

CHAPTER III

STRANGE STORIES

“Peace, peace, at any price”—The Conservative party to-day—The Liberals of yesterday—Queen Victoria’s influence—Restricted language—Lady Jane Taylor pays a visit—She reprimands the butler—An Irish peer is lost—Where he was found—“We *must* change this cook”—An absent-minded relative—What the policeman said—A visit to Ireland—Some lost luggage—An East-end story—The generous public—Colonel Fred Burnaby faints—His remembrances of Harrow—His poem that caused excitement—A row brewing—Saved by Mr. Delane of *The Times*—The Duke of Cambridge is wroth—A snobby Queen’s Counsel—Fits of the dumps—“Good-bye”—“The great adventure”—A curious wedding—Sir William Broadbent and his nose—A beautiful lecture—A medical instructor’s advice—A precocious small boy.

Now I must leave the fascinating subject of hunting and sport, for there are so many other things and people that have interested me, and will, I hope, interest others.

I have lately been talking to a well-known lord who has held high positions in this country and in the Dominions. I will not give his name, as he might not like it. He rather depressed me, as he is one of those who think the present situation in this country is hopeless—indeed, past praying for—and that the inhabitants in our Colonies are discontented and restless.

To a certain extent I agree with him. The peace, peace-at-any-price, the being everybody’s friend (which means being nobody’s friend), the loving our enemies better than our own people, and so forth, is not what made Great Britain the power she has been. But I console myself with the thought that, after all is said and done, the Conservative party to-day are

only what a few years ago would have been considered advanced Liberals, and there were many who upheld their policy, and the country has survived, though it has had to suffer for it.

We hear a good deal in these days about the working people wanting higher wages. Naturally, everybody wants all that they can get, but I wonder if many of those agitating for more money realise that they are already being paid more than some of His Majesty's officers in the army.

I wonder who in Queen Victoria's time would have dared suggest to her the handing over of the Irish Loyalists to the Sinn Feiners, or the taking away of the money of the hardworking people to give it in doles to those who do not care to work.

Queen Victoria was a wonderful woman, and used her influence well. I wonder if those who are alive who lived in her time ever noticed how much more restricted language became during her reign? Before then there was considerably greater licence, and it cannot have added to the joy of life.

In the days of Chaucer (1340 and onwards) and of Shakespeare (1564 and onwards) there was considerable coarseness of expression: How came this unpleasant habit to have been dropped in Queen's Victoria's reign? It was, I think, her good example and her personality—a lesson to all on the way we cast our shadows for good or ill on all around us, be they kings, queens, or common and garden folk. Queen Victoria's good influence is in a measure with us still.

The vulgar are exceedingly unattractive, and the brusque disconcerting. Those who remember Lady Jane Taylor, of 16, Eaton Place, will recollect that she was rather severe and brusque at times. Personally, I always received the greatest kindness from her, but I have seen her at times awe-inspiring. Her voice

was very deep and her bearing most dignified, though her bonnet at times sought rakish attitudes—a *grande dame* of the old school, who “stand no nonsense from anyone.”

One day when she was calling on the present Lady Clancarty, and the butler answered the door, she asked: “Is Lady Clancarty at home?”

The servant replied: “I do not think so.”

Lady Jane, drawing herself up to her full height, said in sonorous voice: “You do not think so. What does that mean? Either she is at home or she is not; there is no thinking about it.”

Much discomfited, the man retired to make inquiries as to his lady’s whereabouts, leaving Lady Jane on the doorstep champing her bit, so to speak.

Writing about people’s peculiarities reminds me of a certain Irish peer who last summer thought he would go and call upon a lady he knew very well. This Irishman had, as unfortunately was often the case, already lunched “not wisely but too well,” and on being shown into the drawing-room sat himself down on a big oak fender surrounding the fireplace. Being summer time by Act of Parliament, there was no fire burning.

The lady of the house, seeing the condition of her guest, and finding his conversation somewhat disconnected, made the excuse that she thought she heard the telephone ringing, and must go and attend to it, if he would excuse her, and so made her escape.

The lady in question told me the story herself, and said she waited some time, thinking that perhaps her visitor would depart. But hearing no sound, she asked the butler if his lordship had gone, and if not, would he please go and say how sorry she was that she was detained on business, and would he come another day?

The servant departed to carry out his orders, shortly returning to say there was nobody in the drawing-room, and he had not heard anybody go out of the house. They then both began a search for the missing peer. Just as they were leaving the drawing-room after looking in cupboards and under sofas, the butler made a bee-line to the fireplace, and there, amongst the fireirons inside the big fender, lay the object of their search.

