

CONINGSBY.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

It was a bright May morning some twelve years ago, when a youth of still tender age, for he had certainly not entered his teens by more than two years, was ushered into the waiting-room of a house in the vicinity of St. James's Square, which, though with the general appearance of a private residence, and that too of no very ambitious character, exhibited at this period symptoms of being occupied for some public purpose.

The house-door was constantly open, and frequent guests even at this early hour crossed the threshold. The hall-table was covered with sealed letters; and the hall-porter inscribed in a book the name of every individual who entered.

The young gentleman we have mentioned found himself in a room which offered few resources for his amusement. A large table amply covered with writing materials, and a few chairs, were its sole furniture, except the grey drugget that covered the floor, and a muddy mezzotinto of the Duke of Wellington that adorned its cold walls. There was not even a newspaper; and the only books were the Court Guide and the London Directory. For some time he remained with patient endurance planted against the

wall, with his feet resting on the rail of his chair; but at length in his shifting posture he gave evidence of his restlessness, rose from his seat, looked out of the window into a small side court of the house surrounded with dead walls, paced the room, took up the Court Guide, changed it for the London Directory, then wrote his name over several sheets of foolscap paper, drew various landscapes and faces of his friends; and then, splitting up a pen or two, delivered himself of a yawn which seemed the climax of his weariness.

And yet the youth's appearance did not betoken a character that, if the opportunity had offered, could not have found amusement and even instruction. His countenance, radiant with health and the lustre of innocence, was at the same time thoughtful and resolute. The expression of his deep blue eye was serious. Without extreme regularity of features, the face was one that would never have passed unobserved. His short upper lip indicated a good breed; and his chestnut curls clustered over his open brow, while his shirt-collar thrown over his shoulders was unrestrained by handkerchief or ribbon. Add to this, a limber and graceful figure, which the jacket of his boyish dress exhibited to great advantage.

Just as the youth, mounted on a chair, was adjusting the portrait of the Duke, which he had observed to be awry, the gentleman for whom he had been all this time waiting entered the room.

'Floreat Etona!' hastily exclaimed the gentleman, in a sharp voice; 'you are setting the Duke to rights. I have left you a long time a prisoner; but I found them so busy here, that I made my escape with some difficulty.'

He who uttered these words was a man of middle size and age, originally in all probability of a spare habit, but now a little inclined to corpulency. Baldness, perhaps, contributed to the spiritual expression of a brow, which was, however, essentially intellectual, and gave some character of openness to a countenance which, though not ill-favoured, was unhappily stamped by a sinister cast

that was not to be mistaken. His manner was easy, but rather audacious than well-bred. Indeed, while a visage which might otherwise be described as handsome was spoilt by a dishonest glance, so a demeanour that was by no means deficient in self-possession and facility, was tainted by an innate vulgarity, which in the long run, though seldom, yet surely developed itself.

The youth had jumped off his chair on the entrance of the gentleman, and then taking up his hat, said

‘Shall we go to grandpapa now, sir?’

‘By all means, my dear boy,’ said the gentleman, putting his arm within that of the youth; and they were just on the point of leaving the waiting-room, when the door was suddenly thrown open, and two individuals, in a state of great excitement, rushed into the apartment.

‘Rigby! Rigby!’ they both exclaimed at the same moment. ‘By G— they’re out!’

‘Who told you?’

‘The best authority; one of themselves.’

‘Who? who?’

‘Paul Evelyn; I met him as I passed Brookes’, and he told me that Lord Grey had resigned, and the King had accepted his resignation.’

But Mr. Rigby, who, though very fond of news, and much interested in the present, was extremely jealous of any one giving him information, was sceptical. He declared that Paul Evelyn was always wrong; that it was morally impossible that Paul Evelyn ever could be right; that he knew, from the highest authority, that Lord Grey had been twice yesterday with the King; that on the last visit nothing was settled; that if he had been at the palace again to-day, he could not have been there before twelve o’clock; that it was only now a quarter to one; that Lord Grey would have called his colleagues together on his return; that at least an hour must have elapsed before anything could possibly have transpired. Then he compared and criticised the dates of every rumoured incident of the last twenty-four hours, and nobody was stronger in dates than

Mr. Rigby; counted even the number of stairs which the minister had to ascend and descend in his visit to the palace, and the time their mountings and dismountings must have consumed, detail was Mr. Rigby's forte; and finally, what with his dates, his private information, his knowledge of palace localities, his contempt for Paul Evelyn, and his confidence in himself, he succeeded in persuading his downcast and disheartened friends that their comfortable intelligence had not the slightest foundation.

They all left the room together; they were in the hall; the gentlemen who brought the news looked somewhat depressed, but Mr. Rigby gay, even amid the prostration of his party, from the consciousness that he had most critically demolished a piece of political gossip and conveyed a certain degree of mortification to a couple of his companions; when a travelling carriage and four with a ducal coronet drove up to the house. The door was thrown open, the steps dashed down, and a youthful noble sprang from his chariot into the hall.

'Good morning, Rigby,' said the Duke.

! 'I see your Grace well, I am sure,' said Mr. Rigby, with a softened manner.

'You have heard the news, gentlemen?' the Duke continued.

'What news? Yes; no; that is to say, Mr. Rigby thinks ——'

'You know, of course, that Lord Lyndhurst is with the King?'

'It is impossible,' said Mr. Rigby.

'I don't think I can be mistaken,' said the Duke, smiling.

I will show your Grace that it is impossible,' said Mr. Rigby. 'Lord Lyndhurst slept at Wimbledon. Lord Grey could not have seen the King until twelve o'clock; it is now five minutes to one. It is impossible, therefore, that any message from the King could have reached Lord Lyndhurst in time for his Lordship to be at the palace at this moment.'

'But my authority is a high one,' said the Duke.

'Authority is a phrase,' said Mr. Rigby; 'we must look to time and place, dates and localities, to discover the truth.'

'Your Grace was saying that your authority ——' ventured to observe Mr. Tadpole, emboldened by the presence of a duke, his patron, to struggle against the despotism of a Rigby, his tyrant.

