

BOOK IX.

CHAPTER I.

It was merry Christmas at St. Geneviève. There was a yule log blazing on every hearth in that wide domain, from the hall of the squire to the peasant's roof. The Buttery Hatch was open for the whole week from noon to sunset; all comers might take their fill, and each carry away as much bold beef, white bread, and jolly ale as a strong man could bear in a basket with one hand. For every woman a red cloak, and a coat of broadcloth for every man. All day long, carts laden with fuel and warm raiment were traversing the various districts, distributing comfort and dispensing cheer. For a Christian gentleman of high degree was Eustace Lyle.

Within his hall, too, he holds his revel, and his beautiful bride welcomes their guests, from her noble parents to the faithful tenants of the house. All classes are mingled in the joyous equality that becomes the season, at once sacred and merry. There are carols for the eventful eve, and mummers for the festive day.

The Duke and Duchess, and every member of the family, had consented this year to keep their Christmas with the newly-married couple. Coningsby, too, was there, and all his friends. The party was numerous, gay, hearty, and happy; for they were all united by sympathy.

They were planning that Henry Sydney should be appointed Lord of Misrule, or ordained Abbot of Unreason at the least, so successful had been his revival of the Mummers, the Hobby-horse not forgotten. Their host had entrusted to Lord Henry the restoration of many old observances; and the joyous feeling which this celebration of Christmas had diffused throughout an extensive district

was a fresh argument in favour of Lord Henry's principle, that a mere mechanical mitigation of the material necessities of the humbler classes, a mitigation which must inevitably be limited, can never alone avail sufficiently to ameliorate their condition; that their condition is not merely 'a knife and fork question,' to use the coarse and shallow phrase of the Utilitarian school; that a simple satisfaction of the grosser necessities of our nature will not make a happy people; that you must cultivate the heart as well as seek to content the belly; and that the surest means to elevate the character of the people is to appeal to their affections.

There is nothing more interesting than to trace predisposition. An indefinite, yet strong sympathy with the peasantry of the realm had been one of the characteristic sensibilities of Lord Henry at Eton. Yet a schoolboy, he had busied himself with their pastimes and the details of their cottage economy. As he advanced in life the horizon of his views expanded with his intelligence and his experience; and the son of one of the noblest of our houses, to whom the delights of life are offered with fatal facility, on the very threshold of his career he devoted his time and thought, labour and life, to one vast and noble purpose, the elevation of the condition of the great body of the people.

'I vote for Buckhurst being Lord of Misrule,' said Lord Henry: 'I will be content with being his gentleman usher.'

'It shall be put to the vote,' said Lord Vere.

'No one has a chance against Buckhurst,' said Coningsby.

'Now, Sir Charles,' said Lady Everingham, 'your absolute sway is about to commence. And what is your will?'

'The first thing must be my formal installation,' said Buckhurst. 'I vote the Boar's head be carried in procession thrice round the hall, and Beau shall be the champion to challenge all who question my right. Duke, you shall be my chief butler, the Duchess my herb-woman. She is to walk before me, and scatter rosemary.'

Coningsby shall carry the Boar's head; Lady Theresa and Lady Everingham shall sing the canticle; Lord Everingham shall be marshal of the lists, and put all in the stocks who are found sober and decorous; Lyle shall be the palmer from the Eoly Land, and Vere shall ride the Hobby-horse. Some must carry cups of Hippocras, some lighted tapers; all must join in chorus.'

He ceased his instructions, and all hurried away to carry them into effect. Some hastily arrayed themselves in fanciful dresses, the ladies in robes of white, with garlands of flowers; some drew pieces of armour from the wall, and decked themselves with helm and hauberk; others waved ancient banners. They brought in the Boar's head on a large silver dish, and Coningsby raised it aloft. They formed into procession, the Duchess distributing rosemary; Buckhurst swaggering with all the majesty of Tamerlane, his mock court irresistibly humorous with their servility; and the sweet voice of Lady Everingham chanting the first verse of the canticle, followed in the second by the rich tones of Lady Theresa:

I.

Caput Apri defero
 Reddens laudes Domino.
 The Boar's heade in hande bring I,
 With garlandes gay and rosemary:
 I pray you all singe merrily,
 Qui estis in convivio.

II.

Caput Apri defero
 Reddens laudes Domino.
 The Boar's heade I understande
 Is the chief serbtee in this lunde
 Toke wherreeber it be fande,
 Serbite cum cantico.

The procession thrice paraded the hall. Then they stopped; and the Lord of Misrule ascended his throne, and his courtiers formed round him in circle. Behind him they held the ancient banners and waved their glittering arms,

and placed on a lofty and illuminated pedestal the Boar's head covered with garlands. It was a good picture, and the Lord of Misrule sustained his part with untiring energy. He was addressing his court in a pompous rhapsody of merry nonsense, when a servant approached Coningsby, and told him that he was wanted without.

Our hero retired unperceived. A despatch had arrived for him from London. Without any prescience of its purpose, he nevertheless broke the seal with a trembling hand. His presence was immediately desired in town : Lord Monmouth was dead.

CHAPTER II.

THIS was a crisis in the life of Coningsby ; yet, like many critical epochs, the person most interested in it was not sufficiently aware of its character. The first feeling which he experienced at the intelligence was sincere affliction. He was fond of his grandfather ; had received great kindness from him, and at a period of life when it was most welcome. The neglect and hardships of his early years, instead of leaving a prejudice against one who, by some, might be esteemed their author, had by their contrast only rendered Coningsby more keenly sensible of the solicitude and enjoyment which had been lavished on his happy youth.

The next impression on his mind was undoubtedly a natural and reasonable speculation on the effect of this bereavement on his fortunes. Lord Monmouth had more than once assured Coningsby that he had provided for him as became a near relative to whom he was attached, and in a manner which ought to satisfy the wants and wishes of an English gentleman. The allowance which Lord Monmouth had made him, as considerable as usually accorded to the eldest sons of wealthy peers, might justify him in estimating his future patrimony as extremely ample. He

was aware, indeed, that at a subsequent period his grandfather had projected for him fortunes of a still more elevated character. He looked to Coningsby as the future representative of an ancient barony, and had been purchasing territory with the view of supporting the title. But Coningsby did not by any means firmly reckon on these views being realised. He had a suspicion that in thwarting the wishes of his grandfather in not becoming a candidate for Darlford, he had at the moment arrested arrangements which, from the tone of Lord Monmouth's communication, he believed were then in progress for that purpose; and he thought it improbable, with his knowledge of his grandfather's habits, that Lord Monmouth had found either time or inclination to resume before his decease the completion of these plans. Indeed there was a period when, in adopting the course which he pursued with respect to Darlford, Coningsby was well aware that he perilled more than the large fortune which was to accompany the barony. Had not a separation between Lord Monmouth and his wife taken place simultaneously with Coningsby's difference with his grandfather, he was conscious that the consequences might have been even altogether fatal to his prospects; but the absence of her evil influence at such a conjuncture, its permanent removal, indeed, from the scene, coupled with his fortunate though not formal reconciliation with Lord Monmouth, had long ago banished from his memory all those apprehensions to which he had felt it impossible at the time to shut his eyes. Before he left town for Scotland he had made a farewell visit to his grandfather, who, though not as cordial as in old days, had been gracious; and Coningsby, during his excursion to the moors, and his various visits to the country, had continued at intervals to write to his grandfather, as had been for some years his custom. On the whole, with an indefinite feeling which, in spite of many a rational effort, did nevertheless haunt his mind, that this great and sudden event might exercise a vast and beneficial influence on his worldly position, Coningsby could not but feel some consolation in the affliction

which he sincerely experienced, in the hope that he might at all events now offer to Edith a home worthy of her charms, her virtues, and her love.

