

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

THERE are few things more full of delight and splendour, than to travel during the heat of a refulgent summer in the green district of some ancient forest.

In one of our midland counties there is a region of this character, to which, during a season of peculiar lustre, we would introduce the reader.

It was a fragment of one of those vast sylvan tracts wherein Norman kings once hunted, and Saxon outlaws plundered; and although the plough had for centuries successfully invaded brake and bower, the relics retained all their original character of wildness and seclusion. Sometimes the green earth was thickly studded with groves of huge and vigorous oaks, intersected with those smooth and sunny glades, that seem as if they must be cut for dames and knights to saunter on. Then again the undulating ground spread on all sides, far as the eye could range, covered with copse and fern of immense growth. Anon you found yourself in a turfy wilderness, girt in apparently by dark woods. And when you had wound your way a little through this gloomy belt, the landscape, still strictly sylvan, would beautifully expand with every combination and variety of woodland; while in its centre, the wildfowl covered the waters of a lake, and the deer basked on the knolls that abounded on its banks.

It was in the month of August, some six or seven years ago, that a traveller on foot, touched, as he emerged from the dark wood, by the beauty of this scene, threw himself under the shade of a spreading tree, and stretched his limbs on the turf for enjoyment rather than repose. The sky was deep-coloured and without a cloud, save here and there a minute, sultry, burnished vapour, almost as glossy

as the heavens. Everything was still as it was bright; all seemed brooding and basking; the bee upon its wing was the only stirring sight, and its song the only sound.

The traveller fell into a reverie. He was young, and therefore his musings were of the future. He had felt the pride of learning, so ennobling to youth; he was not a stranger to the stirring impulses of a high ambition, though the world to him was as yet only a world of books, and all that he knew of the schemes of statesmen and the passions of the people, were to be found in their annals. Often had his fitful fancy dwelt with fascination on visions of personal distinction, of future celebrity, perhaps even of enduring fame. But his dreams were of another colour now. The surrounding scene, so fair, so still, and sweet; so abstracted from all the tumult of the world, its strife, its passions, and its cares; had fallen on his heart with its soft and subduing spirit; had fallen on a heart still pure and innocent, the heart of one who, notwithstanding all his high resolves and daring thoughts, was blessed with that tenderness of soul which is sometimes linked with an ardent imagination and a strong will. The traveller was an orphan, more than that, a solitary orphan. The sweet sedulousness of a mother's love, a sister's mystical affection, had not cultivated his early susceptibility. No soft pathos of expression had appealed to his childish ear. He was alone, among strangers calmly and coldly kind. It must indeed have been a truly gentle disposition that could have withstood such hard neglect. All that he knew of the power of the softer passions might be found in the fanciful and romantic annals of schoolboy friendship.

And those friends too, so fond, so sympathising, so devoted, where were they now? Already they were dispersed; the first great separation of life had been experienced; the former schoolboy had planted his foot on the threshold of manhood. True, many of them might meet again; many of them the University must again unite, but never with the same feelings. The space of time, passed in the world before they again met, would be

an age of sensation, passion, experience to all of them. They would meet again with altered mien, with different manners, different voices. Their eyes would not shine with the same light; they would not speak the same words. The favourite phrases of their intimacy, the mystic sounds that spoke only to their initiated ear, they would be ashamed to use them. Yes, they might meet again, but the gushing and secret tenderness was gone for ever?

Nor could our pensive youth conceal it from himself that it was affection, and mainly affection, that had bound him to these dear companions. They could not be to him what he had been to them. His had been the inspiring mind that had guided their opinions, formed their tastes, directed the bent and tenor of their lives and thoughts. Often, indeed, had he needed, sometimes he had even sighed for, the companionship of an equal or superior mind; one who, by the comprehension of his thought, and the richness of his knowledge, and the advantage of his experience, might strengthen and illuminate and guide his obscure or hesitating or unpractised intelligence. He had scarcely been fortunate in this respect, and he deeply regretted it; for he was one of those who was not content with excelling in his own circle, if he thought there was one superior to it. Absolute, not relative distinction, was his noble aim.

Alone, in a lonely scene, he doubly felt the solitude of his life and mind. His heart and his intellect seemed both to need a companion. Books, and action, and deep thought, might in time supply the want of that intellectual guide; but for the heart, where was he to find solace?

Ah! if she would but come forth from that shining lake like a beautiful Ondine! Ah, if she would but step out from the green shade of that secret grove like a Dryad of sylvan Greece! O mystery of mysteries, when the youth dreams his first dream over some imaginary heroine!

Suddenly the brooding wildfowl rose from the bosom of the lake, soared in the air, and, uttering mournful shrieks, whirled in agitated tumult. The deer started from their

knolls, no longer sunny, stared around, and rushed into the woods. Coningsby raised his eyes from the turf on which they had been long fixed in abstraction, and he observed that the azure sky had vanished, a thin white film had suddenly spread itself over the heaven and the wind moaned with a sad and fitful gust.

He had some reason to believe that on the other side of the opposite wood the forest was intersected by a public road, and that there were some habitations. Immediately rising, he descended at a rapid pace into the valley, passed the lake, and then struck into the ascending wood on the bank opposite to that on which he had mused away some precious time.

The wind howled, the branches of the forest stirred, and sent forth sounds like an incantation. Soon might be distinguished the various voices of the mighty trees, as they expressed their terror or their agony. The oak roared, the beech shrieked, the elm sent forth its deep and long-drawn groan; while ever and anon, amid a momentary pause, the passion of the ash was heard in moans of thrilling anguish.

Coningsby hurried on, the forest became less close. All that he aspired to was to gain more open country. Now he was in a rough flat land, covered only here and there with dwarf underwood; the horizon bounded at no great distance by a barren hill of moderate elevation. He gained its height with ease. He looked over a vast open country like a wild common; in the extreme distance hills covered with woods; the plain intersected by two good roads: the sky entirely clouded, but in the distance black as ebony.

A place of refuge was at hand: screened from his first glance by some elm-trees, the ascending smoke now betrayed a roof, which Coningsby reached before the tempest broke. The forest-inn was also a farmhouse. There was a comfortable-enough looking kitchen; but the ingle nook was full of smokers, and Coningsby was glad to avail himself of the only private room for the simple meal which they offered him, only eggs and bacon; but very welcome to a pedestrian, and a hungry one.

As he stood at the window of his little apartment, watching the large drops that were the heralds of a coming hurricane, and waiting for his repast, a flash of lightning illumined the whole country, and a horseman at full speed, followed by his groom, galloped up to the door.

The remarkable beauty of the animal so attracted Coningsby's attention, that it prevented him catching even a glimpse of the rider, who rapidly dismounted and entered the inn. The host shortly after came in and asked Coningsby whether he had any objection to a gentleman, who was driven there by the storm, sharing his room until it subsided. The consequence of the immediate assent of Coningsby was, that the landlord retired and soon returned, ushering in an individual, who, though perhaps ten years older than Coningsby, was still, according to Hippocrates, in the period of lusty youth. He was above the middle height, and of a distinguished air and figure; pale, with an impressive brow, and dark eyes of great intelligence.

'I am glad that we have both escaped the storm,' said the stranger; 'and I am greatly indebted to you for your courtesy.' He slightly and graciously bowed, as he spoke in a voice of remarkable clearness; and his manner, though easy was touched with a degree of dignity that was engaging.

'The inn is a common home,' replied Coningsby, returning his salute.

'And free from cares,' added the stranger. Then, looking through the window, he said, 'A strange storm this. I was sauntering in the sunshine, when suddenly I found I had to gallop for my life. 'Tis more like a white squall in the Mediterranean than anything else.'

'I never was in the Mediterranean,' said Coningsby. 'There is nothing I should like so much as to travel.'

'You are travelling,' rejoined his companion. 'Every moment is travel, if understood.'

'Ah! but the Mediterranean!' exclaimed Coningsby. 'What would I not give to see Athens!'

'I have seen it,' said the stranger, slightly shrugging his shoulders; 'and more wonderful things. Phantoms

and spectres! The Age of Ruins is past. Have you seen Manchester?’

‘I have seen nothing,’ said Coningsby; ‘this is my first wandering. I am about to visit a friend who lives in this county, and I have sent on my baggage as I could. For myself, I determined to trust to a less common-place conveyance.’

‘And seek adventures,’ said the stranger, smiling. ‘Well, according to Cervantes, they should begin in an inn.’

‘I fear that the age of adventures is past, as well as that of ruins,’ replied Coningsby.

‘Adventures are to the adventurous,’ said the stranger.