'Was the highest,' rejoined the Duke, smiling, 'for it was Lord Lyndhurst himself. I came up from Nuneham this morning, passed his Lordship's house in Hyde Park Place as he was getting into his carriage in full dress, stopped my own, and learned in a breath that the Whigs were out, and that the King had sent for the Chief Baron. So I came on here at once.'

'I always thought the country was sound at bottom,' exclaimed Mr. Taper, who, under the old system, had sneaked into the Treasury Board.

Tadpole and Taper were great friends. Neither of them ever despaired of the Commonwealth. Even if the Reform Bill were passed, Taper was convinced that the Whigs would never prove men of business; and when his friends confessed among themselves that a Tory Government was for the future impossible, Taper would remark, in a confidential whisper, that for his part he believed before the year was over the Whigs would be turned out by the clerks.

'There is no doubt that there is considerable reaction,' said Mr. Tadpole. 'The infamous conduct of the Whigs in the Amersham case has opened the public mind more than anything.'

'Aldborough was worse,' said Mr. Taper.

'Terrible,' said Tadpole. 'They said there was no use discussing the Reform Bill in our House. I believe Rigby's great speech on Aldborough has done more towards the reaction than all the violence of the Political Unions put together.'

'Let us hope for the best,' said the Duke, mildly. "'Tis

a bold step on the part of the Sovereign, and I am free to say I could have wished it postponed; but we must support the King like men. What say you, Rigby? You are silent.'

'I am thinking how very unfortunate it was that I did not breakfast with Lyndhurst this morning, as I was nearly doing, instead of going down to Eton.'

'To Eton! and why to Eton?'

'For the sake of my young friend here, Lord Monmouth's grandson. By the bye, you are kinsmen. Let me present to your Grace, MR. CONINGSBY.'

CHAPTER II.

THE political agitation which for a year and a half had shaken England to its centre, received, if possible, an increase to its intensity and virulence, when it was known, in the early part of the month of May 1832, that the Prime Minister had tendered his resignation to the King, which resignation had been graciously accepted.

The amendment carried by the Opposition in the House of Lords on the evening of the 7th of May, that the enfranchising clauses of the Reform Bill should be considered before entering into the question of disfranchisement, was the immediate cause of this startling event. The Lords had previously consented to the second reading of the Bill with the view of preventing that large increase of their numbers with which they had been long menaced; rather, indeed, by mysterious rumours than by any official declaration; but, nevertheless, in a manner which had carried conviction to no inconsiderable portion of the Opposition that the threat was not without foundation.

During the progress of the Bill through the Lower House, the journals which were looked upon as the organs of the ministry had announced with unhesitating confidence, that Lord Grey was armed with what was then called a 'carte

blanche' to create any number of peers necessary to insure its success. But public journalists who were under the control of the ministry, and whose statements were never contradicted, were not the sole authorities for this prevailing belief. Members of the House of Commons, who were strong supporters of the cabinet, though not connected with it by any official tie, had unequivocally stated in their places that the Sovereign had not resisted the advice of his counsellors to create peers, if such creation were required to carry into effect what was then styled 'the great national measure.' In more than one instance, ministers had been warned, that if they did not exercise that power with prompt energy, they might deserve impeachment. And these intimations and announcements had been made in the presence of leading members of the Government, and had received from them, at least, the sanction of their silence.

It did not subsequently appear that the Reform ministers had been invested with any such power; but a conviction of the reverse, fostered by these circumstances, had successfully acted upon the nervous temperament, or the statesman-like prudence, of a certain section of the peers, who consequently hesitated in their course; were known as being no longer inclined to pursue their policy of the preceding session; had thus obtained a title at that moment in everybody's mouth, the title of 'THE WAVERERS.'

Notwithstanding, therefore, the opposition of the Duke of Wellington and of Lord Lyndhurst, the Waverers carried the second reading of the Reform Bill; and then, scared at the consequences of their own headstrong timidity, they went in a fright to the Duke and his able adviser to extricate them from the inevitable result of their own conduct. The ultimate device of these distracted counsels, where daring and poltroonery, principle and expediency, public spirit and private intrigue, each threw an ingredient into the turbulent spell, was the celebrated and successful amendment to which we have referred.

But the Whig ministers, who, whatever may have been their faults, were at least men of intellect and courage,

were not to be beaten by 'the Waverers.' They might have made terms with an audacious foe; they trampled on a hesitating opponent. Lord Grey hastened to the palace.

Before the result of this appeal to the Sovereign was known, for its effects were not immediate, on the second morning after the vote in the House of Lords, Mr. Rigby had made that visit to Eton which had summoned very unexpectedly the youthful Coningsby to London. He was the orphan child of the youngest of the two sons of the Marquess of Monmouth. It was a family famous for its hatreds. The eldest son hated his father; and, it was said, in spite had married a lady to whom that father was attached, and with whom Lord Monmouth then meditated a second alliance. This eldest son lived at Naples, and had several children, but maintained no connection either with his parent or his native country. On the other hand, Lord Monmouth hated his younger son, who had married, against his consent, a woman to whom that son was devoted. A system of domestic persecution, sustained by the hand of a master, had eventually broken up the health of its victim, who died of a fever in a foreign country, where he had sought some refuge from his creditors.

His widow returned to England with her child; and, not having a relation, and scarcely an acquaintance in the world, made an appeal to her husband's father, the wealthiest noble in England, and a man who was often prodigal, and occasionally generous. After some time, and more trouble, after urgent and repeated, and what would have seemed heart-rending, solicitations, the attorney of Lord Monmouth called upon the widow of his client's son, and informed her of his Lordship's decision. Provided she gave up her child, and permanently resided in one of the remotest counties, he was authorised to make her, in four quarterly payments, the yearly allowance of three hundred pounds, that being the income that Lord Monmouth, who was the shrewdest accountant in the country, had calculated a lone woman might very decently exist upon in a small market town in the county of Westmoreland.