All sympathy and good manners, the butler cried, "Oh dear! oh dear! I do hope your lordship is not hurt?" and tried to help him on to his feet again, but was told: "Go away, go away. I am waiting for a trunk call." Evidently the last thing he remembered was hearing his hostess saying something about the telephone.

A sense of humour helps us through all sorts of situations, but absent-minded people often put us in tight corners; they are, however, occasionally amusing though embarrassing. For instance, an old gentleman and his wife were dining with friends in London one day. The dinner was not to the gentleman's liking, so he looked across the table towards his wife, and said quite audibly: "My dear, we really *must* change this cook."

A young relative of mine is also absent-minded. Finding himself in London one day with nothing particular to do in the evening, he thought he would go to the theatre and so pass the time away. Looking through the list of plays in one of the daily papers, he saw one entitled "Toddles," with a cast that looked promising. This he decided so see.

Being a beautiful night, he walked from his club towards theatreland, then found he had forgotten which theatre he was looking for. Passing a police-

man, my relative in his usual dreamy way said: "Constable, can you tell me where to find 'Toddles'?"

Looking stern and rather scornful, the policeman replied: "Where is who?"

"'Toddles.'"

"Look here, young man," said the policeman, "I think you had better go home to your mother."

Not until then did it dawn upon this youth that there was anything unusual in his question, or that it might have a different interpretation to the one intended. He then laughed heartily, no doubt making the policeman think even worse of him. After he had eventually found "Toddles," he came home and told us all about it.

It is rather pleasant to have philandering scallywags in the family; they keep us all alive.

This same young man went one year to hunt with the late Lord Conyngham's otter hounds in Ireland. Knowing the young man's proclivities in the way of losing everything he had to lose, we besought him to try and come back with all his belongings by way of a change.

When he returned, in his usual breezy way, full of the joy of life and the good time he had been having, we asked him: "Where is your luggage?"

With a laugh he replied: "Oh, that's coming. Unfortunately, somehow I missed my portmanteau when coming off the boat, so at the first place we stopped at I got out and rushed off to the telegraph office to send a wire about it. As my great-coat was impeding me, I threw it off to write the wire, and in my haste left it behind, so at the next stop I got out to wire for that also, and left my stick somewhere; but I have sent for that too."

"So," we said, "you have lost everything that you could lose except your hat?"

“Yes, that is so, and very nearly lost that, only a kind man ran after me with it when I got out of the train. But it is all coming presently.”

Another instance of absent-mindedness, only not a relative this time.

At a dinner-party one night a pretty acquaintance of mine was peeling a slippery peach, when the gallant young man sitting beside her offered to prepare it for her. She gladly consented. Taking the peach to his plate, he set to work very carefully, taking a long time and talking unceasingly. When it was quite ready he ate it himself!

I often hear people say it is an unkind world. I do not agree, and frequently think what a mysterious and generous body the public are. There is no end to the queer and kind things they will do when anything appeals to them.

The same absent-minded relative I have already mentioned once sent a paragraph to one of the well-known daily papers describing the sad plight of an old couple in the East End, whom he knew in their dire poverty had parted with their last and only bed covering—an old counterpane, which they had pawned. The address of the old people was given, so that anybody interested could verify the story. The result of that little paragraph was that Carter Paterson shortly delivered bundles, which in all contained twenty-six counterpanes, at the door of the astonished couple.

Nerves play queer tricks with us sometimes. I remember that daring, plucky man, Colonel Fred Burnaby, of the “Ride to Khiva” fame, who had faced death often and in horrible forms, enduring many nerve-racking moments and glorying in them, surprised us all one day when we were in the East, and being vaccinated on account of an outbreak of

smallpox, by falling off his chair in a faint during the operation. A cruel trick of his nerves to play him, but eccentricity is tolerated when wedded to great achievements.

The present generation may not know or remember much about this brave man, but there are some still living who will remember him well.

He entered the army when commissions were purchased. Once, when talking to me of his past, he said he believed that his father had paid considerably over £5,000 for his various steps of promotion in the army, not one farthing of which was ever refunded by a generous Government when purchase was abolished.

Colonel Fred Burnaby was a man who ought to have been very happy but was not; from his earliest days his independent spirit made trouble for him.