At this moment a pretty serving-maid entered the room. She laid the dapper cloth and arranged the table with a self-possession quite admirable. She seemed unconscious that any being was in the chamber except herself, or that there were any other duties to perform in life beyond filling a salt-cellar or folding a napkin.

‘She does not even look at us,’ said Coningsby, when she had quitted the room; ‘and I dare say is only a prude.’

‘She is calm,’ said the stranger, ‘because she is mistress of her subject; ’tis the secret of self-possession. She is here as a duchess at court.’

They brought in Coningsby’s meal, and he invited the stranger to join him. The invitation was accepted with cheerfulness.

‘’Tis but simple fare,’ said Coningsby, as the maiden uncovered the still hissing bacon and the eggs, that looked like tufts of primroses.

‘Nay, a national dish,’ said the stranger, glancing quickly at the table, ‘whose fame is a proverb. And what more should we expect under a simple roof! How much better than an omelette or a greasy olla, that they would give us in a posada! ’Tis a wonderful country this England! What a napkin! How spotless! And so sweet; I declare ’tis a perfume. There is not a princess throughout the South of Europe served with the cleanliness that meets us in this cottage.’

'An inheritance from our Saxon fathers?' said Coningsby. 'I apprehend the northern nations have a greater sense of cleanliness, of propriety, of what we call comfort?'

'By no means,' said the stranger; 'the East is the land of the Bath. Moses and Mahomet made cleanliness religion.'

'You will let me help you?' said Coningsby, offering him a plate which he had filled.

'I thank you,' said the stranger, 'but it is one of my bread days. With your permission this shall be my dish;' and he cut from the large loaf a supply of crusts.

'Tis but unsavoury fare after a gallop,' said Coningsby.

'Ah! you are proud of your bacon and your eggs,' said the stranger, smiling, 'but I love corn and wine. They are our chief and our oldest luxuries. Time has brought us substitutes, but how inferior! Man has deified corn and wine! but not even the Chinese or the Irish have raised temples to tea and potatoes.'

'But Ceres without Bacchus,' said Coningsby, 'how does that do? Think you, under this roof, we could invoke the god?'

'Let us swear by his body that we will try,' said the stranger.

Alas! the landlord was not a priest to Bacchus. But then these inquiries led to the finest perry in the world. The young men agreed they had seldom tasted anything more delicious; they sent for another bottle. Coningsby, who was much interested by his new companion, enjoyed himself amazingly.

A cheese, such as Derby alone can produce, could not induce the stranger to be even partially inconstant to his crusts. But his talk was as vivacious as if the talker had been stimulated by the juices of the finest banquet. Coningsby had never met or read of any one like this chance companion. His sentences were so short, his language so racy, his voice rang so clear, his elocution was so complete. On all subjects his mind seemed to be instructed, and his opinions formed. He flung out a result in a few words; he solved with a phrase some deep problem that

men muse over for years. He said many things that were strange, yet they immediately appeared to be true. Then, without the slightest air of pretension or parade, he seemed to know everybody as well as everything. Monarchs, statesmen, authors, adventurers, of all descriptions and of all climes, if their names occurred in the conversation, he described them in an epigrammatic sentence, or revealed their precise position, character, calibre, by a curt dramatic trait. All this, too, without any excitement of manner; on the contrary, with repose amounting almost to nonchalance. If his address had any fault in it, it was rather a deficiency of earnestness. A slight spirit of mockery played over his speech even when you deemed him most serious; you were startled by his sudden transitions from profound thought to poignant sarcasm. A very singular freedom from passion and prejudice on every topic on which they treated, might be some compensation for this want of earnestness, perhaps was its consequence. Certainly it was difficult to ascertain his precise opinions on many subjects, though his manner was frank even to abandonment. And yet throughout his whole conversation, not a stroke of egotism, not a word, not a circumstance escaped him, by which you could judge of his position or purposes in life. As little did he seem to care to discover those of his companion. He did not by any means monopolise the conversation. Far from it; he continually asked questions, and while he received answers, or had engaged his fellow-traveller in any exposition of his opinion or feelings, he listened with a serious and fixed attention, looking Coningsby in the face with a steadfast glance.

‘I perceive,’ said Coningsby, pursuing a strain of thought which the other had indicated, ‘that you have great confidence in the influence of individual character. I also have some confused persuasions of that kind. But it is not the Spirit of the Age.’

‘The age does not believe in great men, because it does not possess any,’ replied the stranger. ‘The Spirit of the Age is the very thing that a great man changes.’

'But does he not rather avail himself of it?' inquired Coningsby.

'Parvenus do,' rejoined his companion; 'but not prophets, great legislators, great conquerors. They destroy and they create.'

'But are these times for great legislators and great conquerors?' urged Coningsby.

'When were they wanted more?' asked the stranger. 'From the throne to the hovel all call for a guide. You give monarchs constitutions to teach them sovereignty, and nations Sunday-schools to inspire them with faith.'

'But what is an individual,' exclaimed Coningsby, 'against a vast public opinion?'

'Divine,' said the stranger. 'God made man in His own image; but the Public is made by Newspapers, Members of Parliament, Excise Officers, Poor Law Guardians. Would Philip have succeeded if Epaminondas had not been slain? And if Philip had not succeeded? Would Prussia have existed had Frederick not been born? And if Frederick had not been born? What would have been the fate of the Stuarts if Prince Henry had not died, and Charles I., as was intended, had been Archbishop of Canterbury?'

'But when men are young they want experience,' said Coningsby; 'and when they have gained experience, they want energy.'

'Great men never want experience,' said the stranger.

'But everybody says that experience ——'

'Is the best thing in the world, a treasure for you, for me, for millions. But for a creative mind, less than nothing. Almost everything that is great has been done by youth.'

'It is at least a creed flattering to our years,' said Coningsby, with a smile.

'Nay,' said the stranger; 'for life in general there is but one decree. Youth is a blunder; Manhood a struggle; Old Age a regret. Do not suppose,' he added, smiling, 'that I hold that youth is genius; all that I say is, that genius, when young, is divine. Why, the greatest captains of

ancient and modern times both conquered Italy at five-and-twenty! Youth, extreme youth, overthrew the Persian Empire. Don John of Austria won Lepanto at twenty-five, the greatest battle of modern time; had it not been for the jealousy of Philip, the next year he would have been Emperor of Mauritania. Gaston de Foix was only twenty-two when he stood a victor on the plain of Ravenna. Every one remembers Condé and Rocroy at the same age. Gustavus Adolphus died at thirty-eight. Look at his captains: that wonderful Duke of Weimar, only thirty-six when he died. Banier himself, after all his miracles, died at forty-five. Cortes was little more than thirty when he gazed upon the golden cupolas of Mexico. When Maurice of Saxony died at thirty-two, all Europe acknowledged the loss of the greatest captain and the profoundest statesman of the age. Then there is Nelson, Clive; but these are warriors, and perhaps you may think there are greater things than war. I do not: I worship the Lord of Hosts. But take the most illustrious achievements of civil prudence. Innocent III., the greatest of the Popes, was the despot of Christendom at thirty-seven. John de Medici was a Cardinal at fifteen, and according to Guicciardini, baffled with his statcraft Ferdinand of Arragon himself. He was Pope as Leo X. at thirty-seven. Luther robbed even him of his richest province at thirty-five. Take Ignatius Loyola and John Wesley, they worked with young brains. Ignatius was only thirty when he made his pilgrimage and wrote the "Spiritual Exercises." Pascal wrote a great work at sixteen, and died at thirty-seven, the greatest of Frenchmen.

'Ah! that fatal thirty-seven, which reminds me of Byron, greater even as a man than a writer. Was it experience that guided the pencil of Raphael when he painted the palaces of Rome? He, too, died at thirty-seven. Richelieu was Secretary of State at thirty-one. Well then, there were Bolingbroke and Pitt, both ministers before other men left off cricket. Grotius was in great practice at seventeen, and Attorney-General at twenty-four. And

Acquaviva; Acquaviva was General of the Jesuits, ruled every cabinet in Europe, and colonised America before he was thirty-seven. What a career!' exclaimed the stranger; rising from his chair and walking up and down the room; 'the secret sway of Europe! That was indeed a position! But it is needless to multiply instances! The history of Heroes is the history of Youth.'

'Ah!' said Coningsby, 'I should like to be a great man.'

The stranger threw at him a scrutinising glance. His countenance was serious. He said in a voice of almost solemn melody,

'Nurture your mind with great thoughts. To believe in the heroic makes heroes.'

'You seem to me a hero,' said Coningsby, in a tone of real feeling, which, half ashamed of his emotion, he tried to turn into playfulness.