Although he had not seen her since their hurried yet sweet reconciliation in the gardens of Lady Everingham, Coningsby was never long without indirect intelligence of the incidents of her life; and the correspondence between Lady Everingham and Henry Sydney, while they were at the moors, had apprised him that Lord Beaumanoir's suit had terminated unsuccessfully almost immediately after his brother had quitted London.

It was late in the evening when Coningsby arrived in town: he called at once on Lord Eskdale, who was one of Lord Monmouth's executors; and he persuaded Coningsby, whom he saw depressed, to dine with him alone.

'You should not be seen at a club,' said the good-natured peer; 'and I remember myself in old days what was the wealth of an Albanian larder.'

Lord Eskdale, at dinner, talked frankly of the disposition of Lord Monmouth's property. He spoke as a matter of course that Coningsby was his grandfather's principal heir.

'I don't know whether you will be happier with a large fortune?' said Lord Eskdale. 'It is a troublesome thing: nobody is satisfied with what you do with it; very often not yourself. To maintain an equable expenditure; not to spend too much on one thing, too little on another, is an art. There must be a harmony, a keeping, in disbursement, which very few men have. Great wealth wearies. The thing to have is about ten thousand a year, and the world to think you have only five. There is some enjoyment then; one is let alone. But the instant you have a large fortune, duties commence. And then impudent fellows borrow your money; and if you ask them for it again, they go about town saying you are a screw.'

Lord Monmouth had died suddenly at his Richmond villa, which latterly he never quitted, at a little supper,

with no persons near him but those who were amusing. He suddenly found he could not lift his glass to his lips, and being extremely polite, waited a few minutes before he asked Clotilde, who was singing a sparkling drinking-song, to do him that service. When, in accordance with his request, she reached him, it was too late. The ladies shrieked, being frightened: at first they were in despair, but, after reflection, they evinced some intention of plundering the house. Villebecque, who was absent at the moment, arrived in time; and everybody became orderly and broken-hearted.

The body had been removed to Monmouth House, where it had been embalmed and laid in state. The funeral was not numerously attended. There was nobody in town; some distinguished connections, however, came up from the country, though it was a period inconvenient for such movements. After the funeral, the will was to be read in the principal saloon of Monmouth House, one of those gorgeous apartments that had excited the boyish wonder of Coningsby on his first visit to that paternal roof, and now hung in black, adorned with the escutcheon of the deceased peer.

The testamentary dispositions of the late lord were still unknown, though the names of his executors had been announced by his family solicitor, in whose custody the will and codicils had always remained. The executors under the will were Lord Eskdale, Mr. Ormsby, and Mr. Rigby. By a subsequent appointment Sidonia had been added. All these individuals were now present. Coningsby, who had been chief mourner, stood on the right hand of the solicitor, who sat at the end of a long table, round which, in groups, were ranged all who had attended the funeral, including several of the superior members of the household, among them M. Villebecque.

The solicitor rose and explained that though Lord Monmouth had been in the habit of very frequently adding codicils to his will, the original will, however changed or modified, had never been revoked; it was therefore neces-

sary to commence by reading that instrument. So saying, he sat down, and breaking the seals of a large packet, he produced the will of Philip Augustus, Marquess of Monmouth, which had been retained in his custody since its execution.

By this will, of the date of 1829, the sum of 10,000*l.* was left to Coningsby, then unknown to his grandfather; the same sum to Mr. Rigby. There was a great number of legacies, none of superior amount, most of them of less: these were chiefly left to old male companions, and women in various countries. There was an almost inconceivable number of small annuities to faithful servants, decayed actors, and obscure foreigners. The residue of his personal estate was left to four gentlemen, three of whom had quitted this world before the legator; the bequests, therefore, had lapsed. The fourth residuary legatee, in whom, according to the terms of the will, all would have consequently centred, was Mr. Rigby.

There followed several codicils which did not materially affect the previous disposition; one of them leaving a legacy of 20,000*l.* to the Princess Colonna; until they arrived at the latter part of the year 1832, when a codicil increased the 10,000*l.* left under the will to Coningsby to 50,000*l.*

After Coningsby's visit to the Castle in 1836 a very important change occurred in the disposition of Lord Monmouth's estate. The legacy of 50,000*l.* in his favour was revoked, and the same sum left to the Princess Lucretia. A similar amount was bequeathed to Mr. Rigby; and Coningsby was left sole residuary legatee.

The marriage led to a considerable modification. An estate of about nine thousand a year, which Lord Monmouth had himself purchased, and was therefore in his own disposition, was left to Coningsby. The legacy to Mr. Rigby was reduced to 20,000*l.*, and the whole of his residue left to his issue by Lady Monmouth. In case he died without issue, the estate bequeathed to Coningsby to be taken into account, and the residue then to be divided equally between Lady Monmouth and his grandson. It was under this

instrument that Sidonia had been appointed an executor, and to whom Lord Monmouth left, among others, the celebrated picture of the Holy Family by Murillo, as his friend had often admired it. To Lord Eskdale he left all his female miniatures, and to Mr. Ormsby his rare and splendid collection of French novels, and all his wines, except his Tokay, which he left, with his library, to Sir Robert Peel; though this legacy was afterwards revoked, in consequence of Sir Robert's conduct about the Irish corporations.

The solicitor paused and begged permission to send for a glass of water. While this was arranging there was a murmur at the lower part of the room, but little disposition to conversation among those in the vicinity of the lawyer. Coningsby was silent, his brow a little knit. Mr. Rigby was pale and restless, but said nothing. Mr. Ormsby took a pinch of snuff, and offered his box to Lord Eskdale, who was next to him. They exchanged glances, and made some observation about the weather. Sidonia stood apart, with his arms folded. He had not, of course, attended the funeral, nor had he as yet exchanged any recognition with Coningsby.

'Now, gentlemen,' said the solicitor, 'if you please, I will proceed.'

They came to the year 1839, the year Coningsby was at Hellingsley. This appeared to be a critical period in the fortunes of Lady Monmouth; while Coningsby's reached to the culminating point. Mr. Rigby was reduced to his original legacy under the will of 10,000*l.*; a sum of equal amount was bequeathed to Armand Villebecque, in acknowledgment of faithful services; all the dispositions in favour of Lady Monmouth were revoked, and she was limited to her moderate jointure of 3,000*l.* per annum, under the marriage settlement; while everything, without reserve, was left absolutely to Coningsby.

A subsequent codicil determined that the 10,000*l.* left to Mr. Rigby should be equally divided between him and Lucian Gay; but as some compensation Lord Monmouth left to the Right Honourable Nicholas Rigby the bust of that gentleman, which he had himself presented to his

Lordship, and which, at his desire, had been placed in the vestibule at Coningsby Castle, from the amiable motive that after Lord Monmouth's decease Mr. Rigby might wish, perhaps, to present it to some other friend.

Lord Eskdale and Mr. Ormsby took care not to catch the eye of Mr. Rigby. As for Coningsby, he saw nobody. He maintained, during the extraordinary situation in which he was placed, a firm demeanour ; but serene and regulated as he appeared to the spectators, his nerves were really strung to a high pitch.

There was yet another codicil. It bore the date of June 1840, and was made at Brighton, immediately after the separation with Lady Monmouth. It was the sight of this instrument that sustained Rigby at this great emergency. He had a wild conviction that, after all, it must set all right. He felt assured that, as Lady Monmouth had already been disposed of, it must principally refer to the disinheritor of Coningsby, secured by Rigby's well-timed and malignant misrepresentations of what had occurred in Lancashire during the preceding summer. And then to whom could Lord Monmouth leave his money? However he might cut and carve up his fortunes, Rigby, and especially at a moment when he had so served him, must come in for a considerable slice.