When at Harrow he wrote some verses and sent them to *Punch* regarding the bullying at that time in the school. This did not tend to make him popular with the headmaster. Dr. Vaughan was headmaster at the time, and Colonel Burnaby said that this individual was a believer in the good effect of the use of the cane, and that when the boys who had offended were all ready and waiting for what was to come, with uplifted arm ready to descend upon the part considered especially made for that purpose, with closed eyes, the master delivered himself aloud of a prayer that the punishment might be effectual and lead to good results. The boys considered this was adding insult to injury.

Once when Burnaby was working with a private tutor in Wales he went on a walking tour and stopped at Llangollen. The proprietor of the hotel where he stopped one day for luncheon was asked what there was for luncheon, and replied: "Hot goose and apple tart."

“And what will be the price?”

“Two shillings and sixpence, sir.”

At the end of the meal this sum was tendered. The proprietor looked at the dish where the goose had been, also at the empty tart dish, and I am afraid he used naughty language.

What wonderful appetites people had in those days! I remember my father, when shooting on the moors, saying one evening that a goose was too much for one and not enough for two!

When in the Blues Burnaby composed some lines to a popular brother officer; they ran as follows:

“The butterfly was a gentleman, who once was in the Guards,
His income was three hundred pounds and what he made at
cards.

To marry an heiress he resolved; his heart was of that stuff
That he could have courted Hecate if she had tin enough.

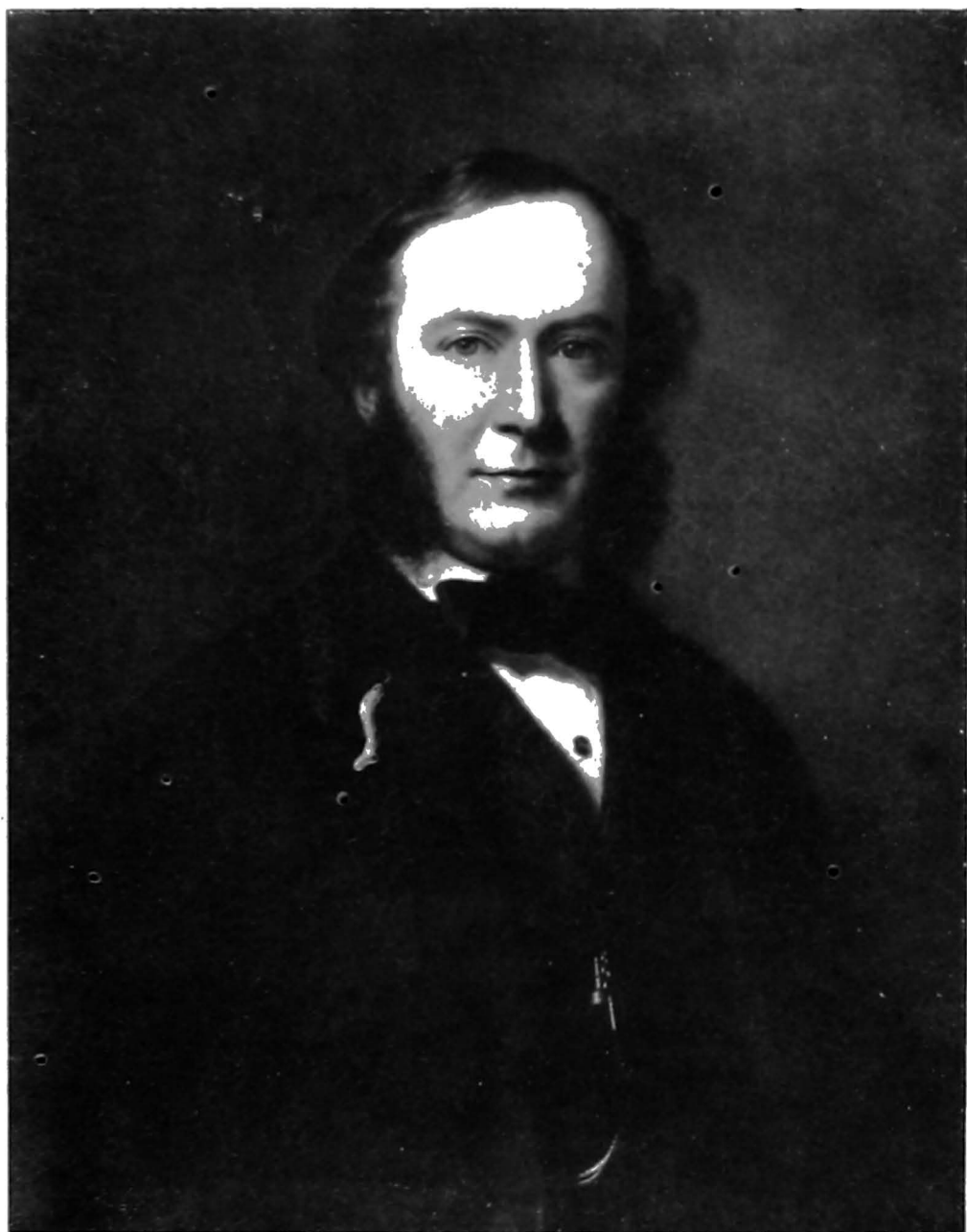
So he went to Doctors' Commons, paid a shilling to see the
wills,