'I am and must ever be,' said the stranger, 'but a dreamer of dreams.' Then going towards the window, and changing into a familiar tone, as if to divert the conversation, he added, 'What a delicious afternoon! I look forward to my ride with delight. You rest here?'

'No; I go on to Nottingham, where I shall sleep.'

'And I in the opposite direction.' And he rang the bell, and ordered his horses.

'I long to see your mare again,' said Coningsby. 'She seemed to me so beautiful.'

'She is not only of pure race,' said the stranger, 'but of the highest and rarest breed in Arabia. Her name is "the Daughter of the Star." She is a foal of that famous mare, which belonged to the Prince of the Wahabees; and to possess which, I believe, was one of the principal causes of war between that tribe and the Egyptians. The Pacha of Egypt gave her to me, and I would not change her for her statue in pure gold, even carved by Lysippus. Come round to the stable and see her.'

They went out together. It was a soft sunny afternoon; the air fresh from the rain, but mild and exhilarating.

The groom brought forth the mare. 'The Daughter of the Star' stood before Coningsby with her sinewy shape of

matchless symmetry; her burnished skin, black mane, legs like those of an antelope, her little ears, dark speaking eye, and tail worthy of a Pacha. And who was her master, and whither was she about to take him?

Coningsby was so naturally well-bred, that we may be sure it was not curiosity; no, it was a finer feeling that made him hesitate and think a little, and then say

‘I am sorry to part.’

‘I also,’ said the stranger. ‘But life is constant separation.’

‘I hope we may meet again,’ said Coningsby.

‘If our acquaintance be worth preserving,’ said the stranger, ‘you may be sure it will not be lost.’

‘But mine is not worth preserving,’ said Coningsby, earnestly. ‘It is yours that is the treasure. You teach me things of which I have long mused.’

The stranger took the bridle of ‘the Daughter of the Star,’ and turning round with a faint smile, extended his hand to his companion.

‘Your mind at least is nurtured with great thoughts,’ said Coningsby; ‘your actions should be heroic.’

‘Action is not for me,’ said the stranger; ‘I am of that faith that the Apostles professed before they followed their master.’

He vaulted into his saddle, ‘the Daughter of the Star’ bounded away as if she scented the air of the Desert from which she and her rider had alike sprung, and Coningsby remained in profound meditation.

CHAPTER II.

THE day after his adventure at the Forest Inn, Coningsby arrived at Beaumanoir. It was several years since he had visited the family of his friend, who were indeed also his kin; and in his boyish days had often proved that they were not unmindful of the affinity. This was a visit that had been long counted on, long promised, and which

a variety of circumstances had hitherto prevented. It was to have been made by the schoolboy; it was to be fulfilled by the man. For no less a character could Coningsby under any circumstances now consent to claim, since he was closely verging to the completion of his nineteenth year; and it appeared manifest that if it were his destiny to do anything great, he had but few years to wait before the full development of his power. Visions of Gastons de Foix and Maurices of Saxony, statesmen giving up cricket to govern nations, beardless Jesuits plunged in profound abstraction in omnipotent cabinets, haunted his fancy from the moment he had separated from his mysterious and deeply interesting companion. To nurture his mind with great thoughts had ever been Coningsby's inspiring habit. Was it also destined that he should achieve the heroic?

There are some books, when we close them; one or two in the course of our life, difficult as it may be to analyse or ascertain the cause; our minds seem to have made a great leap. A thousand obscure things receive light; a multitude of indefinite feelings are determined. Our intellect grasps and grapples with all subjects with a capacity, a flexibility, and a vigour, before unknown to us. It masters questions hitherto perplexing, which are not even touched or referred to in the volume just closed. What is this magic? It is the spirit of the supreme author, by a magnetic influence blending with our sympathising intelligence, that directs and inspires it. By that mysterious sensibility we extend to questions which he has not treated, the same intellectual force which he has exercised over those which he has expounded. His genius for a time remains in us. 'Tis the same with human beings as with books. All of us encounter, at least once in our life, some individual who utters words that make us think for ever. There are men whose phrases are oracles; who condense in a sentence the secrets of life; who blurt out an aphorism that forms a character or illustrates an existence. A great thing is a great book; but greater than all is the talk of a great man.

And what is a great man? Is it a Minister of State?

Is it a victorious General? A gentleman in the Windsor uniform? A Field Marshal covered with stars? Is it a Prelate, or a Prince? A King, even an Emperor? It may be all these; yet these, as we must all daily feel, are not necessarily great men. A great man is one who affects the mind of his generation: whether he be a monk in his cloister agitating Christendom, or a monarch crossing the Granicus, and giving a new character to the Pagan World.

Our young Coningsby reached Beaumanoir in a state of meditation. He also desired to be great. Not from the restless vanity that sometimes impels youth to momentary exertion, by which they sometimes obtain a distinction as evanescent as their energy. The ambition of our hero was altogether of a different character. It was, indeed, at present not a little vague, indefinite, hesitating, inquiring, sometimes desponding. What were his powers? what should be his aim? were often to him, as to all young aspirants, questions infinitely perplexing and full of pain. But, on the whole, there ran through his character, notwithstanding his many dazzling qualities and accomplishments, and his juvenile celebrity, which has spoiled so much promise, a vein of grave simplicity that was the consequence of an earnest temper, and of an intellect that would be content with nothing short of the profound.

His was a mind that loved to pursue every question to the centre. But it was not a spirit of scepticism that impelled this habit; on the contrary, it was the spirit of faith. Coningsby found that he was born in an age of infidelity in all things, and his heart assured him that a want of faith was a want of nature. But his vigorous intellect could not take refuge in that maudlin substitute for belief which consists in a patronage of fantastic theories. He needed that deep and enduring conviction that the heart and the intellect, feeling and reason united, can alone supply. He asked himself why governments were hated, and religions despised? Why loyalty was dead, and reverence only a galvanised corpse?

These were indeed questions that had as yet presented

themselves to his thought in a crude and imperfect form; but their very occurrence showed the strong predisposition of his mind. It was because he had not found guides among his elders, that his thoughts had been turned to the generation that he himself represented. The sentiment of veneration was so developed in his nature, that he was exactly the youth that would have hung with enthusiastic humility on the accents of some sage of old in the groves of Academus, or the porch of Zeno. But as yet he had found age only perplexed and desponding; manhood only callous and desperate. Some thought that systems would last their time; others, that something would turn up. His deep and pious spirit recoiled with disgust and horror from such lax, chance-medley maxims, that would, in their consequences, reduce man to the level of the brutes. Notwithstanding a prejudice which had haunted him from his childhood, he had, when the occasion offered, applied to Mr. Rigby for instruction, as one distinguished in the republic of letters, as well as the realm of politics; who assumed the guidance of the public mind, and, as the phrase runs, was looked up to. Mr. Rigby listened at first to the inquiries of Coningsby, urged, as they ever were, with a modesty and deference which do not always characterise juvenile investigations, as if Coningsby were speaking to him of the unknown tongues. But Mr. Rigby was not a man who ever confessed himself at fault. He caught up something of the subject as our young friend proceeded, and was perfectly prepared, long before he had finished, to take the whole conversation into his own hands.

Mr. Rigby began by ascribing everything to the Reform Bill, and then referred to several of his own speeches on Schedule A. Then he told Coningsby that want of religious Faith was solely occasioned by want of churches; and want of Loyalty, by George IV. having shut himself up too much at the cottage in Windsor Park, entirely against the advice of Mr. Rigby. He assured Coningsby that the Church Commission was operating wonders, and that with private benevolence, he had himself subscribed 1,000*l.*, for

Lord Monmouth, we should soon have churches enough. The great question now was their architecture. Had George IV. lived all would have been right. They would have been built on the model of the Buddhist pagoda. As for Loyalty, if the present King went regularly to Ascot races, he had no doubt all would go right. Finally, Mr. Rigby impressed on Coningsby to read the Quarterly Review with great attention; and to make himself master of Mr. Wordy's History of the late War, in twenty volumes, a capital work, which proves that Providence was on the side of the Tories.

Coningsby did not apply to Mr. Rigby again; but worked on with his own mind, coming often enough to sufficiently crude conclusions, and often much perplexed and harassed. He tried occasionally his inferences on his companions, who were intelligent and full of fervour. Millbank was more than this. He was of a thoughtful mood; had also caught up from a new school some principles, which were materials for discussion. One way or other, however, before he quitted Eton there prevailed among this circle of friends, the initial idea doubtless emanating from Coningsby, an earnest, though a rather vague, conviction that the present state of feeling in matters both civil and religious was not healthy; that there must be substituted for this latitudinarianism something sound and deep, fervent and well defined, and that the priests of this new faith must be found among the New Generation; so that when the bright-minded rider of 'the Daughter of the Star' descanted on the influence of individual character, of great thoughts and heroic actions, and the divine power of youth and genius, he touched a string that was the very heart-chord of his companion, who listened with fascinated enthusiasm as he introduced him to his gallery of inspiring models.