His prescient mind was right. All the dispositions in favour of 'my grandson Harry Coningsby' were revoked ; and he inherited from his grandfather only the interest of the sum of 10,000*l.* which had been originally bequeathed to him in his orphan boyhood. The executors had the power of investing the principal in any way they thought proper for his advancement in life, provided always it was not placed in 'the capital stock of any manufactory.'

Coningsby turned pale ; he lost his abstracted look ; he caught the eye of Rigby ; he read the latent malice of that nevertheless anxious countenance. What passed through the mind and being of Coningsby was thought and sensation enough for a year ; but it was as the flash that reveals a whole country, yet ceases to be ere one can say it lightens.

There was a revelation to him of an inward power that should baffle these conventional calamities, a natural and sacred confidence in his youth and health, and knowledge and convictions. Even the recollection of Edith was not unaccompanied with some sustaining associations. At least the mightiest foe to their union was departed.

All this was the impression of an instant, simultaneous with the reading of the words of form with which the last testamentary disposition of the Marquess of Monmouth left the sum of 30,000*l.* to Armand Villebecque; and all the rest, residue, and remainder of his unentailed property, wheresoever, and whatsoever it might be, amounting in value to nearly a million sterling, was given, devised, and bequeathed to Flora, commonly called Flora Villebecque, the step-child of the said Armand Villebecque, 'but who is my natural daughter by Marie Estelle Matteau, an actress at the Théâtre Français in the years 1811-15, by the name of Stella.'

CHAPTER III.

'THIS is a crash!' said Coningsby, with a grave rather than agitated countenance, to Sidonia, as his friend came up to greet him, without, however, any expression of condolence.

'This time next year you will not think so,' said Sidonia.

Coningsby shrugged his shoulders.

'The principal annoyance of this sort of miscarriage,' said Sidonia, 'is the condolence of the gentle world. I think we may now depart. I am going home to dine. Come, and discuss your position. For the present we will not speak of it.' So saying, Sidonia good-naturedly got Coningsby out of the room.

They walked together to Sidonia's house in Carlton Gardens, neither of them making the slightest allusion to the catastrophe; Sidonia inquiring where he had been,

what he had been doing, since they last met, and himself conversing in his usual vein, though with a little more feeling in his manner than was his custom. When they had arrived there, Sidonia ordered their dinner instantly, and during the interval between the command and its appearance, he called Coningsby's attention to an old German painting he had just received, its brilliant colouring and quaint costumes.

'Eat, and an appetite will come,' said Sidonia, when he observed Coningsby somewhat reluctant. 'Take some of that Chablis: it will put you right; you will find it delicious.'

In this way some twenty minutes passed; their meal was over, and they were alone together.

'I have been thinking all this time of your position,' said Sidonia.

'A sorry one I fear,' said Coningsby.

'I really cannot see that,' said his friend. 'You have experienced this morning a disappointment, but not a calamity. If you had lost your eye it would have been a calamity: no combination of circumstances could have given you another. There are really no miseries except natural miseries; conventional misfortunes are mere illusions. What seems conventionally, in a limited view, a great misfortune, if subsequently viewed in its results, is often the happiest incident in one's life.'

'I hope the day may come when I may feel this.'

'Now is the moment when philosophy is of use; that is to say, now is the moment when you should clearly comprehend the circumstances which surround you. Holiday philosophy is mere idleness. You think, for example, that you have just experienced a great calamity, because you have lost the fortune on which you counted?'

'I must say I do.'

'I ask you again, which would you have rather lost, your grandfather's inheritance or your right leg?'

'Most certainly my inheritance.'

'Or your left arm?'

‘Still the inheritance.’

‘Would you have received the inheritance on condition that your front teeth should be knocked out?’

‘No.’

‘Would you have given up a year of your life for that fortune trebled?’

‘Even at twenty-three I would have refused the terms.’

‘Come, come, Coningsby, the calamity cannot be very great.’

‘Why, you have put it in an ingenious point of view; and yet it is not so easy to convince a man, that he should be content who has lost everything.’

‘You have a great many things at this moment that you separately prefer to the fortune that you have forfeited. How then can you be said to have lost everything?’

‘What have I?’ said Coningsby, despondingly.

‘You have health, youth, good looks, great abilities, considerable knowledge, a fine courage, a lofty spirit, and no contemptible experience. With each of these qualities one might make a fortune; the combination ought to command the highest.’

‘You console me,’ said Coningsby, with a faint blush and a fainter smile.

‘I teach you the truth. That is always solacing. I think you are a most fortunate young man; I should not have thought you more fortunate if you had been your grandfather’s heir; perhaps less so. But I wish you to comprehend your position: if you understand it you will cease to lament.’

‘But what should I do?’

‘Bring your intelligence to bear on the right object. I make you no offers of fortune, because I know you would not accept them, and indeed I have no wish to see you a loungee in life. If you had inherited a great patrimony, it is possible your natural character and previous culture might have saved you from its paralysing influence; but it is a question, even with you. Now you are free; that is to say, you are free, if you are not in debt. A man who has

not seen the world, whose fancy is harassed with glittering images of pleasures he has never experienced, cannot live on 300*l.* per annum; but you can. You have nothing to haunt your thoughts, or disturb the abstraction of your studies. You have seen the most beautiful women; you have banqueted in palaces; you know what heroes, and wits, and statesmen are made of: and you can draw on your memory instead of your imagination for all those *dazzling and interesting objects that make the inexperienced restless, and are the cause of what are called scrapes.* But you can do nothing if you be in debt. You must be free. *Before, therefore, we proceed, I must beg you to be frank on this head. If you have any absolute or contingent incumbrances, tell me of them without reserve, and permit me to clear them at once to any amount. You will sensibly oblige me in so doing: because I am interested in watching your career, and if the racer start with a clog my psychological observations will be imperfect.'*

'You are, indeed, a friend; and had I debts I would ask you to pay them. I have nothing of the kind. My grandfather was so lavish in his allowance to me that I never *got into difficulties.* Besides, there are horses and things without end which I must sell, and money at Drummonds.'

'That will produce your outfit, whatever the course you adopt. I conceive there are too careers which deserve your consideration. In the first place there is Diplomacy. If you decide upon that, I can assist you. There exist between me and the Minister such relations that I can at once secure you that first step which is so difficult to obtain. After that, much, if not all, depends on yourself. But I could advance you, provided you were capable. You should, at least, not languish for want of preferment. In an important post, I could throw in your way advantages which would soon permit you to control cabinets. Information commands the world. I doubt not your success, and for such a career, speedy. Let us assume it as a fact. Is it a result satisfactory? Suppose yourself in a dozen

years a Plenipotentiary at a chief court, or at a critical post, with a red ribbon and the Privy Council in immediate perspective; and, after a lengthened career, a pension and a peerage. Would that satisfy you? You don't look excited. I am hardly surprised. In your position it would not satisfy me. A Diplomatist is, after all, a phantom. There is a want of nationality about his being. I always look upon Diplomatists as the Hobrows of politics; without country, political creeds, popular convictions, that strong reality of existence which pervades the career of an eminent citizen in a free and great country.'

'You read my thoughts,' said Coningsby. 'I should be sorry to sever myself from England.'

'There remains then the other, the greater, the nobler career,' said Sidonia, 'which in England may give you all, the Bar. I am absolutely persuaded that with the requisite qualifications, and with perseverance, success at the Bar is certain. It may be retarded or precipitated by circumstances, but cannot be ultimately affected. You have a right to count with your friends on no lack of opportunities when you are ripe for them. You appear to me to have all the qualities necessary for the Bar; and you may count on that perseverance which is indispensable, for the reason I have before mentioned, because it will be sustained by your experience.'