Desperate necessity, the sense of her own forlornness, the utter impossibility to struggle with an omnipotent foe, who, her husband had taught her, was above all scruples, prejudices, and fears, and who, though he respected law, despised opinion, made the victim yield. But her sufferings were not long; the separation from her child, the bleak clime, the strange faces around her, sharp memory, and the dull routine of an unimpassioned life, all combined to wear out a constitution originally frail, and since shattered by many sorrows. Mrs. Coningsby died the same day that her father-in-law was made a Marquess. He deserved his honours. The four votes he had inherited in the House of Commons had been increased, by his intense volition and unsparing means, to ten; and the very day he was raised to his Marquisate, he commenced sapping fresh corporations, and was working for the strawberry leaf. His honours were proclaimed in the London Gazette, and her decease was not even noticed in the County Chronicle; but the altars of Nemesis are beneath every outraged roof, and the death of this unhappy lady, apparently without an earthly friend or an earthly hope, desolate and deserted, and dying in obscure poverty, was not forgotten.

Coningsby was not more than nine years of age when he lost his last parent; and he had then been separated from her for nearly three years. But he remembered the sweetness of his nursery days. His mother, too, had written to him frequently since he quitted her, and her fond expressions had cherished the tenderness of his heart. He wept bitterly when his schoolmaster broke to him the news of his mother's death. True it was they had been long parted, and their prospect of again meeting was vague and dim; but his mother seemed to him his only link to human society. It was something to have a mother, even if he never saw her. Other boys went to see their mothers! he, at least, could talk of his. Now he was alone. His grandfather was to him only a name. Lord Monmouth resided almost constantly abroad, and during his rare visits to England had found no time or inclination to see

the orphan, with whom he felt no sympathy. Even the death of the boy's mother, and the consequent arrangements, were notified to his master by a stranger. The letter which brought the sad intelligence was from Mr. Rigby. It was the first time that name had been known to Coningsby.

Mr. Rigby was member for one of Lord Monmouth's boroughs. He was the manager of Lord Monmouth's parliamentary influence, and the auditor of his vast estates. He was more; he was Lord Monmouth's companion when in England, his correspondent when abroad; hardly his counsellor, for Lord Monmouth never required advice; but Mr. Rigby could instruct him in matters of detail, which Mr. Rigby made amusing. Rigby was not a professional man; indeed, his origin, education, early pursuits, and studies, were equally obscure; but he had contrived in good time to squeeze himself into parliament, by means which no one could ever comprehend, and then set up to be a perfect man of business. The world took him at his word, for he was bold, acute, and voluble; with no thought, but a good deal of desultory information; and though destitute of all imagination and noble sentiment, was blessed with a vigorous, mendacious fancy, fruitful in small expedients, and never happier than when devising shifts for great men's scrapes.

They say that all of us have one chance in this life, and so it was with Rigby. After a struggle of many years, after a long series of the usual alternatives of small successes and small failures, after a few cleverish speeches and a good many cleverish pamphlets, with a considerable reputation, indeed, for pasquinades, most of which he never wrote, and articles in reviews to which it was whispered he had contributed, Rigby, who had already intrigued himself into a subordinate office, met with Lord Monmouth.

He was just the animal that Lord Monmouth wanted, for Lord Monmouth always looked upon human nature with the callous eye of a jockey. He surveyed Rigby, and he determined to buy him. He bought him; with his clear

head, his indefatigable industry, his audacious tongue, and his ready and unscrupulous pen; with all his dates, all his lampoons; all his private memoirs, and all his political intrigues. It was a good purchase. Rigby became a great personage, and Lord Monmouth's man.

Mr. Rigby, who liked to be doing a great many things at the same time, and to astonish the Tadpoles and Tapers with his energetic versatility, determined to superintend the education of Coningsby. It was a relation which identified him with the noble house of his pupil, or, properly speaking, his charge: for Mr. Rigby affected rather the graceful dignity of the governor than the duties of a tutor. The boy was recalled from his homely, rural school, where he had been well grounded by a hard-working curate, and affectionately tended by the curate's unsophisticated wife. He was sent to a fashionable school preparatory to Eton, where he found about two hundred youths of noble families and connections, lodged in a magnificent villa, that had once been the retreat of a minister, superintended by a sycophantic Doctor of Divinity, already well beneficed, and not despairing of a bishopric by favouring the children of the great nobles. The doctor's lady, clothed in cashmeres, sometimes inquired after their health, and occasionally received a report as to their linen.

Mr. Rigby had a classical retreat, not distant from this establishment, which he esteemed a Tusculum. There, surrounded by his busts and books, he wrote his lampoons and articles; massacred a she liberal (it was thought that no one could lash a woman like Rigby), cut up a rising genius whose politics were different from his own, or sacrificed some unhappy wretch who had brought his claims before parliament, proving, by garbled extracts from official correspondence that no one could refer to, that the malcontent instead of being a victim, was, on the contrary, a defaulter. Tadpole and Taper would back Rigby for a 'slashing reply' against the field. Here, too, at the end of a busy week, he found it occasionally convenient to entertain a clever friend or two of equivocal reputation,

with whom he had become acquainted in former days of equal brotherhood. No one was more faithful to his early friends than Mr. Rigby, particularly if they could write a squib.

It was in this refined retirement that Mr. Rigby found time enough, snatched from the toils of official life and parliamentary struggles, to compose a letter on the study of History, addressed to Coningsby. The style was as much like that of Lord Bolingbroke as if it had been written by the authors of the 'Rejected Addresses,' and it began, 'My dear young friend.' This polished composition, so full of good feeling and comprehensive views, and all in the best taste, was not published. It was only privately printed, and a few thousand copies were distributed among select personages as an especial favour and mark of high consideration. Each copy given away seemed to Rigby like a certificate of character; a property which, like all men of dubious repute, he thoroughly appreciated. Rigby intrigued very much that the headmaster of Eton should adopt his discourse as a class-book. For this purpose he dined with the Doctor, told him several anecdotes of the King, which intimated personal influence at Windsor; but the headmaster was inflexible, and so Mr. Rigby was obliged to be content with having his Letter on History canonized as a classic in the Preparatory Seminary, where the individual to whom it was addressed was a scholar.