Coningsby arrived at Beaumanoir at a season when men can neither hunt nor shoot. Great internal resources should be found in a country family under such circumstances. The Duke and Duchess had returned from London only a few days with their daughter, who had been presented this

year. They were all glad to find themselves again in the country, which they loved and which loved them. One of their sons-in-law and his wife, and Henry Sydney, completed the party.

There are few conjunctures in life of a more startling interest, than to meet the pretty little girl that we have gambolled with in our boyhood, and to find her changed in the lapse of a very few years, which in some instances may not have brought a corresponding alteration in our own appearance, into a beautiful woman. Something of this flitted over Coningsby's mind, as he bowed, a little agitated from his surprise, to Lady Theresa Sydney. All that he remembered had prepared him for beauty; but not for the degree or character of beauty that he met. It was a rich, sweet face, with blue eyes and dark lashes, and a nose that we have no epithet in English to describe, but which charmed in Roxalana. Her brown hair fell over her white and well-turned shoulders in long and luxuriant tresses. One has met something as brilliant and dainty in a medallion of old Sèvres, or amid the terraces and gardens of Watteau.

Perhaps Lady Theresa, too, might have welcomed him with more freedom had his appearance also more accorded with the image which he had left behind. Coningsby was a boy then, as we described him in our first chapter. Though only nineteen now, he had attained his full stature, which was above the middle height, and time had fulfilled that promise of symmetry in his figure, and grace in his mien, then so largely intimated. Time, too, which had not yet robbed his countenance of any of its physical beauty, had strongly developed the intellectual charm by which it had ever been distinguished. As he bowed lowly before the Duchess and her daughter, it would have been difficult to image a youth of a mien more prepossessing and a manner more finished.

A manner that was spontaneous; nature's pure gift, the reflex of his feeling. No artifice prompted that profound and polished homage. Not one of those influences, the aggregate of whose sway produces, as they tell us, the

finished gentleman, had ever exercised its beneficent power on our orphan, and not rarely forlorn, Coningsby. No clever and refined woman, with her quick perception, and nice criticism that never offends our self-love, had ever given him that education that is more precious than Universities. The mild suggestions of a sister, the gentle raillery of some laughing cousin, are also advantages not always appreciated at the time, but which boys, when they have become men, often think over with gratitude, and a little remorse at the ungracious spirit in which they were received. Not even the dancing-master had afforded his mechanical aid to Coningsby, who, like all Eton boys of this generation, viewed that professor of accomplishments with frank repugnance. But even in the boisterous life of school, Coningsby, though his style was free and flowing, was always well-bred. His spirit recoiled from that gross familiarity that is the characteristic of modern manners, and which would destroy all forms and ceremonies merely because they curb and control their own coarse convenience and ill-disguised selfishness. To women, however, Coningsby instinctively bowed, as to beings set apart for reverence and delicate treatment. Little as his experience was of them, his spirit had been fed with chivalrous fancies, and he entertained for them all the ideal devotion of a Surrey or a Sydney. Instructed, if not learned, as books and thought had already made him in men, he could not conceive that there were any other women in the world than fair Geraldines and Countesses of Pembroke.

There was not a country-house in England that had so completely the air of habitual residence as Beaumanoir. It is a charming trait, and very rare. In many great mansions everything is as stiff, formal, and tedious, as if your host were a Spanish grandee in the days of the Inquisition. No ease, no resources; the passing life seems a solemn spectacle in which you play a part. How delightful was the morning room at Beaumanoir; from which gentlemen were not excluded with that assumed suspicion that they can never enter it but for felonious purposes. Such a profusion of

flowers! Such a multitude of books! Such a various prodigality of writing materials! So many easy chairs too, of so many shapes; each in itself a comfortable home; yet nothing crowded. Woman alone can organise a drawing-room; man succeeds sometimes in a library. And the ladies' work! How graceful they look bending over their embroidery frames, consulting over the arrangement of a group, or the colour of a flower. The panniers and fanciful baskets, overflowing with variegated worsted, are gay and full of pleasure to the eye, and give an air of elegant business that is vivifying. Even the sight of employment interests.

Then the morning costume of English women is itself a beautiful work of art. At this period of the day they can find no rivals in other climes. The brilliant complexions of the daughters of the north dazzle in daylight; the illumined saloon levels all distinctions. One should see them in their well-fashioned muslin dresses. What matrons, and what maidens! Full of graceful dignity, fresher than the morn! And the married beauty in her little lace cap. Ah, she is a coquette! A charming character at all times; in a country-house an invaluable one.

A coquette is a being who wishes to please. Amiable being! If you do not like her, you will have no difficulty in finding a female companion of a different mood. Alas! coquettes are but too rare. 'Tis a career that requires great abilities, infinite pains, a gay and airy spirit. 'Tis the coquette that provides all amusement; suggests the riding party, plans the pic-nic, gives and guesses charades, acts them. She is the stirring element amid the heavy congeries of social atoms; the soul of the house, the salt of the banquet. Let any one pass a very agreeable week, or it may be ten days, under any roof, and analyse the cause of his satisfaction, and one might safely make a gentle wager that his solution would present him with the frolic phantom of a coquette.

'It is impossible that Mr. Coningsby can remember me!' said a clear voice; and he looked round, and was greeted by a pair of sparkling eyes and the gayest smile in the world.

It was Lady Everingham, the Duke's married daughter.

CHAPTER III.

'AND you walked here!' said Lady Everingham to Coningsby, when the stir of arranging themselves at dinner had subsided. 'Only think, papa, Mr. Coningsby walked here! I also am a great walker.'

'I had heard much of the forest,' said Coningsby.

'Which I am sure did not disappoint you,' said the Duke.

'But forests without adventures!' said Lady Everingham, a little shrugging her pretty shoulders.

'But I had an adventure,' said Coningsby.

'Oh! tell it us by all means!' said the Lady, with great animation. 'Adventures are my weakness. I have had more adventures than any one. Have I not had, Augustus?' she added, addressing her husband.

'But you make everything out to be an adventure, Isabel,' said Lord Everingham. 'I dare say that Mr. Coningsby's was more substantial.' And looking at our young friend, he invited him to inform them.

'I met a most extraordinary man,' said Coningsby.

'It should have been a heroine,' exclaimed Lady Everingham.

'Do you know anybody in this neighbourhood who rides the finest Arab in the world?' asked Coningsby. 'She is called "the Daughter of the Star," and was given to her rider by the Pacha of Egypt.'

'This is really an adventure,' said Lady Everingham, interested.

'The Daughter of the Star!' said Lady Theresa. 'What a pretty name! Percy has a horse called "Sunbeam."'

'A fine Arab, the finest in the world!' said the Duke, who was very fond of horses. 'Who can it be?'

'Can you throw any light on this, Mr. Lyle?' asked the Duchess of a young man who sat next her.

He was a neighbour who had joined their dinner-party.

Eustace Lyle, a Roman Catholic, and the richest commoner in the county; for he had succeeded to a great estate early in his minority, which had only this year terminated.

'I certainly do not know the horse,' said Mr. Lyle; 'but if Mr. Coningsby would describe the rider, perhaps ——'

'He is a man something under thirty,' said Coningsby, 'pale, with dark hair. We met in a sort of forest-inn during a storm. A most singular man! Indeed, I never met any one who seemed to me so clever, or to say such remarkable things.'

'He must have been the spirit of the storm,' said Lady Everingham.

'Charles Verney has a great deal of dark hair,' said Lady Theresa. 'But then he is anything but pale, and his eyes are blue.'

'And certainly he keeps his wonderful things for your ear, Theresa,' said her sister.

'I wish that Mr. Coningsby would tell us some of the wonderful things he said,' said the Duchess, smiling.

'Take a glass of wine first with my mother, Coningsby,' said Henry Sydney, who had just finished helping them all to fish.