'I have resolved,' said Coningsby; 'I will try for the Great Seal.'

CHAPTER IV.

ALONE in his chambers, no longer under the sustaining influence of Sidonia's converse and counsel, the shades of night descending and bearing gloom to the gloomy, all the excitement of his spirit evaporated, the heart of Coningsby sank. All now depended on himself, and in that self he had no trust. Why should he succeed? Success was the

most rare of results. Thousands fail; units triumph. And even success could only be conducted to him by the course of many years. His career, even if prosperous, was now to commence by the greatest sacrifice which the heart of man could be called upon to sustain. Upon the stern altar of his fortunes he must immolate his first and enduring love. Before, he had a perilous position to offer Edith; now he had none. The future might then have aided them; there was no combination which could improve his present. Under any circumstances he must, after all his thoughts and studies, commence a new novitiate, and before he could enter the arena must pass years of silent and obscure preparation. 'Twas very bitter. He looked up, his eye caught that drawing of the towers of Hellingsley which she had given him in the days of their happy hearts. That was all that was to remain of their loves. He was to bear it to the future scene of his labours, to remind him through revolving years of toil and routine, that he too had had his romance, had roamed in fair gardens, and whispered in willing ears the secrets of his passion. That drawing was to become the altar-picco of his life.

Coningsby passed an agitated night of broken sleep, waking often with a consciousness of having experienced some great misfortune, yet with an indefinite conception of its nature. He woke exhausted and dispirited. It was a gloomy day, a raw north-easter blowing up the cloisters of the Albany, in which the fog was lingering, the newspaper on his breakfast-table, full of rumoured particulars of his grandfather's will, which had of course been duly digested by all who knew him. What a contrast to St. Geneviève! To the bright, bracing morn of that merry Christmas! That radiant and cheerful scene, and those gracious and beaming personages, seemed another world and order of beings to the one he now inhabited, and the people with whom he must now commune. The Great Seal indeed! It was the wild excitement of despair, the frenzied hope that blends inevitably with absolute ruin, that could alone have inspired such a hallucination! His unstrung heart

deserted him. His energies could rally no more. He gave orders that he was at home to no one; and in his morning gown and slippers, with his feet resting on the fireplace, the once high-souled and noble-hearted Coningsby delivered himself up to despair.

The day passed in a dark trance rather than a reverie. Nothing rose to his consciousness. He was like a particle of chaos; at the best, a glimmering entity of some shadowy Hades. Towards evening the wind changed, the fog dispersed, there came a clear starry night, brisk and bright. Coningsby roused himself, dressed, and wrapping his cloak around him, sallied forth. Once more in the mighty streets, surrounded by millions, his petty griefs and personal fortunes assumed their proper position. Well had Sidonia taught him, view everything in its relation to the rest. 'Tis the secret of all wisdom. Here was the mightiest of modern cities; the rival even of the most celebrated of the ancient. Whether he inherited or forfeited fortunes, what was it to the passing throng? They would not share his splendour, or his luxury, or his comfort. But a word from his lip, a thought from his brain, expressed at the right time, at the right place, might turn their hearts, might influence their passions, might change their opinions, might affect their destiny. Nothing is great but the personal. As civilisation advances, the accidents of life become each day less important. The power of man, his greatness and his glory, depend on essential qualities. Brains every day become more precious than blood. You must give men new ideas, you must teach them new words, you must modify their manners, you must change their laws, you must root out prejudices, subvert convictions, if you wish to be great. Greatness no longer depends on rentals, the world is too rich; nor on pedigrees, the world is too knowing.

'The greatness of this city destroys my misery,' said Coningsby, 'and my genius shall conquer its greatness!'

This conviction of power in the midst of despair was a revelation of intrinsic strength. It is indeed the test of a

creative spirit. From that moment all petty fears for an ordinary future quitted him. He felt that he must be prepared for great sacrifices, for infinite suffering; that there must devolve on him a bitter inheritance of obscurity, struggle, envy, and hatred, vulgar prejudice, base criticism, petty hostilities, but the dawn would break, and the hour arrive, when the welcome morning hymn of his success and his fame would sound and be re-echoed.

He returned to his rooms; calm, resolute. He slept the deep sleep of a man void of anxiety, that has neither hope nor fear to haunt his visions, but is prepared to rise on the morrow collected for the great human struggle.

And the morning came. Fresh, vigorous, not rash or precipitate, yet determined to lose no time in idle meditation, Coningsby already resolved at once to quit his present residence, was projecting a visit to some legal quarter, where he intended in future to reside, when his servant brought him a note. The handwriting was feminine. The note was from Flora. The contents were brief. She begged Mr. Coningsby, with great earnestness, to do her the honour and the kindness of calling on her at his earliest convenience, at the hotel in Brook Street where she now resided.

It was an interview which Coningsby would rather have avoided; yet it seemed to him, after a moment's reflection, neither just, nor kind, nor manly, to refuse her request. Flora had not injured him. She was, after all, his kin. Was it for a moment to be supposed that he was envious of her lot? He replied, therefore, that in an hour he would wait upon her.

In an hour, then, two individuals are to be brought together whose first meeting was held under circumstances most strangely different. Then Coningsby was the patron, a generous and spontaneous one, of a being obscure, almost friendless, and sinking under bitter mortification. His favour could not be the less appreciated because he was the chosen relative of a powerful noble. That noble was no more; his vast inheritance had devolved on the disre-

garded, even despised actress, whose suffering emotions Coningsby had then soothed, and whose fortune had risen on the destruction of all his prospects, and the balk of all his aspirations.

Flora was alone when Coningsby was ushered into the room. The extreme delicacy of her appearance was increased by her deep mourning; and seated in a cushioned chair, from which she seemed to rise with an effort, she certainly presented little of the character of a fortunate and prosperous heiress.

'You are very good to come to me,' she said, faintly smiling.

Coningsby extended his hand to her affectionately, in which she placed her own, looking down much embarrassed.

'You have an agreeable situation here,' said Coningsby, trying to break the first awkwardness of their meeting.

'Yes; but I hope not to stop here long.'

'You are going abroad?'

'No; I hope never to leave England!'

There was a slight pause; and then Flora sighed and said,

'I wish to speak to you on a subject that gives me pain; yet of which I must speak. You think I have injured you?'

'I am sure,' said Coningsby, in a tone of great kindness 'that you could injure no one.'

'I have robbed you of your inheritance.'

'It was not mine by any right, legal or moral. There were others who might have urged an equal claim to it; and there are many who will now think that you might have preferred a superior one.'

'You had enemies; I was not one. They sought to benefit themselves by injuring you. They have not benefited themselves; let them not say that they have at least injured you.'

'We will care not what they say,' said Coningsby; 'I can sustain my lot.'

'Would that I could mine!' said Flora. She sighed

again with a downcast glance. Then looking up embarrassed and blushing deeply, she added, 'I wish to restore to you that fortune of which I have unconsciously and unwillingly deprived you.'

'The fortune is yours, dear Flora, by every right,' said Coningsby, much moved; 'and there is no one who wishes more fervently that it may contribute to your happiness than I do.'

'It is killing me,' said Flora, mournfully; then speaking with unusual animation, with a degree of excitement, she continued, 'I must tell what I feel. This fortune is yours. I am happy in the inheritance, if you generously receive it from me, because Providence has made me the means of baffling your enemies. I never thought to be so happy as I shall be if you will generously accept this fortune, always intended for you. I have lived then for a purpose; I have not lived in vain; I have returned to you some service, however humble, for all your goodness to me in my unhappiness.'