This change in the life of Coningsby contributed to his happiness. The various characters which a large school exhibited interested a young mind whose active energies were beginning to stir. His previous acquirements made his studies light; and he was fond of sports, in which he was qualified to excel. He did not particularly like Mr. Rigby. There was something jarring and grating in that gentleman's voice and modes, from which the chords of the young heart shrank. He was not tender, though perhaps he wished to be; scarcely kind: but he was good-natured, at least to children. However, this connection was, on the whole, an agreeable one for Coningsby. He seemed sud-

denly to have friends; he never passed his holidays again at school. Mr. Rigby was so clever that he contrived always to quarter Coningsby on the father of one of his school-fellows, for Mr. Rigby knew all his school-fellows and all their fathers. Mr. Rigby also called to see him, not unfrequently would give him a dinner at the Star and Garter, or even have him up to town for a week to Whitehall. Compared with his former forlorn existence, these were happy days, when he was placed under the gallery as a member's son, or went to the play with the butler!

When Coningsby had attained his twelfth year, an order was received from Lord Monmouth, who was at Rome, that he should go at once to Eton. This was the first great epoch of his life. There never was a youth who entered into that wonderful little world with more eager zest than Coningsby. Nor was it marvellous.

That delicious plain, studded with every creation of graceful culture; hamlet and hall, and grange; garden and grove, and park; that castle-palace, grey with glorious ages; those antique spires, hoar with faith and wisdom, the chapel and the college; that river winding through the shady meads; the sunny glade and the solemn avenue; the room in the Dame's house where we first order our own breakfast and first feel we are free; the stirring multitude, the energetic groups, the individual mind that leads, conquers, controls; the emulation and the affection; the noble strife and the tender sentiment; the daring exploit and the dashing scrape; the passion that pervades our life, and breathes in everything, from the aspiring study to the inspiring sport: oh! what hereafter can spur the brain and touch the heart like this; can give us a world so deeply and variously interesting; a life so full of quick and bright excitement, passed in a scene so fair?

CHAPTER III.

LORD MONMOUTH, who detested popular tumults as much as he despised public opinion, had remained during the agitating year of 1831 in his luxurious retirement in Italy, contenting himself with opposing the Reform Bill by proxy. But when his correspondent, Mr. Rigby, had informed him, in the early part of the spring of 1832, of the probability of a change in the tactics of the Tory party, and that an opinion was becoming prevalent among their friends, that the great scheme must be defeated in detail rather than again withstood on principle, his Lordship, who was never wanting in energy when his own interests were concerned, immediately crossed the Alps, and travelled rapidly to England. He indulged a hope that the weight of his presence and the influence of his strong character, which was at once shrewd and courageous, might induce his friends to relinquish their half measure, a course to which his nature was repugnant. At all events, if they persisted in their intention, and the Bill went into committee, his presence was indispensable, for in that stage of a parliamentary proceeding proxies become ineffective.

The counsels of Lord Monmouth, though they coincided with those of the Duke of Wellington, did not prevail with the Waverers. Several of these high-minded personages had had their windows broken, and they were of opinion that a man who lived at Naples was not a competent judge of the state of public feeling in England. Besides, the days are gone by for senates to have their beards plucked in the forum. We live in an age of prudence. The leaders of the people, now, generally follow. The truth is, the peers were in a fright. 'Twas a pity; there is scarcely a less dignified entity than a patrician in a panic.

Among the most intimate companions of Coningsby at Eton, was Lord Henry Sydney, his kinsman. Coningsby had frequently passed his holidays of late at Beaumanoir, the

seat of the Duke, Lord Henry's father. The Duke sat next to Lord Monmouth during the debate on the enfranchising question, and to while away the time, and from kindness of disposition, spoke, and spoke with warmth and favour, of his grandson. The polished Lord Monmouth bowed as if he were much gratified by this notice of one so dear to him. He had too much tact to admit that he had never yet seen his grandchild; but he asked some questions as to his progress and pursuits, his tastes and habits, which intimated the interest of an affectionate relative.

Nothing, however, was ever lost upon Lord Monmouth. No one had a more retentive memory, or a more observant mind. And the next day, when he received Mr. Rigby at his morning levee, Lord Monmouth performed this ceremony in the high style of the old court, and welcomed his visitors in bed, he said with imperturbable calmness, and as if he had been talking of trying a new horse, 'Rigby, I should like to see the boy at Eton.

There might be some objection to grant leave to Coningsby at this moment; but it was a rule with Mr. Rigby never to make difficulties, or at least to persuade his patron that he, and he only, could remove them. He immediately undertook that the boy should be forthcoming, and notwithstanding the excitement of the moment, he went off next morning to fetch him.

They arrived in town rather early; and Rigby, wishing to know how affairs were going on, ordered the servant to drive immediately to the head-quarters of the party; where a permanent committee watched every phasis of the impending revolution; and where every member of the Opposition, of note and trust, was instantly admitted to receive or to impart intelligence.

It was certainly not without emotion that Coningsby contemplated his first interview with his grandfather. All his experience of the ties of relationship, however limited, was full of tenderness and rapture. His memory often dwelt on his mother's sweet embrace; and ever and anon a fitful phantom of some past passage of domestic love

haunted his gushing heart. The image of his father was less fresh in his mind; but still it was associated with a vague sentiment of kindness and joy; and the allusions to her husband in his mother's letters had cherished these impressions. To notice lesser sources of influence in his estimate of the domestic tie, he had witnessed under the roof of Beaumanoir the existence of a family bound together by the most beautiful affections. He could not forget how Henry Sydney was embraced by his sisters when he returned home; what frank and fraternal love existed between his kinsman and his elder brother; how affectionately the kind Duke had welcomed his son once more to the house where they had both been born; and the dim eyes, and saddened brows, and tones of tenderness, which rather looked than said farewell, when they went back to Eton.