Coningsby had too much tact to be entrapped into a long story. He already regretted that he had been betrayed into any allusion to the stranger. He had a wild, fanciful notion, that their meeting ought to have been preserved as a sacred secret. But he had been impelled to refer to it in the first instance by the chance observation of Lady Everingham; and he had pursued his remark from the hope that the conversation might have led to the discovery of the unknown. When he found that his inquiry in this respect was unsuccessful, he was willing to turn the conversation. In reply to the Duchess, then, he generally described the talk of the stranger as full of lively anecdote and epigrammatic views of life; and gave them, for example, a saying of an illustrious foreign Prince, which was quite new and pointed, and which Coningsby told well. This led to a new train of discourse. The Duke also knew this illustrious

foreign Prince, and told another story of him; and Lord Everingham had played whist with this illustrious foreign Prince often at the Travellers', and this led to a third story; none of them too long. Then Lady Everingham came in again, and sparkled agreeably. She, indeed, sustained throughout dinner the principal weight of the conversation; but, as she asked questions of everybody, all seemed to contribute. Even the voice of Mr. Lyle, who was rather bashful, was occasionally heard in reply. Coningsby, who had at first unintentionally taken a more leading part than he aspired to, would have retired into the background for the rest of the dinner, but Lady Everingham continually signalled him out for her questions, and as she sat opposite to him, he seemed the person to whom they were principally addressed.

At length the ladies rose to retire. A very great personage in a foreign, but not remote country, once mentioned to the writer of these pages, that he ascribed the superiority of the English in political life, in their conduct of public business and practical views of affairs, in a great measure to 'that little half-hour' that separates, after dinner, the dark from the fair sex. The writer humbly submitted, that if the period of disjunction were strictly limited to a 'little half-hour,' its salutary consequences for both sexes need not be disputed, but that in England the 'little half-hour' was too apt to swell into a term of far more awful character and duration. Lady Everingham was a disciple of the 'very little half-hour' school; for, as she gaily followed her mother, she said to Coningsby, whose gracious lot it was to usher them from the apartment,

'Pray do not be too long at the Board of Guardians to-day.'

These were prophetic words; for no sooner were they again seated, than the Duke, filling his glass and pushing the claret to Coningsby, observed,

'I suppose Lord Monmouth does not trouble himself much about the New Poor Law?'

'Hardly,' said Coningsby. 'My grandfather's frequent

absence from England, which his health, I believe, renders quite necessary, deprives him of the advantage of personal observation on a subject, than which I can myself conceive none more deeply interesting.'

'I am glad to hear you say so,' said the Duke, 'and it does you great credit, and Henry too, whose attention, I observe, is directed very much to these subjects. In my time, the young men did not think so much of such things, and we suffer consequently. By the bye, Everingham, you, who are a Chairman of a Board of Guardians, can give me some information. Supposing a case of out-door relief——'

'I could not suppose anything so absurd,' said the son-in-law.

'Well,' rejoined the Duke, 'I know your views on that subject, and it certainly is a question on which there is a good deal to be said. But would you under any circumstances give relief out of the Union, even if the parish were to save a considerable sum?'

'I wish I knew the Union where such a system was followed,' said Lord Everingham; and his Grace seemed to tremble under his son-in-law's glance.

The Duke had a good heart, and not a bad head. If he had not made in his youth so many Latin and English verses, he might have acquired considerable information, for he had a natural love of letters, though his pack were the pride of England, his barrel seldom missed, and his fortune on the turf, where he never betted, was a proverb. He was good, and he wished to do good; but his views were confused from want of knowledge, and his conduct often inconsistent because a sense of duty made him immediately active; and he often acquired in the consequent experience a conviction exactly contrary to that which had prompted his activity.

His Grace had been a great patron and a zealous administrator of the New Poor Law. He had been persuaded that it would elevate the condition of the labouring class. His son-in-law, Lord Everingham, who was a Whig, and a

clear-headed, cold-blooded man, looked upon the New Poor Law as another Magna Charta. Lord Everingham was completely master of the subject. He was himself the Chairman of one of the most considerable Unions of the kingdom. The Duke, if he ever had a misgiving, had no chance in argument with his son-in-law. Lord Everingham overwhelmed him with quotations from Commissioners' rules and Sub-commissioners' reports, statistical tables, and references to dietaries. Sometimes with a strong case, the Duke struggled to make a fight; but Lord Everingham, when he was at fault for a reply, which was very rare, upbraided his father-in-law with the abuses of the old system, and frightened him with visions of rates exceeding rentals.

Of late, however, a considerable change had taken place in the Duke's feelings on this great question. His son Henry entertained strong opinions upon it, and had combated his father with all the fervour of a young votary. A victory over his Grace, indeed, was not very difficult. His natural impulse would have early enlisted him on the side, if not of opposition to the new system, at least of critical suspicion of its spirit and provisions. It was only the statistics and sharp acuteness of his son-in-law that had, indeed, ever kept him to his colours. Lord Henry would not listen to statistics, dietary tables, Commissioners' rules, Sub-commissioners' reports. He went far higher than his father; far deeper than his brother-in-law. He represented to the Duke that the order of the peasantry was as ancient, legal, and recognised an order as the order of the nobility; that it had distinct rights and privileges, though for centuries they had been invaded and violated, and permitted to fall into desuetude. He impressed upon the Duke that the parochial constitution of this country was more important than its political constitution; that it was more ancient, more universal in its influence; and that this parochial constitution had already been shaken to its centre by the New Poor Law. He assured his father that it would never be well for England until this order of

the peasantry was restored to its pristine condition; not merely in physical comfort, for that must vary according to the economical circumstances of the time, like that of every class; but to its condition in all those moral attributes which make a recognised rank in a nation; and which, in a great degree, are independent of economics, manners, customs, ceremonies, rights, and privileges.

'Henry thinks,' said Lord Everingham, 'that the people are to be fed by dancing round a May-pole.'

'But will the people be more fed because they do not dance round a May-pole?' urged Lord Henry.

'Obsolete customs!' said Lord Everingham.

'And why should dancing round a May-pole be more obsolete than holding a Chapter of the Garter?' asked Lord Henry.

The Duke, who was a blue ribbon, felt this a home thrust. 'I must say,' said his Grace, 'that I for one deeply regret that our popular customs have been permitted to fall so into desuetude.'

'The Spirit of the Age is against such things,' said Lord Everingham.

'And what is the Spirit of the Age?' asked Coningsby.

'The Spirit of Utility,' said Lord Everingham.

'And you think then that ceremony is not useful?' urged Coningsby, mildly.

'It depends upon circumstances,' said Lord Everingham.

'There are some ceremonies, no doubt, that are very proper, and of course very useful. But the best thing we can do for the labouring classes is to provide them with work.'

'But what do you mean by the labouring classes, Everingham?' asked Lord Henry. 'Lawyers are a labouring class, for instance, and by the bye sufficiently provided with work. But would you approve of Westminster Hall being denuded of all its ceremonies?'

'And the long vacation being abolished?' added Coningsby.

'Theresa brings me terrible accounts of the sufferings of the poor about us,' said the Duke, shaking his head.

'Women think everything to be suffering!' said Lord Everingham.

'How do you find them about you, Mr. Lyle?' continued the Duke.

'I have revived the monastic customs at St. Geneviève,' said the young man, blushing. 'There is an almsgiving twice a-week.'

'I am sure I wish I could see the labouring classes happy,' said the Duke.

'Oh! pray do not use, my dear father, that phrase, the labouring classes!' said Lord Henry. 'What do you think, Coningsby, the other day we had a meeting in this neighbourhood to vote an agricultural petition that was to comprise all classes. I went with my father, and I was made chairman of the committee to draw up the petition. Of course, I described it as the petition of the nobility, clergy, gentry, yeomanry, and peasantry of the county of —; and, could you believe it, they struck out *peasantry* as a word no longer used, and inserted *labourers*.'

'What can it signify,' said Lord Everingham, 'whether a man be called a labourer or a peasant?'

'And what can it signify,' said his brother-in-law, 'whether a man be called Mr. Howard or Lord Everingham?'

They were the most affectionate family under this roof of Beaumanoir, and of all members of it, Lord Henry the sweetest tempered, and yet it was astonishing what sharp skirmishes every day arose between him and his brother-in-law, during that 'little half-hour' that forms so happily the political character of the nation. The Duke, who from experience felt that a guerilla movement was impending, asked his guests whether they would take any more claret; and on their signifying their dissent, moved an adjournment to the ladies.

They joined the ladies in the music-room. Coningsby, not experienced in feminine society, and who found a little difficulty from want of practice in maintaining conversation, though he was desirous of succeeding, was delighted with

Lady Everingham, who, instead of requiring to be amused, amused him; and suggested so many subjects, and glanced at so many topics, that there never was that cold, awkward pause, so common with sullen spirits and barren brains. Lady Everingham thoroughly understood the art of conversation, which, indeed, consists of the exercise of two fine qualities. You must originate, and you must sympathise; you must possess at the same time the habit of communicating and the habit of listening. The union is rather rare, but irresistible.