'You are, as I have ever thought you, the kindest and most tender-hearted of beings. But you misconceive our mutual positions, my gentle Flora. The custom of the world does not permit such acts to either of us as you contemplate. The fortune is yours. It is left you by one on whose affections you had the highest claim. I will not say that so large an inheritance does not bring with it an alarming responsibility; but you are not unequal to it. Have confidence in yourself. You have a good heart; you have good sense; you have a well-principled being. Your spirit will mount with your fortunes, and blend with them. You will be happy.'

'And you?'

'I shall soon learn to find content, if not happiness, from other sources,' said Coningsby; 'and mere riches, however vast, could at no time have secured my felicity.'

'But they may secure that which brings felicity,' said Flora, speaking in a choking voice, and not meeting the glance of Coningsby. 'You had some views in life which

displeased him who has done all this ; they may be, they must be, affected by this fatal caprice. Speak to me, for I cannot speak, dear Mr. Coningsby ; do not let me believe that I, who would sacrifice my life for your happiness, am the cause of such calamities !'

'Whatever be my lot, I repeat I can sustain it,' said Coningsby, with a cheek of scarlet.

'Ah ! he is angry with me,' exclaimed Flora ; 'he is angry with me !' and the tears stole down her pale cheek.

'No, no, no ! dear Flora ; I have no other feelings to you than those of affection and respect,' and Coningsby, much agitated, drew his chair nearer to her, and took her hand. 'I am gratified by these kind wishes, though they are utterly impracticable ; but they are the witnesses of your sweet disposition and your noble spirit. There never shall exist between us, under any circumstances, other feelings than those of kin and kindness.'

He rose as if to depart. When she saw that, she started, and seemed to summon all her energies.

'You are going,' she exclaimed, 'and I have said nothing, I have said nothing ; and I shall never see you again. Let me tell you what I mean. This fortune is yours ; it must be yours. It is an arrow in my heart. Do not think I am speaking from a momentary impulse. I know myself. I have lived so much alone, I have had so little to deceive or to delude me, that I know myself. If you will not let me do justice you declare my doom. I cannot live if my existence is the cause of all your prospects being blasted, and the sweetest dreams of your life being defeated. When I die, these riches will be yours ; that you cannot prevent. Refuse my present offer, and you seal the fate of that unhappy Flora whose fragile life has hung for years on the memory of your kindness.'

'You must not say these words, dear Flora ; you must not indulge in these gloomy feelings. You must live, and you must live happily. You have every charm and virtue which should secure happiness. The duties and the affections of existence will fall to your lot. It is one that will

always interest me, for I shall ever be your friend. You have conferred on me one of the most delightful of feelings, gratitude, and for that I bless you. I will soon see you again.' Mournfully he bade her farewell.

CHAPTER V.

ABOUT a week after this interview with Flora, as Coningsby one morning was about to sally forth from the Albany to visit some chambers in the Temple, to which his notice had been attracted, there was a loud ring, a bustle in the hall, and Henry Sydney and Buckhurst were ushered in:

There never was such a cordial meeting; and yet the faces of his friends were serious. The truth is, the paragraphs in the newspapers had circulated in the country, they had written to Coningsby, and after a brief delay he had confirmed their worst apprehensions. Immediately they came up to town. Henry Sydney, a younger son, could offer little but sympathy, but he declared it was his intention also to study for the bar, so that they should not be divided. Buckhurst, after many embraces and some ordinary talk, took Coningsby aside, and said, 'My dear fellow, I have no objection to Henry Sydney hearing everything I say, but still these are subjects which men like to be discussed in private. Of course I expect you to share my fortune. There is enough for both. We will have an exact division.'

There was something in Buckhurst's fervent resolution very lovable and a little humorous, just enough to put one in good temper with human nature and life. If there were any fellow's fortune in the world that Coningsby would share, Buckhurst's would have had the preference; but while he pressed his hand, and with a glance in which a tear and a smile seemed to contend for mastery, he gently indicated why such arrangements were, with our present manners, impossible.

'I see,' said Buckhurst, after a moment's thought, 'I quite agree with you. The thing cannot be done; and, to tell you the truth, a fortune is a bore. What I vote that we three do at once is, to take plenty of ready-money, and enter the Austrian service. By Jove! it is the only thing to do.'

'There is something in that,' said Coningsby. 'In the meantime, suppose you two fellows walk with me to the Temple, for I have an appointment to look at some chambers.'

It was a fine day, and it was by no means a gloomy walk. Though the two friends had arrived full of indignation against Lord Monmouth, and miserable about their companion, once more in his society, and finding little difference in his carriage, they assumed unconsciously their habitual tone. As for Buckhurst, he was delighted with the Temple, which he visited for the first time. The name enchanted him. The tombs in the church convinced him that the Crusades were the only career. He would have himself become a law student if he might have prosecuted his studies in chain armour. The calmer Henry Sydney was consoled for the misfortunes of Coningsby by a fanciful project himself to pass a portion of his life amid these halls and courts, gardens and terraces, that maintain in the heart of a great city in the nineteenth century, so much of the grave romance and picturesque decorum of our past manners. Henry Sydney was sanguine; he was reconciled to the disinheritance of Coningsby by the conviction that it was a providential dispensation to make him a Lord Chancellor.

These faithful friends remained in town with Coningsby until he was established in Paper Buildings, and had become a pupil of a celebrated special pleader. They would have remained longer had not he himself suggested that it was better that they should part. It seemed a terrible catastrophe after all the visions of their boyish days, their college dreams, and their dazzling adventures in the world.

'And this is the end of Coningsby, the brilliant Co-

ningsby, that we all loved, that was to be our leader!' said Buckhurst to Lord Henry as they quitted him. 'Well, come what may, life has lost something of its bloom.'

'The great thing now,' said Lord Henry, 'is to keep up the chain of our friendship. We must write to him very often, and contrive to be frequently together. It is dreadful to think that in the ways of life our hearts may become estranged. I never felt more wretched than I do at this moment, and yet I have faith that we shall not lose him.'

'Amen!' said Buckhurst; 'but I feel my plan about the Austrian service was, after all, the only thing. The Continent offers a career. He might have been prime minister; several strangers have been; and as for war, look at Brown and Laudohn, and half a hundred others. I had a much better chance of being a field-marshal than he has of being a Lord Chancellor.'

'I feel quite convinced that Coningsby will be Lord Chancellor,' said Henry Sydney, gravely.

This change of life for Coningsby was a great social revolution. It was sudden and complete. Within a month after the death of his grandfather his name had been erased from all his fashionable clubs, his horses and carriages sold, and he had become a student of the Temple. He entirely devoted himself to his new pursuit. His being was completely absorbed in it. There was nothing to haunt his mind; no unexperienced scene or sensation of life to distract his intelligence. One sacred thought alone indeed there remained, shrined in the innermost sanctuary of his heart and consciousness. But it was a tradition, no longer a hope. The moment that he had fairly recovered from the first shock of his grandfather's will; had clearly ascertained the consequences to himself, and had resolved on the course to pursue; he had communicated unreservedly with Oswald Millbank, and had renounced those pretensions to the hand of his sister which it ill became the destitute to prefer.

His letter was answered in person. Millbank met Henry Sydney and Buckhurst at the chambers of Coningsby. Once more they were all four together; but under what

different circumstances, and with what different prospects from those which attended their separation at Eton! Alone with Coningsby, Millbank spoke to him things which letters could not convey. He bore to him all the sympathy and devotion of Edith; but they would not conceal from themselves that, at this moment, and in the present state of affairs, all was hopeless. In no way did Coningsby ever permit himself to intimate to Oswald the cause of his disinheritance. He was, of course, silent on it to his other friends; as any communication of the kind must have touched on a subject that was consecrated in his inmost soul.

CHAPTER VI.