And these rapturous meetings and these mournful adieus were occasioned only by a separation at the most of a few months, softened by constant correspondence and the communication of mutual sympathy. But Coningsby was to meet a relation, his near, almost his only, relation, for the first time; the relation, too, to whom he owed maintenance, education; it might be said, existence. It was a great incident for a great drama; something tragical in the depth and stir of its emotions. Even the imagination of the boy could not be insensible to its materials; and Coningsby was picturing to himself a beneficent and venerable gentleman pressing to his breast an agitated youth, when his reverie was broken by the carriage stopping before the gates of Monmouth House.

The gates were opened by a gigantic Swiss, and the carriage rolled into a huge court-yard. At its end Coningsby beheld a Palladian palace, with wings and colonnades encircling the court.

A double flight of steps led into a circular and marble hall, adorned with colossal busts of the Cæsars; the staircase in fresco by Sir James Thornhill, breathed with the loves and wars of gods and heroes. It led into a vestibule,

painted in arabesque, hung with Venetian girandoles, and looking into gardens. Opening a door in this chamber, and proceeding some little way down a corridor, Mr. Rigby and his companion arrived at the base of a private staircase. Ascending a few steps, they reached a landing-place hung with tapestry. Drawing this aside, Mr. Rigby opened a door, and ushered Coningsby through an ante-chamber into a small saloon, of beautiful proportions, and furnished in a brilliant and delicate taste.

'You will find more to amuse you here than where you were before,' said Mr. Rigby, 'and I shall not be nearly so long absent.' So saying, he entered into an inner apartment.

The walls of the saloon, which were covered with light blue satin, held, in silver panels, portraits of beautiful women, painted by Boucher. Couches and easy chairs of every shape invited in every quarter to luxurious repose; while amusement was afforded by tables covered with caricatures, French novels, and endless miniatures of foreign dancers, princesses, and sovereigns.

But Coningsby was so impressed with the impending interview with his grandfather, that he neither sought nor required diversion. Now that the crisis was at hand, he felt agitated and nervous, and wished that he was again at Eton. The suspense was sickening, yet he dreaded still more the summons. He was not long alone; the door opened; he started, grew pale; he thought it was his grandfather; it was not even Mr. Rigby. It was Lord Monmouth's valet.

'Monsieur Konigby?'

'My name is Coningsby,' said the boy.

'Milor is ready to receive you,' said the valet.

Coningsby sprang forward with that desperation which the scaffold requires. His face was pale; his hand was moist; his heart beat with tumult. He had occasionally been summoned by Dr. Keate; that, too, was awful work, but, compared with the present, a morning visit. Music, artillery, the roar of cannon, and the blare of trumpets,

may urge a man on to a forlorn hope; ambition, one's constituents, the hell of previous failure, may prevail on us to do a more desperate thing; speak in the House of Commons; but there are some situations in life, such, for instance, as entering the room of a dentist, in which the prostration of the nervous system is absolute.

The moment had at length arrived when the desolate was to find a benefactor, the forlorn a friend, the orphan a parent; when the youth, after a childhood of adversity, was to be formally received into the bosom of the noble house from which he had been so long estranged, and at length to assume that social position to which his lineage entitled him. Manliness might support, affection might soothe, the happy anguish of such a meeting; but it was undoubtedly one of those situations which stir up the deep fountains of our nature, and before which the conventional proprieties of our ordinary manners instantaneously vanish.

Coningsby with an uncertain step followed his guide through a bed-chamber, the sumptuousness of which he could not notice, into the dressing-room of Lord Monmouth. Mr. Rigby, facing Coningsby as he entered, was leaning over the back of a large chair, from which as Coningsby was announced by the valet, the Lord of the house slowly rose, for he was suffering slightly from the gout, his left hand resting on an ivory stick. Lord Monmouth was in height above the middle size, but somewhat portly and corpulent. His countenance was strongly marked; sagacity on the brow, sensuality in the mouth and jaw. His head was bald, but there were remains of the rich brown locks on which he once prided himself. His large deep blue eye, madid and yet piercing, showed that the secretions of his brain were apportioned, half to voluptuousness, half to common sense. But his general mien was truly grand; full of a natural nobility, of which no one was more sensible than himself. Lord Monmouth was not in dishabille; on the contrary, his costume was exact, and even careful. Rising as we have mentioned when his grandson entered, and leaning with his left hand on his ivory cane, he made Coningsby such a

how as *Louis Quatorze* might have bestowed on the ambassador of the United Provinces. Then extending his right hand, which the boy tremblingly touched, Lord Monmouth said:

‘How do you like Eton?’

This contrast to the reception which he had imagined, hoped, feared, paralysed the reviving energies of young Coningsby. He felt stupified; he looked almost aghast. In the chaotic tumult of his mind, his memory suddenly seemed to receive some miraculous inspiration. Mysterious phrases heard in his earliest boyhood, unnoticed then, long since forgotten, rose to his ear. Who was this grandfather, seen not before, seen now for the first time? Where was the intervening link of blood between him and this superb and icy being? The boy sank into the chair which had been placed for him, and leaning on the table burst into tears.

Here was a business! If there were one thing which would have made Lord Monmouth travel from London to Naples at four-and-twenty hours’ notice, it was to avoid a scene; He hated scenes. He hated feelings. He saw instantly the mistake he had made in sending for his grandchild. He was afraid that Coningsby was tender-hearted like his father. Another tender-hearted Coningsby! Unfortunate family! Degenerate race! He decided in his mind that Coningsby must be provided for in the Church, and looked at Mr. Rigby, whose principal business it always was to disembarass his patron from the disagreeable.

Mr. Rigby instantly came forward and adroitly led the boy into the adjoining apartment, Lord Monmouth’s bed-chamber, closing the door of the dressing-room behind him.

‘My dear young friend,’ said Mr. Rigby, ‘what is all this?’

A sob the only answer.

‘What can be the matter?’ said Mr. Rigby.

‘I was thinking,’ said Coningsby, ‘of poor mamma!’