Lady Everingham was not a celebrated beauty, but she was something infinitely more delightful, a captivating woman. There were combined in her, qualities not commonly met together, great vivacity of mind with great grace of manner. Her words sparkled and her movements charmed. There was, indeed, in all she said and did, that congruity that indicates a complete and harmonious organisation. It was the same just proportion which characterised her form: a shape slight and undulating with grace; the most beautifully shaped ear; a small, soft hand; a foot that would have fitted the glass slipper; and which, by the bye, she lost no opportunity of displaying; and she was right, for it was a model.

Then there was music. Lady Theresa sang like a seraph: a rich voice, a grand style. And her sister could support her with grace and sweetness. And they did not sing too much. The Duke took up a review, and looked at Rigby's last slashing article. The country seemed ruined, but it appeared that the Whigs were still worse off than the Tories. The assassins had committed suicide. This poetical justice is pleasing. Lord Everingham, lounging in an easy chair, perused with great satisfaction his *Morning Chronicle*, which contained a cutting reply to Mr. Rigby's article, not quite so 'slashing' as the Right Honourable scribe's manifesto, but with some searching mockery, that became the subject and the subject-monger.

Mr. Lyle seated himself by the Duchess, and encouraged by her amenity, and speaking in whispers, became animated

and agreeable, occasionally patting the lap-dog. Coningsby stood by the singers, or talked with them when the music had ceased: and Henry Sydney looked over a volume of Strutt's *Sports and Pastimes*, occasionally, without taking his eyes off the volume, calling the attention of his friends to his discoveries.

Mr. Lyle rose to depart, for he had some miles to return; he came forward with some hesitation, to hope that Coningsby would visit his bloodhounds, which Lord Henry had told him Coningsby had expressed a wish to do. Lady Everingham remarked that she had not been at St. Geneviève since she was a girl, and it appeared Lady Theresa had never visited it. Lady Everingham proposed that they should all ride over on the morrow, and she appealed to her husband for his approbation, instantly given, for though she loved admiration, and he apparently was an iceberg, they were really devoted to each other. Then there was a consultation as to their arrangements. The Duchess would drive over in her pony chair with Theresa. The Duke, as usual, had affairs that would occupy him. The rest were to ride. It was a happy suggestion, all anticipated pleasure; and the evening terminated with the prospect of what Lady Everingham called an adventure.

The ladies themselves soon withdrew; the gentlemen lingered for awhile; the Duke took up his candle, and bid his guests good night; Lord Everingham drank a glass of Seltzer water, nodded, and vanished. Lord Henry and his friend sat up talking over the past. They were too young to call them old times; and yet what a life seemed to have elapsed since they had quitted Eton, dear old Eton! Their boyish feelings, and still latent boyish character, developed with their reminiscences.

'Do you remember Bucknall? Which Bucknall? The eldest: I saw him the other day at Nottingham; he is in the Rifles. Do you remember that day at Sirly Hall, that Paulet had that row with Dickinson? Did you like Dickinson? Hum! Paulet was a good fellow. I tell you who

was a good fellow, Paulet's little cousin. What! Augustus Le Grange? Oh! I liked Augustus Le Grange. I wonder where Buckhurst is? I had a letter from him the other day. He has gone with his uncle to Paris. We shall find him at Cambridge in October. I suppose you know Millbank has gone to Oriel. Has he, though! I wonder who will have our room at Cookesley's? Cookesley was a good fellow! Oh, capital! How well he behaved when there was that row about our going out with the hounds? Do you remember Vere's face? It makes me laugh now when I think of it. I tell you who was a good fellow, Kangaroo Gray; I liked him. I don't know any fellow who sang a better song!

'By the bye,' said Coningsby, 'what sort of fellow is Eustace Lyle? I rather liked his look.'

'Oh! I will tell you all about him,' said Lord Henry. 'He is a great ally of mine, and I think you will like him very much. It is a Roman Catholic family, about the oldest we have in the county, and the wealthiest. You see, Lyle's father was the most violent ultra Whig, and so were all Eustace's guardians; but the moment he came of age, he announced that he should not mix himself up with either of the parties in the county, and that his tenantry might act exactly as they thought fit. My father thinks, of course, that Lyle is a Conservative, and that he only waits the occasion to come forward; but he is quite wrong. I know Lyle well, and he speaks to me without disguise. You see 'tis an old Cavalier family, and Lyle has all the opinions and feelings of his race. He will not ally himself with anti-monarchists, and democrats, and infidels, and sectarians; at the same time, why should he support a party who pretend to oppose these, but who never lose an opportunity of insulting his religion, and would deprive him, if possible, of the advantages of the very institutions which his family assisted in establishing?'

'Why, indeed? I am glad to have made his acquaintance,' said Coningsby. 'Is he clever?'

'I think so,' said Lord Henry. 'He is the most shy

fellow, especially among women, that I ever knew, but he is very popular in the county. He does an amazing deal of good, and is one of the best riders we have. My father says, the very best; bold, but so very certain.'

'He is older than we are?'

'My senior by a year: he is just of age.'

'Oh, ah! twenty-one. A year younger than Gaston de Foix when he won Ravenna, and four years younger than John of Austria when he won Lepanto,' observed Coningsby, musingly. 'I vote we go to bed, old fellow!'

CHAPTER IV.

In a valley, not far from the margin of a beautiful river, raised on a lofty and artificial terrace at the base of a range of wooded heights, was a pile of modern building in the finest style of Christian architecture. It was of great extent and richly decorated. Built of a white and glittering stone, it sparkled with its pinnacles in the sunshine as it rose in strong relief against its verdant background. The winding valley, which was studded, but not too closely studded, with clumps of old trees, formed for a great extent on either side of the mansion a grassy demesne, which was called the Lower Park; but it was a region bearing the name of the Upper Park, that was the peculiar and most picturesque feature of this splendid residence. The wooded heights that formed the valley were not, as they appeared, a range of hills. Their crest was only the abrupt termination of a vast and enclosed table-land, abounding in all the qualities of the ancient chase: turf and trees, a wilderness of underwood, and a vast spread of gorse and fern. The deer, that abounded, lived here in a world as savage as themselves: trooping down in the evening to the river. Some of them, indeed, were ever in sight of those who were in the valley, and you might often observe various groups clustered on the green heights

above the mansion, the effect of which was most inspiring and graceful. Sometimes in the twilight, a solitary form, magnified by the illusive hour, might be seen standing on the brink of the steep, large and black against the clear sky.

We have endeavoured slightly to sketch St. Geneviève as it appeared to our friends from Beaumanoir, winding into the valley the day after Mr. Lyle had dined with them. The valley opened for about half-a-mile opposite the mansion, which gave to the dwellers in it a view over an extensive and richly-cultivated country. It was through this district that the party from Beaumanoir had pursued their way. The first glance at the building, its striking situation, its beautiful form, its brilliant colour, its great extent, a gathering as it seemed of galleries, halls, and chapels, mullioned windows, portals of clustered columns, and groups of airy pinnacles and fretwork spires, called forth a general cry of wonder and of praise.

The ride from Beaumanoir had been delightful; the breath of summer in every breeze, the light of summer on every tree. The gay laugh of Lady Everingham rang frequently in the air; often were her sunny eyes directed to Coningsby, as she called his attention to some fair object or some pretty effect. She played the hostess of Nature, and introduced him to all the beauties.

Mr. Lyle had recognised them. He cantered forward with greetings on a fat little fawn-coloured pony, with a long white mane and white flowing tail, and the wickedest eye in the world. He rode by the side of the Duchess, and indicated their gently-descending route.

They arrived, and the peacocks, who were sunning themselves on the turrets, expanded their plumage to welcome them.

‘I can remember the old house,’ said the Duchess, as she took Mr. Lyle’s arm; ‘and I am happy to see the new one. The Duke had prepared me for much beauty, but the reality exceeds his report.’

They entered by a short corridor into a large hall. They

would have stopped to admire its rich roof, its gallery and screen; but their host suggested that they should refresh themselves after their ride, and they followed him through several apartments into a spacious chamber, its oaken panels covered with a series of interesting pictures, representing the siege of St. Geneviève by the Parliament forces in 1643: the various assaults and sallies, and the final discomfiture of the rebels. In all these figured a brave and graceful Sir Eustace Lyle, in cuirass and buff jerkin, with gleaming sword and flowing plume. The sight of these pictures was ever a source of great excitement to Henry Sydney, who always lamented his ill-luck in not living in such days; nay, would insist that all others must equally deplore their evil destiny.

'See, Coningsby, this battery on the Upper Park,' said Lord Henry. 'This did the business: how it rakes up the valley; Sir Eustace works it himself. Mother, what a pity Beaumanoir was not besieged!'

'It may be,' said Coningsby.