THE state of political parties in England in the spring of 1841 offered a most remarkable contrast to their condition at the period commemorated in the first chapter of this work. The banners of the Conservative camp at this moment lowered on the Whig forces, as the gathering host of the Norman invader frowned on the coast of Sussex. The Whigs were not yet conquered, but they were doomed; and they themselves knew it. The mistake which was made by the Conservative leaders in not retaining office in 1839; and, whether we consider their conduct in a national and constitutional light, or as a mere question of political tactics and party prudence, it was unquestionably a great mistake; had infused into the corps of Whig authority a kind of galvanic action, which only the superficial could mistake for vitality. Even to form a basis for their future operations, after the conjuncture of '39, the Whigs were obliged to make a fresh inroad on the revenue, the daily increasing debility of which was now arresting attention and exciting public alarm. It was clear that the catastrophe of the government would be financial.

Under all the circumstances of the case, the conduct of

the Whig Cabinet, in their final propositions, cannot be described as deficient either in boldness or prudence. The policy which they recommended was in itself a sagacious and spirited policy; but they erred in supposing that, at the period it was brought forward, any measure promoted by the Whigs could have obtained general favour in the country. The Whigs were known to be feeble; they were looked upon as tricksters. The country knew they were opposed by a powerful party; and though there certainly never was any authority for the belief, the country did believe that that powerful party were influenced by great principles; had in their view a definite and national policy; and would secure to England, instead of a feeble administration and fluctuating opinions, energy and a creed.

The future effect of the Whig propositions of '41 will not be detrimental to that party, even if in the interval they be appropriated piecemeal, as will probably be the case, by their Conservative successors. But for the moment, and in the plight in which the Whig party found themselves, it was impossible to have devised measures more conducive to their precipitate fall. Great interests were menaced by a weak government. The consequence was inevitable. Tadpole and Taper saw it in a moment. They snuffed the factious air, and felt the coming storm. Notwithstanding the extreme congeniality of these worthies, there was a little latent jealousy between them. Tadpole worshipped Registration: Taper adored a Cry. Tadpole always maintained that it was the winnowing of the electoral lists that could alone gain the day; Taper, on the contrary, faithful to ancient traditions, was ever of opinion that the game must ultimately be won by popular clamour. It always seemed so impossible that the Conservative party could ever be popular; the extreme graciousness and personal popularity of the leaders not being sufficiently apparent to be esteemed an adequate set-off against the inveterate odium that attached to their opinions; that the Tadpole philosophy was the favoured tenet in high places; and Taper had had his knuckles well rapped more than once

for manœuvring too actively against the New Poor-law, and for hiring several link-boys to hawl a much-wronged lady's name in the Park when the Court prorogued Parliament.

And now, after all, in 1841, it seemed that Taper was right. There was a great clamour in every quarter, and the clamour was against the Whigs and in favour of Conservative principles. What Canadian timber-merchants meant by Conservative principles, it is not difficult to conjecture; or West Indian planters. It was tolerably clear on the hustings what squires and farmers, and their followers, meant by Conservative principles. What they mean by Conservative principles now is another question: and whether *Conservative principles mean something higher* than a perpetuation of fiscal arrangements, some of them impolitic, none of them important. But no matter what different bodies of men understood by the cry in which they all joined, the Cry existed. Taper beat Tadpole; and the great Conservative party beat the shattered and exhausted Whigs.

Notwithstanding the abstraction of his legal studies, Coningsby could not be altogether insensible to the political crisis. In the political world of course he never mixed, but the friends of his boyhood were deeply interested in affairs, and they lost no opportunity which he would permit them, of cultivating his society. Their occasional fellowship, a visit now and then to Sidonia, and a call sometimes on Flora, who lived at Richmond, comprised his social relations. His general acquaintance did not desert him, but he was out of sight, and did not wish to be remembered. Mr. Ormsby asked him to dinner, and occasionally mourned over his fate in the bow window of White's; while Lord Eskdale even went to see him in the Temple, was interested in his progress, and said, with an encouraging look, that, when he was called to the bar, all his friends must join and get up the steam. Coningsby had once met Mr. Rigby, who was walking with the Duke of Agincourt, which was probably the reason he could not notice a lawyer. Mr. Rigby cut Coningsby.

Lord Eskdale had obtained from Villebecque accurate details as to the cause of Coningsby being disinherited. Our hero, if one in such fallen fortunes may still be described as a hero, had mentioned to Lord Eskdale his sorrow that his grandfather had died in anger with him, but Lord Eskdale, without dwelling on the subject, had assured him that he had reason to believe that if Lord Monmouth had lived, affairs would have been different. He had altered the disposition of his property at a moment of great and general irritation and excitement; and had been too indolent, perhaps really too indisposed, which he was unwilling ever to acknowledge, to recur to a calmer and more equitable settlement. Lord Eskdale had been more frank with Sidonia, and had told him all about the refusal to become a candidate for Darlford against Mr. Millbank; the communication of Rigby to Lord Monmouth, as to the presence of Oswald Millbank at the castle, and the love of Coningsby for his sister; all these details, furnished by Villebecque to Lord Eskdale, had been truly transferred by that nobleman to his co-executor; and Sidonia, when he had sufficiently digested them, had made Lady Wallinger acquainted with the whole history,

The dissolution of the Whig Parliament by the Whigs, the project of which had reached Lord Monmouth a year before, and yet in which nobody believed to the last moment, at length took place. All the world was dispersed in the heart of the season, and our solitary student of the Temple, in his lonely chambers, notwithstanding all his efforts, found his eye rather wander over the pages of Tidd and Chitty as he remembered that the great event to which he had so looked forward was now occurring, and he, after all, was no actor in the mighty drama. It was to have been the epoch of his life; when he was to have found himself in that proud position for which all the studies, and meditations, and higher impulses of his nature had been preparing him. It was a keen trial of a man. Every one of his friends and old companions were candidates, and with sanguine prospects. Lord Henry was certain for a division of his county; Buckhurst harangued a large agri-

cultural borough in his vicinity; Eustace Lyle and Vere stood in coalition for a Yorkshire town; and Oswald Millbank solicited the suffrages of an important manufacturing constituency. They sent their addresses to Coningsby. He was deeply interested as he traced in them the influence of his own mind; often recognised the very expressions to which he had habituated them. Amid the confusion of a general election, no unimpassioned critic had time to canvass the language of an address to an isolated constituency; yet an intelligent speculator on the movements of political parties might have detected in these public declarations some intimation of new views, and of a tone of political feeling that has unfortunately been too long absent from the public life of this country.

It was the end of a sultry July day, the last ray of the sun shooting down Pall Mall sweltering with dust; there was a crowd round the doors of the Carlton and the Reform Clubs, and every now and then an express arrived with the agitating bulletin of a fresh defeat or a new triumph. Coningsby was walking up Pall Mall. He was going to dine at the Oxford and Cambridge Club, the only club on whose list he had retained his name, that he might occasionally have the pleasure of meeting an Eton or Cambridge friend without the annoyance of encountering any of his former fashionable acquaintances. He lighted in his walk on Mr. Tadpole and Mr. Taper, both of whom he knew. The latter did not notice him, but Mr. Tadpole, more good-natured, bestowed on him a rough nod, not unmarked by a slight expression of coarse pity.

Coningsby ordered his dinner, and then took up the evening papers, where he learnt the return of Vere and Lyle; and read a speech of Buckhurst denouncing the Venetian Constitution, to the amazement of several thousand persons, apparently not a little terrified by this unknown danger, now first introduced to their notice. Being true Englishmen, they were all against Buckhurst's opponent, who was of the Venetian party, and who ended by calling out Buckhurst for his personalities.