‘Hush!’ said Mr. Rigby; ‘Lord Monmouth never likes to hear of people who are dead; so you must take care never to mention your mother or your father.’

In the meantime Lord Monmouth had decided on the fate of Coningsby. The Marquis thought he could read characters by a glance, and in general he was successful, for his natural sagacity had been nurtured by great experience. His grandson was not to his taste; amiable no doubt, but spooney.

We are too apt to believe that the character of a boy is easily read. 'Tis a mystery the most profound. Mark what blunders parents constantly make as to the nature of their own offspring, bred, too, under their eyes, and displaying every hour their characteristics. How often in the nursery does the genius count as a dunce because he is pensive; while a rattling urchin is invested with almost supernatural qualities because his animal spirits make him impudent and flippant! The school-boy, above all others, is not the simple being the world imagines. In that young bosom are often stirring passions as strong as our own, desires not less violent, a volition not less supreme. In that young bosom what burning love, what intense ambition, what avarice, what lust of power; envy that fiends might emulate, hate that man might fear!

CHAPTER IV.

'COME,' said Mr. Rigby, when Coningsby was somewhat composed, 'come with me and we will see the house.'

So they descended once more the private staircase, and again entered the vestibule.

'If you had seen these gardens when they were illuminated for a fête to George IV.,' said Rigby, as crossing the chamber he ushered his charge into the state apartments. The splendour and variety of the surrounding objects soon distracted the attention of the boy, for the first time in the palace of his fathers. He traversed saloon after saloon hung with rare tapestry and the gorgeous products of foreign looms; filled with choice pictures and creations

of curious art; cabinets that sovereigns might envy, and colossal vases of malachite presented by emperors. Coningsby alternately gazed up to ceilings glowing with colour and with gold, and down upon carpets bright with the fancies and vivid with the tints of Aubusson and of Axminster.

'This grandfather of mine is a great prince,' thought Coningsby, as musing he stood before a portrait in which he recognised the features of the being from whom he had so recently and so strangely parted. There he stood, Philip Augustus, Marquess of Monmouth, in his robes of state, with his new coronet on a table near him, a despatch lying at hand that indicated the special mission of high ceremony of which he had been the illustrious envoy, and the garter beneath his knee.

'You will have plenty of opportunities to look at the pictures,' said Rigby, observing that the boy had now quite recovered himself. 'Some luncheon will do you no harm after our drive;' and he opened the door of another apartment:

It was a pretty room adorned with a fine picture of the chase; at a round table in the centre sat two ladies interested in the meal to which Rigby had alluded.

'Ah, Mr. Rigby!' said the eldest, yet young and beautiful, and speaking, though with fluency, in a foreign accent, 'come and tell me some news. Have you seen Milor?' and then she threw a scrutinizing glance from a dark flashing eye at his companion.

'Let me present to your Highness,' said Rigby, with an air of some ceremony, 'Mr. Coningsby.'

'My dear young friend,' said the lady, extending her white hand with an air of joyous welcome, 'this is Lucretia, my daughter. We love you already. Lord Monmouth will be so charmed to see you. What beautiful eyes he has, Mr. Rigby. Quite like Milor.'

The young lady, who was really more youthful than Coningsby, but of a form and stature so developed that she appeared almost a woman, bowed to the guest with some

ceremony, and a faint sullen smile, and then proceeded with her Perigord pie.

'You must be so hungry after your drive,' said the elder lady, placing Coningsby at her side, and herself filling his plate.

This was true enough; and while Mr. Rigby and the lady talked an infinite deal about things which he did not understand, and persons of whom he had never heard, our little hero made his first meal in his paternal house with no ordinary zest; and renovated by the pasty and a glass of sherry, felt altogether a different being from what he was, when he had undergone the terrible interview in which he began to reflect he had considerably exposed himself. His courage revived, his senses rallied, he replied to the interrogations of the lady with calmness, but with promptness and propriety. It was evident that he had made a favourable impression on her Highness, for ever and anon she put a truffle or some small delicacy in his plate, and insisted upon his taking some particular confectionary, because it was a favourite of her own. When she rose, she said,—

'In ten minutes the carriage will be at the door; and if you like, my dear young friend, you shall be cur beau.'

'There is nothing I should like so much,' said Coningsby.

'Ah!' said the lady, with the sweetest smile, 'he is frank.'

The ladies bowed and retired; Mr. Rigby returned to the Marquess, and the groom of the chambers led Coningsby to his room.

This lady, so courteous to Coningsby, was the Princess Colonna, a Roman dame, the second wife of Prince Paul Colonna. The Prince had first married when a boy, and into a family not inferior to his own. Of this union, in every respect unhappy, the Princess Lucretia was the sole offspring. He was a man dissolute and devoted to play; and cared for nothing much but his pleasures and billiards, in which latter he was esteemed unrivalled. According to some, in a freak of passion, according to others, to cancel a gambling debt, he had united himself to his present wife, whose origin was obscure; but with whom

he contrived to live on terms of apparent cordiality, for she was much admired, and made the society of her husband sought by those who contributed to his enjoyment. Among these especially figured the Marquess of Monmouth, between whom and Prince Colonna the world recognised as existing the most intimate and entire friendship, so that his Highness and his family were frequent guests under the roof of the English nobleman, and now accompanied him on a visit to England.

CHAPTER V.

IN the meantime, while ladies are luncheoning on Perigord pie, or coursing in whirling britskas, performing all the singular ceremonies of a London morning in the heart of the season; making visits where nobody is seen, and making purchases which are not wanted; the world is in agitation and uproar. At present the world and the confusion are limited to St. James's Street and Pall Mall; but soon the boundaries and the tumult will be extended to the intended metropolitan boroughs; to-morrow they will spread over the manufacturing districts. It is perfectly evident, that before eight-and-forty hours have passed, the country will be in a state of fearful crisis. And how can it be otherwise? Is it not a truth that the subtle Chief Baron has been closeted one whole hour with the King; that shortly after, with thoughtful brow and compressed lip, he was marked in his daring chariot entering the courtyard of Apsley House? Great was the panic at Brookes', wild the hopes of Carlton Terrace; all the gentlemen who expected to have been made peers perceived that the country was going to be given over to a apacious oligarchy.