'I always fancy a siege must be so interesting,' said Lady Everingham. '*It must be so exciting.*'

'I hope the next siege may be at Beaumanoir, instead of St. Geneviève,' said Lyle, laughing; 'as Henry Sydney has such a military predisposition. Duchess, you said the other day that you liked Malvoisie, and here is some.'

'Now broach me a cask of Malvoisie,
Bring pasty from the doo;'

said the Duchess. 'That has been my luncheon.'

'A poetic repast,' said Lady Theresa.

'Their breeds of sheep must have been very inferior in old days,' said Lord Everingham, 'as they made such a noise about their vension. For my part I consider it a thing as much gone by as tilts and tournaments.'

'I am sorry that they have gone by,' said Lady Theresa.

'Everything has gone by that is beautiful,' said Lord Henry.

'Life is much easier,' said Lord Everingham.

'Life easy!' said Lord Henry. 'Life appears to me to be a fierce struggle.'

'Manners are easy,' said Coningsby, 'and life is hard.'

'And I wish to see things exactly the reverse,' said Lord Henry. 'The means and modes of subsistence less difficult; the conduct of life more ceremonious.'

'Civilisation has no time for ceremony,' said Lord Everingham.

'How very sententious you all are!' said his wife. 'I want to see the hall and many other things.' And they all rose.

There were indeed many other things to see: a long gallery, rich in ancestral portraits, specimens of art and costume from Holbein to Lawrence; courtiers of the Tudors, and cavaliers of the Stuarts, terminating in red-coated squires fresh from the field, and gentlemen buttoned up in black coats, and sitting in library chairs, with their backs to a crimson curtain. Woman, however, is always charming; and the present generation may view their mothers painted by Lawrence, as if they were patronesses of Almack's; or their grandmothers by Reynolds, as Robinettas caressing birds, with as much delight as they gaze on the dewy-eyed matrons of Lely, and the proud bearing of the heroines of Vandyke. But what interested them more than the gallery, or the rich saloons, or even the baronial hall, was the chapel, in which art had exhausted all its invention, and wealth offered all its resources. The walls and vaulted roofs entirely painted in encaustic by the first artists of Germany, and representing the principal events of the second Testament, the splendour of the mosaic pavement, the richness of the painted windows, the sumptuousness of the altar, crowned by a masterpiece of Carlo Dolce and surrounded by a silver rail, the tone of rich and solemn light that pervaded all, and blended all the various sources of beauty into one absorbing and harmonious whole: all combined to produce an effect which stilled them into a silence that lasted for some minutes, until the ladies breathed their feelings in an almost inarticulate murmur of reve-

ronce and admiration; while a tear stole to the eye of the enthusiastic Henry Sydney.

Leaving the chapel, they sauntered through the gardens, until, arriving at their limit, they were met by the prettiest sight in the world; a group of little pony chairs, each drawn by a little fat fawn-coloured pony, like the one that Mr. Lyle had been riding. Lord Henry drove his mother; Lord Everingham, Lady Theresa; Lady Everingham was attended by Coningsby. Their host cantered by the Duchess's side, and along winding roads of easy ascent, leading through beautiful woods, and offering charming landscapes, they reached in due time the Upper Park.

'One sees our host to great advantage in his own house,' said Lady Everingham. 'He is scarcely the same person. I have not observed him once blush. He speaks and moves with ease. It is a pity that he is not more graceful. Above all things I like a graceful man.'

'That chapel,' said Coningsby, 'was a fine thing.'

'Very!' said Lady Everingham. 'Did you observe the picture over the altar, the Virgin with blue eyes? I never observed blue eyes before in such a picture. What, is your favourite colour for eyes?'

Coningsby felt embarrassed: he said something rather pointless about admiring everything that is beautiful.

'But every one has a favourite style; I want to know yours. Regular features, do you like regular features? Or is it expression that pleases you?'

'Expression; I think I like expression. Expression must be always delightful.'

'Do you dance?'

'No; I am no great dancer. I fear I have few accomplishments. I am fond of fencing.'

'I don't fence,' said Lady Everingham, with a smile. 'But I think you are right not to dance. It is not in your way. You are ambitious, I believe?' she added.

'I was not aware of it; everybody is ambitious.'

'You see I know something of your character. Henry has spoken of you to me a great deal; long before we met,

—met again, I should say, for we are old friends, remember. Do you know your career much interests me? I like ambitious men.'

There is something fascinating in the first idea that your career interests a charming woman. Coningsby felt that he was perhaps driving a Madame de Longueville. A woman who likes ambitious men must be no ordinary character; clearly a sort of heroine. At this moment they reached the Upper Park, and the novel landscape changed the current of their remarks.

Far as the eye could reach there spread before them a savage sylvan scene. It wanted, perhaps, undulation of surface, but that deficiency was greatly compensated for by the multitude and prodigious size of the trees; they were the largest, indeed, that could well be met with in England; and there is no part of Europe where the timber is so huge. The broad interminable glades, the vast avenues, the quantity of deer browsing or bounding in all directions, the thickets of yellow gorse and green fern, and the breeze that even in the stillness of summer was ever playing over this table-land, all produced an animated and renovating scene. It was like suddenly visiting another country, living among other manners, and breathing another air. They stopped for a few minutes at a pavilion built for the purposes of the chase, and then returned, all gratified by this visit to what appeared to be the higher regions of the earth.

As they approached the brow of the hill that hung over St. Geneviève, they heard the great bell sound.

'What is that?' asked the Duchess.

'It is almsgiving day,' replied Mr. Lyle, looking a little embarrassed, and for the first time blushing. 'The people of the parishes with which I am connected come to St. Geneviève twice a-week at this hour.'

'And what is your system?' inquired Lord Everingham, who had stopped, interested by the scene. 'What check have you?'

'The rectors of the different parishes grant certificates to those who in their belief merit bounty according to the

rules which I have established. These are again visited by my almoner, who countersigns the certificate, and then they present it at the postern-gate. The certificate explains the nature of their necessities, and my steward acts on his discretion.

‘Mamma, I see them!’ exclaimed Lady Theresa.

‘Perhaps your Grace may think that they might be relieved without all this ceremony,’ said Mr. Lyle, extremely confused. ‘But I agree with Henry and Mr. Coningsby, that Ceremony is not, as too commonly supposed, an idle form. I wish the people constantly and visibly to comprehend that Property is their protector and their friend.’

‘My reason is with you, Mr. Lyle,’ said the Duchess, ‘as well as my heart.’

They came along the valley, a procession of Nature, whose groups an artist might have studied. The old man, who loved the pilgrimage too much to avail himself of the privilege of a substitute accorded to his grey hairs, came in person with his grandchild and his staff. There also came the widow with her child at the breast, and others clinging to her form; some sorrowful faces, and some pale; many a serious one, and now and then a frolic glance; many a dame in her red cloak, and many a maiden with her light basket; curly-headed urchins with demure looks, and sometimes a stalwart form baffled for a time of the labour which he desired. But not a heart there that did not bless the bell that sounded from the tower of St. Geneviève!

CHAPTER V.

‘My fathers perilled their blood and fortunes for the cause of the Sovereignty and Church of England,’ said Lyle to Coningsby, as they were lying stretched out on the sunny turf in the park of Beaumanoir, ‘and I inherit their passionate convictions. They were Catholics, as their descendant. No doubt they would have been glad to see

their ancient faith predominant in their ancient land ; but they bowed, as I bow, to an adverse and apparently irrevocable decree. But if we could not have the Church of our fathers, we honoured and respected the Church of their children. It was at least a Church ; a ' Catholic and Apostolic Church,' as it daily declares itself. Besides, it was our friend. When we were persecuted by Puritanic Parliaments, it was the Sovereign and the Church of England that interposed, with the certainty of creating against themselves odium and mistrust, to shield us from the dark and relentless bigotry of Calvinism.'

' I believe,' said Coningsby, ' that if Charles I. had hanged all the Catholic priests that Parliament petitioned him to execute, he would never have lost his crown.'

' You were mentioning my father,' continued Lyle. ' He certainly was a Whig. Galled by political exclusion, he connected himself with that party in the State which began to intimate emancipation. After all, they did not emancipate us. It was the fall of the Papacy in England that founded the Whig aristocracy ; a fact that must always lie at the bottom of their hearts, as, I assure you, it does of mine.'

