He wanted to hear nothing of those painful and embarrassing influences which from our contracted experience and want of enlightenment we magnify into such undue importance. For this purpose he wished to have about him persons whose knowledge of the cares of life concerned only the means of existence, and whose sense of its objects referred only to the sources of enjoyment; persons who had not been educated in the idolatry of Respectability; that is to say, of realising such an amount of what is termed Character by a hypocritical deference to the prejudices of the community as may enable them, at suitable times, and under convenient circumstances and disguises, to plunder the public. This was the Monmouth Philosophy.

With these feelings, Lord Monmouth recoiled at this moment from grandsons and relations and ties of all kinds.

He did not wish to be reminded of his identity, but to swim unmolested and undisturbed in his Epicurean dream. When, therefore, his fair visitors; Clotilde, who opened her mouth only to breathe roses and diamonds, and Ermengarde, who was so good-natured that she sacrificed even her lovers to her friends; saw him merely to exclaim at the same moment, and with the same voices of thrilling joyousness,—

‘Why did not you ask him to dinner?’

And then, without waiting for his reply, entered with that rapidity of elocution which Frenchwomen can alone command into the catalogue of his charms and accomplishments, Lord Monmouth began to regret that he really had not seen Coningsby, who, it appeared, might have greatly contributed to the pleasure of the day. The message, which was duly given, however, settled the business. Lord Monmouth felt that any chance of explanations, or even allusions to the past, was out of the question; and to defend himself from the accusations of his animated guests, he said,

‘Well, he shall come to dine with you next time.’

There is no end to the influence of woman on our life. It is at the bottom of everything that happens to us. And so it was, that, in spite of all the combinations of Lucretia and Mr. Rigby, and the mortification and resentment of Lord Monmouth, the favourable impression he casually made on a couple of French actresses occasioned Coningsby, before a month had elapsed since his memorable interview at Monmouth House, to receive an invitation again to dine with his grandfather.

The party was agreeable. Clotilde and Ermengarde had wits as sparkling as their eyes. There was the manager of the Opera, a great friend of Villebecque, and his wife, a splendid lady, who had been a prima donna of celebrity, and still had a commanding voice for a chamber; a Carlist nobleman who lived upon his traditions, and who, though without a son, could tell of a festival given by his family, before the revolution, which had cost a million of francs; and a Neapo-

litan physician, in whom Lord Monmouth had great confidence, and who himself believed in the elixir vita, made up the party, with Lucian Gay, Coningsby, and Mr. Rigby. Our hero remarked that Villebecque on this occasion sat at the bottom of the table, but Flora did not appear.

In the meantime, the month which brought about this satisfactory and at one time unexpected result was fruitful also in other circumstances still more interesting. Coningsby and Edith met frequently, if to breathe the same atmosphere in the same crowded saloons can be described as meeting; ever watching each other's movements, and yet studious never to encounter each other's glance. The charms of Miss Millbank had become an universal topic, they were celebrated in ball-rooms, they were discussed at clubs: Edith was the beauty of the season. All admired her, many sighed even to express their admiration; but the devotion of Lord Beaumanoir, who always hovered about her, deterred them from a rivalry which might have made the boldest despair. As for Coningsby, he passed his life principally with the various members of the Sydney family, and was almost daily riding with Lady Everingham and her sister, generally accompanied by Lord Henry and his friend Eustace Lyle, between whom, indeed, and Coningsby there were relations of intimacy scarcely less inseparable. Coningsby had spoken to Lady Everingham of the rumoured marriage of her elder brother, and found, although the family had not yet been formally apprised of it, she entertained little doubt of its ultimate occurrence. She admired Miss Millbank, with whom her acquaintance continued slight; and she wished, of course, that her brother should marry and be happy. 'But Percy is often in love,' she would add, 'and never likes us to be very intimate with his inamoratas. He thinks it destroys the romance; and that domestic familiarity may compromise his heroic character. However,' she added, 'I really believe that will be a match.'

On the whole, though he bore a serene aspect to the world, Coningsby passed this month in a state of restless

misery. His soul was brooding on one subject, and he had no confidant: he could not resist the spell that impelled him to the society where Edith might at least be seen, and the circle in which he lived was one in which her name was frequently mentioned. Alone, in his solitary rooms in the Albany, he felt all his desolation; and often a few minutes before he figured in the world, apparently followed and courted by all, he had been plunged in the darkest fits of irremediable wretchedness.