In the meantime Tadpole and Taper, who had never quitted for an instant the mysterious head-quarters of the

late Opposition, were full of hopes and fears, and asked many questions, which they chiefly answered themselves.

'I wonder what Lord Lyndhurst will say to the King,' said Taper.

'He has plenty of pluck,' said Tadpole.

'I almost wish now that Rigby had breakfasted with him this morning,' said Taper.

'If the King be firm, and the country sound,' said Tadpole, 'and Lord Monmouth keep his boroughs, I should not wonder to see Rigby made a privy councillor.'

'There is no precedent for an under-secretary being a privy councillor,' said Taper.

'But we live in revolutionary times,' said Tadpole.

'Gentlemen,' said the groom of the chambers, in a loud voice, entering the room, 'I am desired to state that the Duke of Wellington is with the King.'

'There is a Providence!' exclaimed an agitated gentleman, the patent of whose intended peerage had not been signed the day that the Duke had quitted office in 1830.

'I always thought the King would be firm,' said Mr. Tadpole.

'I wonder who will have the India Board,' said Taper.

At this moment three or four gentlemen entered the room in a state of great bustle and excitement; they were immediately surrounded.

'Is it true?' 'Quite true; not the slightest doubt. Saw him myself. Not at all hissed; certainly not hooted. Perhaps a little hissed. One fellow really cheered him. Saw him myself. Say what they like, there is reaction.' 'But Constitution Hill, they say?' 'Well, there was a sort of inclination to a row on Constitution Hill; but the Duke quite firm; pistols, and carriage doors bolted.'

Such may give a faint idea of the anxious inquiries and the satisfactory replies that were occasioned by the entrance of this group.

'Up, guards, and at them!' exclaimed Tadpole, rubbing his hands in a fit of patriotic enthusiasm.

Later in the afternoon, about five o'clock, the high

change of political gossip, when the room was crowded, and every one had his rumour, Mr. Rigby looked in again to throw his eye over the evening papers, and catch in various chit-chat the tone of public or party feeling on the 'crisis.' Then it was known that the Duke had returned from the King, having accepted the charge of forming an administration. *An administration to do what? Portentous question!* Were concessions to be made? And if so, what? Was it altogether impossible, and too late, '*stare super vias antiquas?*' Questions altogether above your Tadpoles and your Tapers, whose idea of the necessities of the age was that they themselves should be in office.

Lord Eskdale came up to Mr. Rigby. This peer was a noble Cræsus, acquainted with all the gradations of life; a voluptuary who could be a Spartan; clear-sighted, unprejudiced, sagacious; the best judge in the world of a horse or a man; he was the universal referee; a quarrel about a bet or a mistress was solved by him in a moment, and in a manner which satisfied both parties. He patronised and appreciated the fine arts, though a jockey; respected literary men, though he only read French novels; and without any affectation of tastes which he did not possess, was looked upon by every singer and dancer in Europe as their natural champion. The secret of his strong character and great influence was his self-composure, which an earthquake or a Reform Bill could not disturb, and which in him was the result of temperament and experience. He was an intimate acquaintance of Lord Monmouth, for they had many tastes in common; were both men of considerable, and in some degree similar, abilities; and were the two greatest proprietors of close boroughs in the country.

'Do you dine at Monmouth House to-day?' inquired Lord Eskdale of Mr. Rigby.

'Where I hope to meet your lordship. The Whig papers are very subdued,' continued Mr. Rigby.

'Ah! they have not the cue yet,' said Lord Eskdale.

'And what do you think of affairs?' inquired his companion.

'I think the hounds are too hot to hark off now,' said Lord Eskdale.

'There is one combination,' said Rigby, who seemed meditating an attack on Lord Eskdale's button.

'Give it us at dinner,' said Lord Eskdale, who knew his man, and made an adroit movement forwards, as if he were very anxious to see the *Globe* newspaper.

In the course of two or three hours these gentlemen met again in the green drawing-room of Monmouth House. Mr. Rigby was sitting on the sofa by Lord Monmouth, detailing in whispers all his gossip of the morn: Lord Eskdale murmuring quaint inquiries into the ear of the Princess Lucretia. Madame Colonna made remarks alternately to two gentlemen, who paid her assiduous court. One of these was Mr. Ormsby; the school, the college, and the club crony of Lord Monmouth, who had been his shadow through life; travelled with him in early days, won money with him at play, had been his colleague in the House of Commons; and was still one of his nominees. Mr. Ormsby was a millionaire, which Lord Monmouth liked. He liked his companions to be very rich or very poor; to be his equals, able to play with him at high stakes, or join him in a great speculation; or to be his tools, and to amuse and serve him. There was nothing which he despised and disliked so much as a moderate fortune.

The other gentleman was of a different class and character. Nature had intended Lucian Gay for a scholar and a wit; necessity had made him a scribbler and a buffoon. He had distinguished himself at the University; but he had no patrimony, nor those powers of perseverance which success in any learned profession requires. He was good-looking, had great animal spirits, and a keen sense of enjoyment, and could not drudge. Moreover he had a fine voice, and sang his own songs with considerable taste; accomplishments which made his fortune in society and completed his ruin. In due time he extricated himself from the bench and merged into journalism, by means of which

he chanced to become acquainted with Mr. Rigby. That worthy individual was not slow in detecting the treasure he had lighted on; a wit, a ready and happy writer, a joyous and tractable being, with the education, and still the feelings and manners, of a gentleman. Frequent were the Sunday dinners which found Gay a guest at Mr. Rigby's villa; numerous the airy pasquinades which he left behind, and which made the fortune of his patron. Flattered by the familiar acquaintance of a man of station, and sanguine that he had found the link which would sooner or later restore him to the polished world that he had forfeited, Gay laboured in his vocation with enthusiasm and success. Willingly would Rigby have kept his treasure to himself; and truly he hoarded it for a long time, but it oozed out. Rigby loved the reputation of possessing the complete art of society. His dinners were celebrated at least for their guests. Great intellectual illustrations were found there blended with rank and high station. Rigby loved to patronise; to play the minister unbending and seeking relief from the cares of council in the society of authors, artists, and men of science. He liked dukes to dine with him and hear him scatter his audacious criticisms to Sir Thomas or Sir Humphry. They went away astounded by the powers of their host, who, had he not fortunately devoted those powers to their party, must apparently have rivalled Vandyke, or discovered the safety-lamp.