' I gathered at an early age,' continued Lyle, ' that I was expected to inherit my father's political connections with the family estates. Under ordinary circumstances this would probably have occurred. In times that did not force one to ponder, it is not likely I should have recoiled from uniting myself with a party formed of the best families in England, and ever famous for accomplished men and charming women. But I enter life in the midst of a convulsion in which the very principles of our political and social systems are called in question. I cannot unite myself with the party of destruction. It is an operative cause alien to my being. What, then, offers itself? The Duke talks to me of Conservative principles ; but he does not inform me what they are. I observe indeed a party in the State whose rule it is to consent to no change, until it is clamorously called for, and then instantly to yield ; but those are Concessionary, not Conservative principles. This party treats institutions as we do our pheasants, they

preserve only to destroy them. But is there a statesman among these Conservatives who offers us a dogma for a guide, or defines any great political truth which we should aspire to establish? It seems to me a barren thing, this Conservatism, an unhappy cross-breed; the mule of politics that engenders nothing. What do you think of all this, Coningsby? I assure you I feel confused, perplexed, harassed. I know I have public duties to perform; I am, in fact, every day of my life solicited by all parties to throw the weight of my influence in one scale or another; but I am paralysed. I often wish I had no position in the country. The sense of its responsibility depresses me; makes me miserable. I speak to you without reserve; with a frankness which our short acquaintance scarcely authorises; but Henry Sydney has so often talked to me of you, and I have so long wished to know you, that I open my heart without restraint.'

'My dear fellow,' said Coningsby, 'you have but described my feelings when you depicted your own. My mind on these subjects has long been a chaos. I float in a sea of troubles, and should long ago have been wrecked had I not been sustained by a profound, however vague, conviction, that there are still great truths, if we could but work them out; that Government, for instance, should be loved and not hated, and that Religion should be a faith and not a form.'

The moral influence of residence furnishes some of the most interesting traits of our national manners. The presence of this power was very apparent throughout the district that surrounded Beaumanoir. The ladies of that house were deeply sensible of the responsibility of their position; thoroughly comprehending their duties, they fulfilled them without affectation, with earnestness, and with that effect which springs from a knowledge of the subject. The consequences were visible in the tone of the peasantry being superior to that which we too often witness. The ancient feudal feeling that lingers in these sequestered haunts is an instrument which, when skilfully

wielded, may be productive of vast social benefit. The Duke understood this well; and his family had imbibed all his views, and seconded them. Lady Everingham, once more in the scene of her past life, resumed the exercise of gentle offices, as if she had never ceased to be a daughter of the house, and as if another domain had not its claims upon her solicitude. Coningsby was often the companion of herself and her sister in their pilgrimages of charity and kindness. He admired the graceful energy, and thorough acquaintance with details, with which Lady Everingham superintended schools, organised societies of relief, and the discrimination which she brought to bear upon individual cases of suffering or misfortune. He was deeply interested as he watched the magic of her manner, as she melted the obdurate, inspired the slothful, consoled the afflicted, and animated with her smiles and ready phrase the energetic and the dutiful. Nor on these occasions was Lady Theresa seen under less favourable auspices. Without the vivacity of her sister, there was in her demeanour a sweet seriousness of purpose that was most winning; and sometimes a burst of energy, a trait of decision, which strikingly contrasted with the somewhat over-controlled character of her life in drawing-rooms.

In the society of these engaging companions, time for Coningsby glided away in a course which he sometimes wished nothing might disturb. Apart from them, he frequently felt himself pensive and vaguely disquieted. Even the society of Henry Sydney or Eustace Lyle, much as under ordinary circumstances they would have been adapted to his mood, did not compensate for the absence of that indefinite, that novel, that strange, yet sweet excitement, which he felt, he knew not exactly how or why, stealing over his senses. Sometimes the countenance of Theresa Sydney flitted over his musing vision; sometimes the merry voice of Lady Everingham haunted his ear. But to be their companion in ride or ramble; to avoid any arrangement which for many hours should deprive him of their presence; was every day with Coningsby a principal object.

One day he had been out shooting rabbits with Lyle and Henry Sydney, and returned with them late to Beaumanoir to dinner. He had not enjoyed his sport, and he had not shot at all well. He had been dreamy, silent, had deeply felt the want of Lady Everingham's conversation, that was ever so poignant and so interestingly personal to himself; one of the secrets of her sway, though Coningsby was not then quite conscious of it. Talk to a man about himself, and he is generally captivated. That is the real way to win him. The only difference between men and women in this respect is, that most women are vain, and some men are not. There are some men who have no self-love; but if they have, female vanity is but a trifling and airy passion compared with the vast voracity of appetite which in the sterner sex can swallow anything, and always crave for more.

When Coningsby entered the drawing-room, there seemed a somewhat unusual bustle in the room, but as the twilight had descended, it was at first rather difficult to distinguish who was present. He soon perceived that there were strangers. A gentleman of pleasing appearance was near a sofa on which the Duchess and Lady Everingham were seated, and discoursing with some volubility. His phrases seemed to command attention; his audience had an animated glance, eyes sparkling with intelligence and interest; not a word was disregarded. Coningsby did not advance as was his custom; he had a sort of instinct, that the stranger was discoursing of matters of which he knew nothing. He turned to a table, he took up a book, which he began to read upside downwards. A hand was lightly placed on his shoulder. He looked round, it was another stranger; who said, however, in a tone of familiar friendliness,

‘How do you do, Coningsby?’

It was a young man about four-and-twenty years of age, tall, good-looking. Old recollections, his intimate greeting, a strong family likeness, helped Coningsby to conjecture correctly who was the person who addressed him. It was, indeed, the eldest son of the Duke, the Marquis of Beaumanoir, who had arrived at his father's unexpectedly with his friend, Mr. Melton, on their way to the north

Mr. Melton was a gentleman of the highest fashion, and a great favourite in society. He was about thirty, good-looking, with an air that commanded attention, and manners, though facile, sufficiently finished. He was communicative, though calm, and without being witty, had at his service a turn of phrase, acquired by practice and success, which was, or which always seemed to be, poignant. The ladies seemed especially to be delighted at his arrival. He knew everything of everybody they cared about; and Coningsby listened in silence to names which for the first time reached his ears, but which seemed to excite great interest. Mr. Melton frequently addressed his most lively observations and his most sparkling anecdotes to Lady Everingham, who evidently relished all that he said, and returned him in kind.

Throughout the dinner Lady Everingham and Mr. Melton maintained what appeared a most entertaining conversation, principally about things and persons which did not in any way interest our hero; who, however, had the satisfaction of hearing Lady Everingham, in the drawing-room, say in a careless tone to the Duchess,

'I am so glad, mamma, that Mr. Melton has come; we wanted some amusement.'

What a confession! What a revelation to Coningsby of his infinite insignificance! Coningsby entertained a great aversion for Mr. Melton, but felt his spirit unequal to the social contest. The genius of the untutored inexperienced youth quailed before that of the long-practised, skilful man of the world. What was the magic of this man? What was the secret of this ease, that nothing could disturb, and yet was not deficient in deference and good taste? And then his dress, it seemed fashioned by some unearthly artist; yet it was impossible to detect the unobtrusive causes of the general effect that was irresistible. Coningsby's coat was made by Stultz; almost every fellow in the sixth form had his coats made by Stultz; yet Coningsby fancied that his own garment looked as if it had been furnished by some rustic slopseller. He began to wonder where Mr. Melton got his boots from, and glanced at his own, which,

though made in St. James's Street, seemed to him to have a cloddish air.

Lady Everingham was determined that Mr. Melton should see Beaumanoir to the greatest advantage. Mr. Melton had never been there before, except at Christmas, with the house full of visitors and factitious gaiety. Now he was to see the country. Accordingly, there were long rides every day, which Lady Everingham called expeditions, and which generally produced some slight incident which she styled an adventure. She was kind to Coningsby, but had no time to indulge in the lengthened conversations which he had previously found so magical. Mr. Melton was always on the scene, the monopolising hero, it would seem, of every thought, and phrase, and plan. Coningsby began to think that Beaumanoir was not so delightful a place as he had imagined. He began to think that he had stayed there perhaps too long. He had received a letter from Mr. Rigby, to inform him that he was expected at Coningsby Castle at the beginning of September, to meet Lord Monmouth, who had returned to England, and for grave and special reasons was about to reside at his chief seat, which he had not visited for many years. Coningsby had intended to have remained at Beaumanoir until that time; but suddenly it occurred to him, that the Age of Ruins was past, and that he ought to seize the opportunity of visiting Manchester, which was in the same county as the castle of his grandfather. So difficult is it to speculate upon events! Muse as we may, we are the creatures of circumstances; and the unexpected arrival of a London dandy at the country-seat of an English nobleman sent this representative of the New Generation, fresh from Eton, nursed in prejudices, yet with a mind predisposed to inquiry and prone to meditation, to a scene apt to stimulate both intellectual processes; which demanded investigation and induced thought, the great METROPOLIS of LABOUR.