Coningsby had dined, and was reading in the library, when a waiter brought up a third edition of the *Sun*, with electioneering bulletins from the manufacturing districts to the very latest hour. Some large letters which expressed the name of Darlford caught his eye. There seemed great excitement in that borough; strange proceedings had happened. The column was headed, 'Extraordinary Affair! Withdrawal of the Liberal Candidate! Two Tory Candidates in the field!!!'

His eye glanced over an animated speech of Mr. Millbank, his countenance changed, his heart palpitated. Mr. Millbank had resigned the representation of the town, but not from weakness; his avocations demanded his presence; he had been requested to let his son supply his place, but his son was otherwise provided for; he should always take a deep interest in the town and trade of Darlford; he hoped that the link between the borough and Hellingsley would be ever cherished; loud cheering; he wished in parting from them to take a step which should conciliate all parties, put an end to local heats and factious contentions, and secure the town an able and worthy representative. For these reasons he begged to propose to them a gentleman who bore a name which many of them greatly honoured; for himself, he knew the individual, and it was his firm opinion that whether they considered his talents, his character, or the ancient connection of his family with the district, he could not propose a candidate more worthy of their confidence than HARRY CONINGSBY, Esq.

This proposition was received with that wild enthusiasm which occasionally bursts out in the most civilised communities. The contest between Millbank and Rigby was equally balanced, neither party was over-confident. The Conservatives were not particularly zealous in behalf of their champion; there was no Marquess of Monmouth and no Coningsby Castle now to back him; he was fighting on his own resources, and he was a beaten horse. The Liberals did not like the prospect of a defeat, and dreaded the mortification of Rigby's triumph. The Moderate men, who

thought more of local than political circumstances, liked the name of Coningsby. Mr. Millbank had dexterously prepared his leading supporters for the substitution. Some traits of the character and conduct of Coningsby had been cleverly circulated. Thus there was a combination of many favourable causes in his favour. In half an hour's time his image was stamped on the brain of every inhabitant of the borough as an interesting and accomplished youth, who had been wronged, and who deserved to be rewarded. It was whispered that Rigby was his enemy. Magog Wrath and his mob offered Mr. Millbank's committee to throw Mr. Rigby into the river, or to burn down his hotel, in case he was prudent enough not to show. Mr. Rigby determined to fight to the last. All his hopes were now staked on the successful result of this contest. It were impossible if he were returned that his friends could refuse him high office. The whole of Lord Monmouth's reduced legacy was devoted to this end. The third edition of the *Sun* left Mr. Rigby in vain attempting to address an infuriated populace.

Here was a revolution in the fortunes of our forlorn Coningsby! When his grandfather first sent for him to Monmouth House, his destiny was not verging on greater vicissitudes. He rose from his seat, and was surprised that all the silent gentlemen who were about him did not mark his agitation. Not an individual there that he knew. It was now an hour to midnight, and to-morrow the almost unconscious candidate was to go to the poll. In a tumult of suppressed emotion, Coningsby returned to his chambers. He found a letter in his box from Oswald Millbank, who had been twice at the Temple. Oswald had been returned without a contest, and had reached Darlford in time to hear Coningsby nominated. He set off instantly to London, and left at his friend's chambers a rapid narrative of what had happened, with information that he should call on him again on the morrow at nine o'clock, when they were to repair together immediately to Darlford in time for Coningsby to be chaired, for no one entertained a doubt of his triumph.

Coningsby did not sleep a wink that night, and yet when he rose early felt fresh enough for any exploit, however difficult or hazardous. He felt as an Egyptian does when the Nile rises after its elevation had been despaired of. At the very lowest ebb of his fortunes, an event had occurred which seemed to restore all. He dared not contemplate the ultimate result of all these wonderful changes. Enough for him, that when all seemed dark, he was about to be returned to Parliament by the father of Edith, and his vanquished rival who was to bite the dust before him was the author of all his misfortunes. Love, Vengeance, Justice, the glorious pride of having acted rightly, the triumphant sense of complete and absolute success, here were chaotic materials from which order was at length evolved; and all subsided in an overwhelming feeling of gratitude to that Providence that had so signally protected him.

There was a knock at the door. It was Oswald. They embraced. It seemed that Oswald was as excited as Coningsby. His eye sparkled, his manner was energetic.

'We must talk it all over during our journey. We have not a minute to spare.'

During that journey Coningsby learned something of the course of affairs which gradually had brought about so singular a revolution in his favour. We mentioned that Sidonia had acquired a thorough knowledge of the circumstances which had occasioned and attended the disinheritance of Coningsby. These he had told to Lady Wallinger, first by letter, afterwards in more detail on her arrival in London. Lady Wallinger had conferred with her husband. She was not surprised at the goodness of Coningsby, and she sympathised with all his calamities. He had ever been the favourite of her judgment, and her romance had always consisted in blending his destinies with those of her beloved Edith. Sir Joseph was a judicious man, who never cared to commit himself; a little selfish, but good, just, and honourable, with some impulses, only a little afraid of them; but then his wife stepped in

like an angel, and gave them the right direction. They were both absolutely impressed with Coningsby's admirable conduct, and Lady Wallinger was determined that her husband should express to others the convictions which he acknowledged in unison with herself. Sir Joseph spoke to Mr. Millbank, who stared; but Sir Joseph spoke feebly. Lady Wallinger conveyed all this intelligence, and all her impressions, to Oswald and Edith. The younger Millbank talked with his father, who, making no admissions, listened with interest, inveighed against Lord Monmouth, and condemned his will.

After some time, Mr. Millbank made inquiries about Coningsby, took an interest in his career, and, like Lord Eskdale, declared that when he was called to the bar, his friends would have an opportunity to evince their sincerity. Affairs remained in this state, until Oswald thought that circumstances were sufficiently ripe to urge his father on the subject. The position which Oswald had assumed at Millbank had necessarily made him acquainted with the affairs and fortune of his father. When he computed the vast wealth which he knew was at his parent's command, and recalled Coningsby in his humble chambers, toiling after all his noble efforts without any results, and his sister pining in a provincial solitude, Oswald began to curse wealth, and to ask himself what was the use of all their marvellous industry and supernatural skill? He addressed his father with that irresistible frankness which a strong faith can alone inspire. What are the objects of wealth, if not to bless those who possess our hearts? The only daughter, the friend to whom the only son was indebted for his life, here are two beings surely whom one would care to bless, and both are unhappy. Mr. Millbank listened without prejudice, for he was already convinced. But he felt some interest in the present conduct of Coningsby. A Coningsby working for his bread was a novel incident for him. He wished to be assured of its authenticity. He was resolved to convince himself of the fact. And perhaps he would have gone on yet for a little

time, and watched the progress of the experiment, already interested and delighted by what had reached him, had not the dissolution brought affairs to a crisis. The misery of Oswald at the position of Coningsby, the silent sadness of Edith, his own conviction, which assured him that he could do nothing wiser or better than take this young man to his heart, so ordained it that Mr. Millbank, who was after all the creature of impulse, decided suddenly, and decided rightly. Never making a single admission to all the representations of his son, Mr. Millbank in a moment did all that his son could have dared to desire.

This is a very imperfect and crude intimation of what had occurred at Millbank and Hellingsley; yet it conveys a faint sketch of the enchanting intelligence that Oswald conveyed to Coningsby during their rapid travel. When they arrived at Birmingham, they found a messenger and a despatch, informing Coningsby, that at mid-day, at Darlford, he was at the head of the poll by an overwhelming majority, and that Mr. Rigby had resigned. He was, however, requested to remain at Birmingham, as they did not wish him to enter Darlford, except to be chaired, so he was to arrive there in the morning. At Birmingham, therefore, they remained.