Now in these dinners, Lucian Gay, who had brilliant conversational powers, and who possessed all the resources of boon companionship, would be an invaluable ally. He was therefore admitted, and inspired both by the present enjoyment, and the future to which it might lead, his exertions were untiring, various, most successful. Rigby's dinners became still more celebrated. It, however, necessarily followed that the guests who were charmed by Gay, wished Gay also to be their guest. Rigby was very jealous of this, but it was inevitable; still by constant manœuvre, by intimations of some exercise, some day or other, of substantial patronage in his behalf, by a thousand little arts by

which he carved out work for Gay which often prevented him accepting invitations to great houses in the country, by judicious loans of small sums on Lucian's notes of hand and other analogous devices, Rigby contrived to keep the wit in a fair state of bondage and dependence.

One thing Rigby was resolved on: Gay should never get into Monmouth House. That was an empyrean too high for his wing to soar in. Rigby kept that social monopoly distinctively to mark the relation that subsisted between them as patron and client. It was something to swagger about when they were together after their second bottle of claret. Rigby kept his resolution for some years, which the frequent and prolonged absence of the Marquess rendered not very difficult. But we are the creatures of circumstances; at least the Rigby race particularly. Lord Monmouth returned to England one year, and wanted to be amused. He wanted a jester: a man about him who would make him, not laugh, for that was impossible, but smile more frequently, tell good stories, say good things, and sing now and then, especially French songs. Early in life Rigby would have attempted all this, though he had neither fun, voice, nor ear. But his hold on Lord Monmouth no longer depended on the mere exercise of agreeable qualities, he had become indispensable to his lordship, by more serious if not higher considerations. And what with auditing his accounts, guarding his boroughs, writing him, when absent, gossip by every post, and when in England deciding on every question and arranging every matter which might otherwise have ruffled the sublime repose of his patron's existence, Rigby might be excused if he shrank a little from the minor part of table wit, particularly when we remember all his subterranean journalism, his acid squibs, and his malicious paragraphs, and, what Tadpole called, his 'slashing articles.'

These 'slashing articles' were, indeed, things which, had they appeared as anonymous pamphlets, would have obtained the contemptuous reception which in an intellectual view no compositions more surely deserved; but whispered as the productions of one behind the scenes,

and appearing in the pages of a party review, they were passed off as genuine coin, and took in great numbers of the lieges, especially in the country. They were written in a style apparently modelled on the briefs of those sharp attorneys who weary advocates with their clever commonplace; teasing with obvious comment, and torturing with inevitable inference. The affectation of order in the statement of facts had all the lucid method of an adroit pettifogger. They dealt much in extracts from newspapers, quotations from the *Annual Register*, parallel passages in forgotten speeches, arranged with a formidable array of dates rarely accurate. When the writer was of opinion he had made a point, you may be sure the hit was in italics, that last resource of the Forcible Feebles. He handled a particular in chronology as if he were proving an alibi at the Criminal Court. The censure was coarse without being strong, and vindictive when it would have been sarcastic. Now and then there was a passage which aimed at a higher flight, and nothing can be conceived more unlike genuine feeling, or more offensive to pure taste. And yet, perhaps, the most ludicrous characteristic of these factious gallimaufreys was an occasional assumption of the high moral and admonitory tone, which when we recurred to the general spirit of the discourse, and were apt to recall the character of its writer, irresistibly reminded one of Mrs. Cole and her prayer-book.

To return to Lucian Gay. It was a rule with Rigby that no one, if possible, should do anything for Lord Monmouth but himself; and as a jester must be found, he was determined that his Lordship should have the best in the market, and that he should have the credit of furnishing the article. As a reward, therefore, for many past services, and a fresh claim to his future exertions, Rigby one day broke to Gay that the hour had at length arrived when the highest object of reasonable ambition on his part, and the fulfilment of one of Rigby's long-cherished and dearest hopes, were alike to be realised. Gay was to be presented to Lord Monmouth and dine at Monmouth House.

The acquaintance was a successful one; very agreeable

to both parties. Gay became an habitual guest of Lord Monmouth when his patron was in England; and in his absence received frequent and substantial marks of his kind recollection, for Lord Monmouth was generous to those who amused him.

In the meantime the hour of dinner is at hand. Coningsby, who had lost the key of his carpet-bag, which he finally cut open with a penknife that he found on his writing-table, and the blade of which he broke in the operation, only reached the drawing-room as the figure of his grandfather, leaning on his ivory cane, and following his guests, was just visible in the distance. He was soon overtaken. Perceiving Coningsby, Lord Monmouth made him a bow, not so formal a one as in the morning, but still a bow, and said, 'I hope you liked your drive.'

CHAPTER VI.

A *LITTLE dinner, not more than the Muses*, with all the guests clever, and some pretty, offers human life and human nature under very favourable circumstances. In the present instance, too, every one was anxious to please, for the host was entirely well-bred, never selfish in little things, and always contributed his quota to the general fund of polished sociability.

Although there was really only one thought in every male mind present, still, regard for the ladies, and some little apprehension of the servants, banished politics from discourse during the greater part of the dinner, with the occasional exception of some rapid and flying allusion which the initiated understood, but which remained a mystery to the rest. Nevertheless an old story now and then well told by Mr. Ormsby, a new joke now and then well introduced by Mr. Gay, some dashing assertion by Mr. Rigby, which, though wrong, was startling; this agreeable blending of anecdote, jest, and paradox, kept everything