He had, of course, frequently met Lady Wallinger, but their salutations, though never omitted, and on each side cordial, were brief. There seemed to be a tacit understanding between them not to refer to a subject fruitful in painful reminiscences.

The season waned. In the fulfilment of a project originally formed in the playing-fields of Eton, often recurred to at Cambridge, and cherished with the fondness with which men cling to a scheme of early youth, Coningsby, Henry Sydney, Vere, and Buckhurst had engaged some moors together this year; and in a few days they were about to quit town for Scotland. They had pressed Eustace Lyle to accompany them, but he, who in general seemed to have no pleasure greater than their society, had surprised them by declining their invitation, with some vague mention that he rather thought he should go abroad.

It was the last day of July, and all the world were at a breakfast given, at a fanciful cottage situated in beautiful gardens on the banks of the Thames, by Lady Everingham. The weather was as bright as the romances of Boccaccio; there were pyramids of strawberries, in bowls colossal enough to hold orange-trees; and the choicest band filled the air with enchanting strains, while a brilliant multitude sauntered on turf like velvet, or roamed in desultory existence amid the quivering shades of winding walks.

'My fête was prophetic,' said Lady Everingham, when she saw Coningsby. 'I am glad it is connected with an incident. It gives it a point.'

'You are mystical as well as prophetic. Tell me what we are to celebrate.'

'Theresa is going to be married.'

'Then I, too, will prophesy, and name the hero of the romance, Eustace Lyle.'

'You have been more prescient than I,' said Lady Everingham, '*perhaps because I was thinking too much of some one else.*'

'It seems to me an union which all must acknowledge perfect. I hardly know which I love best. I have had my suspicions a long time; and when Eustace refused to go to the moors with us, though I said nothing, I was convinced.'

'At any rate,' said Lady Everingham, sighing, with a rather smiling face, 'we are kinsfolk, Mr. Coningsby; though I would gladly have wished to have been more.'

'Were those your thoughts, dear lady? Ever kind to me! Happiness,' he added, in a mournful tone, 'I fear can never be mine.'

'And why?'

'Ah! 'tis a tale too strange and sorrowful for a day when, like Seged, we must all determine to be happy.'

'You have already made me miserable.'

'Here comes a group that will make you gay,' said Coningsby as he moved on. Edith and the Wallingers, accompanied by Lord Beaumanoir, Mr. Melton, and Sir Charles Buckhurst, formed the party. They seemed profuse in their congratulations to Lady Everingham, having already learnt the intelligence from her brother.

Coningsby stopped to speak to Lady St. Julians, who had still a daughter to marry. Both Augustina, who was at Coningsby Castle, and Clara Isabella, who ought to have been there, had each secured the right man. But Adelaide Victoria had now appeared, and Lady St. Julians had a great regard for the favourite grandson of Lord Monmouth, and also for the influential friend of Lord Vere and Sir Charles Buckhurst. In case Coningsby did not determine to become her son-in-law himself, he might counsel either of his friends to a judicious decision on an inevitable act.

'Strawberries and cream?' said Lord Eskdale to Mr. Ormsby, who seemed occupied with some delicacies.

'Egad! no, no, no; those days are passed. I think there is a little easterly wind with all this fine appearance.'

'I am for' in-door nature myself,' said Lord Eskdale. 'Do you know, I do not half like the way Monmouth is going on? He never gets out of that villa of his. He should change his air more. Tell him.'

'It is no use telling him anything. Have you heard anything of Miladi?'

'I had a letter from her to-day: she writes in good spirits. I am sorry it broke up, and yet I never thought it would last so long.'

'I gave them two years,' said Mr. Ormsby. 'Lord Monmouth lived with his first wife two years. And afterwards with the *Mirandola* at Milan, at least nearly two years; it was a year and ten months. I must know, for he called me in to settle affairs. I took the lady to the baths at Lucca, on the pretence that Monmouth would meet us there. He went to Paris. All his great affairs have been two years. I remember I wanted to bet Cassilis, at White's, on it when he married; but I thought, being his intimate friend; the oldest friend he has, indeed, and one of his trustees; it was perhaps as well not to do it.'

'You should have made the bet with himself,' said Lord Eskdale, 'and then there never would have been a separation.'