There was Oswald's election to talk of as well as Coningsby's. They had hardly had time for this. Now they were both Members of Parliament. Men must have been at school together, to enjoy the real fun of meeting thus, and realising boyish dreams. Often, years ago, they had talked of these things, and assumed these results; but those were words and dreams, these were positive facts; after some doubts and struggles, in the freshness of their youth, Oswald Millbank and Harry Coningsby were members of the British Parliament; public characters, responsible agents, with a career.

This afternoon, at Birmingham, was as happy an afternoon as usually falls to the lot of man. Both of these companions were labouring under that degree of excitement which is necessary to felicity. They had enough to talk

about. Edith was no longer a forbidden or a sorrowful subject. There was rapture in their again meeting under such circumstances. Then there were their friends; that dear Buckhurst, who had just been called out for styling his opponent a Venetian, and all their companions of early days. What a sudden and marvellous change in all their destinies! Life was a pantomime; the wand was waved, and it seemed that the schoolfellows had of a sudden become elements of power, springs of the great machine.

A train arrived; restless they sallied forth, to seek diversion in the dispersion of the passengers. Coningsby and Millbank, with that glance, a little inquisitive, even impertinent, if we must confess it, with which one greets a stranger when he emerges from a public conveyance, were lounging on the platform. The train arrived; stopped; the doors were thrown open, and from one of them emerged Mr. Rigby! Coningsby, who had dined, was greatly tempted to take off his hat and make him a bow, but he refrained. Their eyes met. Rigby was dead beat. He was evidently used up; a man without a resource; the sight of Coningsby his last blow; he had met his fate.

'My dear fellow,' said Coningsby, 'I remember I wanted you to dine with my grandfather at Montem, and that fellow would not ask you. Such is life!'

About eleven o'clock the next morning they arrived at the Darlford station. Here they were met by an anxious deputation, who received Coningsby as if he were a prophet, and ushered him into a car covered with satin and blue ribbons, and drawn by six beautiful grey horses, caparisoned in his colours, and ridden by postilions, whose very whips were blue and white. Triumphant music sounded; banners waved; the multitude were marshalled; the Freemasons, at the first opportunity, fell into the procession; the Odd Fellows joined it at the nearest corner. Preceded and followed by thousands, with colours flying, trumpets sounding, and endless huzzas, flags and handkerchiefs waving from every window, and every balcony filled with dames and

maidens bedecked with his colours, Coningsby was borne through enthusiastic Darlford like Paulus Emilius returning from Macedon. Uncovered, still in deep mourning, his fine figure, and graceful bearing, and his intelligent brow, at once won every female heart.

The singularity was, that all were of the same opinion: everybody cheered him, every house was adorned with his colours. His triumphal return was no party question. Magog Wrath and Bully Bluck walked together like lambs at the head of his procession.

The car stopped before the principal hotel in the High Street. It was Mr. Millbank's committee. The broad street was so crowded, that, as every one declared, you might have walked on the heads of the people. Every window was full; the very roofs were peopled. The car stopped, and the populace gave three cheers for Mr. Millbank. Their late member, surrounded by his friends, stood in the balcony, which was fitted up with Coningsby's colours, and bore his name on the hangings in gigantic letters formed of dahlias. The flashing and inquiring eye of Coningsby caught the form of Edith, who was leaning on her father's arm.

The hustings were opposite the hotel, and here, after a while, Coningsby was carried, and, stepping from his car, took up his post to address, for the first time, a public assembly. Anxious as the people were to hear him, it was long before their enthusiasm could subside into silence. At length that silence was deep and absolute. He spoke; his powerful and rich tones reached every ear. In five minutes' time every one looked at his neighbour, and without speaking they agreed that there never was anything like this heard in Darlford before.

He addressed them for a considerable time, for he had a great deal to say; not only to express his gratitude for the unprecedented manner in which he had become their representative, and for the spirit in which they had greeted him, but he had to offer them no niggard exposition of the views and opinions of the member whom they had so con-

fidingly chosen, without even a formal declaration of his sentiments.

He did this with so much clearness, and in a manner so pointed and popular, that the deep attention of the multitude never wavered. His lively illustrations kept them often in continued merriment. But when, towards his close, he drew some picture of what he hoped might be the character of his future and lasting connection with the town, the vast throng was singularly affected. There were a great many present at that moment who, though they had never seen Coningsby before, would willingly have then died for him. Coningsby had touched their hearts, for he had spoken from his own. His spirit had entirely magnetised them. Darlford believed in Coningsby: and a very good creed.

And now Coningsby was conducted to the opposite hotel. He walked through the crowd. The progress was slow, as every one wished to shake hands with him. His friends, however, at last safely landed him. He sprang up the stairs; he was met by Mr. Millbank, who welcomed him with the greatest warmth, and offered his hearty congratulations.

'It is to you, dear sir, that I am indebted for all this,' said Coningsby.

'No,' said Mr. Millbank, 'it is to your own high principles, great talents, and good heart.'

After he had been presented by the late member to the principal personages in the borough, Mr. Millbank said

'I think we must now give Mr. Coningsby a little rest. Come with me,' he added, 'here is some one who will be very glad to see you.'

Speaking thus, he led our hero a little away, and placing his arm in Coningsby's with great affection opened the door of an apartment. There was Edith, radiant with loveliness and beaming with love. Their agitated hearts told at a glance the tumult of their joy. The father joined their hands, and blessed them with words of tenderness.

CHAPTER VII.

THE marriage of Coningsby and Edith took place early in the autumn. It was solemnised at Millbank, and they passed their first moon at Hellingsley, which place was in future to be the residence of the member for Darford. The estate was to devolve to Coningsby after the death of Mr. Millbank, who in the meantime made arrangements which permitted the newly-married couple to reside at the Hall in a manner becoming its occupants. All these settlements, as Mr. Millbank assured Coningsby, were effected not only with the sanction, but at the express instance, of his son.

An event, however, occurred not very long after the marriage of Coningsby, which rendered this generous conduct of his father-in-law no longer necessary to his fortunes, though he never forgot its exercise. The gentle and unhappy daughter of Lord Monmouth quitted a scene with which her spirit had never greatly sympathised. Perhaps she might have lingered in life for yet a little while, had it not been for that fatal inheritance which disturbed her peace and embittered her days, haunting her heart with the recollection that she had been the unconscious instrument of injuring the only being whom she loved, and embarrassing and encumbering her with duties foreign to her experience and her nature. The marriage of Coningsby had greatly affected her, and from that day she seemed gradually to decline. She died towards the end of the autumn, and, subject to an ample annuity to Villebecque, she bequeathed the whole of her fortune to the husband of Edith. Gratifying as it was to him to present such an inheritance to his wife, it was not without a pang that he received the intelligence of the death of Flora. Edith sympathised in his affectionate feelings, and they raised a monument to her memory in the gardens of Hellingsley

Coningsby passed his next Christmas in his own hall,

with his beautiful and gifted wife by his side, and surrounded by the friends of his heart and his youth.

They stand now on the threshold of public life. They are in the leash, but in a moment they will be slipped. What will be their fate? Will they maintain in august assemblies and high places the great truths which, in study and in solitude, they have embraced? Or will their courage exhaust itself in the struggle, their enthusiasm evaporate before hollow-hearted ridicule, their generous impulses yield with a vulgar catastrophe to the tawdry temptations of a low ambition? Will their skilled intelligence subside into being the adroit tool of a corrupt party? Will Vanity confound their fortunes, or Jealousy wither their sympathies? Or will they remain brave, single, and true; refuse to bow before shadows and worship phrases; sensible of the greatness of their position, recognise the greatness of their duties; denounce to a perplexed and disheartened world the frigid theories of a generalising age that have destroyed the individuality of man, and restore the happiness of their country by believing in their own energies, and daring to be great?