'Hah, hah, hah! Do you know, I feel the wind?'

About an hour after this, Coningsby, who had just quitted the Duchess, met, on a terrace by the river, Lady Wallinger, walking with Mrs. Guy Flouncey and a Russian Prince, whom that lady was enchanting. Coningsby was about to pass with some slight courtesy, but Lady Wallinger stopped and would speak to him, on slight subjects, the weather and the fête, but yet adroitly enough managed to make him turn and join her. Mrs. Guy Flouncey walked on a little before with her Russian admirer. Lady Wallinger followed with Coningsby.

'The match that has been proclaimed to-day has greatly surprised me,' said Lady Wallinger.

'Indeed!' said Coningsby: 'I confess I was long prepared for it. And it seems to me the most natural alliance conceivable, and one that every one must approve.'

'Lady Everingham seems much surprised at it.'

'Ah! Lady Everingham is a brilliant personage, and cannot deign to observe obvious circumstances.'

'Do you know, Mr. Coningsby, that I always thought you were engaged to Lady Theresa?'

'I!'

'Indeed, we were informed more than a month ago that you were positively going to be married to her.'

'I am not one of those who can shift their affections with such rapidity, Lady Wallinger.'

Lady Wallinger looked distressed. 'You remember our meeting you on the stairs at —— House, Mr. Coningsby?'

'Painfully. It is deeply graven on my brain.'

'Edith had just been informed that you were going to be married to Lady Theresa.'

'Not surely by him to whom she is herself going to be married?' said Coningsby, reddening.

'I am not aware that she is going to be married to any one. Lord Beaumanoir admires her, has always admired her. But Edith has given him no encouragement, at least gave him no encouragement as long as she believed; but why dwell on such an unhappy subject, Mr. Coningsby? I am to blame; I have been to blame perhaps before, but indeed I think it cruel, very cruel, that Edith and you are kept asunder.'

'You have always been my best, my dearest friend, and are the most amiable and admirable of women. But tell me, is it indeed true that Edith is not going to be married?'

At this moment Mrs. Guy Flouncey turned round, and assuring Lady Wallinger that the Prince and herself had agreed to refer some point to her about the most transcendental ethics of flirtation, this deeply interesting conversation was arrested, and Lady Wallinger, with becoming

suavity, was obliged to listen to the lady's lively appeal of exaggerated nonsense and the Prince's affected protests, while Coningsby walked by her side, pale and agitated, and then offered his arm to Lady Wallinger, which she accepted with an affectionate pressure. At the end of the terrace they met some other guests, and soon were immersed in the multitude that thronged the lawn.

'There is Sir Joseph,' said Lady Wallinger, and Coningsby looked up, and saw Edith on his arm. They were unconsciously approaching them. Lord Beaumanoir was there, but he seemed to shrink into nothing to-day before Buckhurst, who was captivated for the moment by Edith, and hearing that no knight was resolute enough to try a fall with the Marquess, was impelled by his talent for action to enter the lists. He had talked down everybody, unhorsed every cavalier. Nobody had a chance against him: he answered all your questions before you asked them; contradicted everybody with the intrepidity of a Rigby; annihilated your anecdotes by historiettes infinitely more piquant; and if anybody chanced to make a joke which he could not excel, declared immediately that it was a Joe Miller. He was absurd, extravagant, grotesque, noisy; but he was young, rattling, and interesting, from his health and spirits. Edith was extremely amused by him, and was encouraging by her smile his spiritual excesses, when they all suddenly met Lady Wallinger and Coningsby.

The eyes of Edith and Coningsby met for the first time since they so cruelly encountered on the staircase of — House. A deep, quick blush suffused her face, her eyes gleamed with a sudden coruscation; suddenly and quickly she put forth her hand.

Yes! he presses once more that hand which permanently to retain is the passion of his life, yet which may never be his! It seemed that for the ravishing delight of that moment he could have borne with cheerfulness all the dark and harrowing misery of the year that had passed away since he embraced her in the woods of Hellingsley, and pledged his faith by the waters of the rushing Darl.

He seized the occasion which offered itself, a moment to walk by her side, and to snatch some brief instants of unreserved communion.

'Forgive me!' she said.

'Ah! how could you ever doubt me?' said Coningsby.

'I was unhappy.'

'And now we are to each other as before?'

'And will be, come what come may.'

END OF BOOK VIII.