And chose thirty thousand a year with which to pay his bills.”

This poem(!) caused some excitement.

In 1876, when Fred Burnaby returned from his ride to Khiva, he was summoned to attend and report himself immediately at headquarters. I believe this was one of the occasions when he had been absent without leave, but am not sure; at any rate, he guessed he was in for one of the many storms which dogged his footsteps. So he thought that before he went to report himself he would, while he still had the chance, go and see Mr. Deane of *The Times*, and give him an account of his ride and its accompanying circumstances.

He knew, as we all know, that the influence of the Press can scarcely be properly estimated, and that if *The Times*, being a most influential paper, gave a good and interesting account of his adventure and



THE MAN THE WORLD LISTENED TO, DELANE OF "THE TIMES."

“So sorry,” replied Burnaby, “but I am being honoured at dinner to-night by the presence of a reporter.”

“Oh, throw him over.”

“No, I can’t do that, as he is a great friend of mine.”

That reporter became one of the leaders of the literary world, and has since been created a Baron.

It was during this visit at Homburg that Colonel Burnaby told me his valet had turned very religious and was always worrying about his latter end, and he had advised him to cease worrying about it and go and sit on it.

Cheery, “don’t-care” Burnaby used to have fits of the dumps rather badly at times, when he used to moralise. One foggy evening, when the British troops were busy in the Soudan and he had asked to be allowed to go and join them and had been refused, he was very low in his mind, but declared, in spite of this refusal, he meant to be there before long. And before long he was leaving England for the last time. He went on the greatest of all adventures.

He talked that foggy evening as though disgusted and disappointed with life—talked about the hollowness of Society. “To show you how snobby Society is, when I came back from Khiva London hostesses whom I did not know sent me cards of invitation to their parties—to advertise themselves.”

“Nonsense!” I replied; “that was their kindness towards you, and to show you that no matter how you might be criticised they stood by you and admired your pluck and daring.”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“Why are you so depressed?” I asked. “You cannot be well. You have a good income, a good position as Colonel of the Blues; you could be a

member of Parliament any time you like; you have already been asked to stand for Bedford, your old home, where you would probably be returned unopposed; you have all earthly blessings. What more do you want?"

"Yes," he replied, "but that is flying at such easy game. Now if I could have been returned with Randolph Churchill for Birmingham, or, say, Bright or Chamberlain, that would have been something worth doing. Some day you will find Chamberlain will come over to our side. As for friendship, little woman, forgive me for saying it, but I don't believe in it. I have only one real friend in the world—Tommy Bowles."

Then he added sadly: "Why are you so happy and fond of life? Is life worth living? I want to see the other side. I have done everything here that I can, and find Society a sham, and politics too dirty a game——"

I interrupted him with: "Dear man, you do not know what you will find on the other side."

"That's true." Then, looking at me with one of his kindly but teasing smiles, he said: "I believe you enjoy every minute of your life. You do now, don't you? And yet you have had some pretty bad times."

"Oh yes," I replied, "but we all have bad times and troubles occasionally; it is the salt that brings out the flavour of all the rest. But I do enjoy my life. Every night when I go to bed I am sorry that another day has gone, and it is my many kind friends—like you, for instance—that makes me glad."

"Wonderful! wonderful!" he exclaimed.

"But," I continued, "I can understand, in a way, your feelings of discontent, because you feel you have

it in you to do great things. You fly high, and hunger to do them. I fly low, not feeling that I have it in me to do great things; hence my happiness, and the difference between your lookout on the world and mine."

A few days later he came to tell me he was off; his words as he gripped my hand were: "Little woman, I'm off." I will not give away how he had managed to bring this about—enough that he had managed it. Joyously he said: "This time to-morrow I shall be in Paris." A pause. I waited. Tossing back the rebellious lock of hair that would fall across his forehead, he took both my hands, saying: "Perhaps we shall not meet again. Good-bye, dear, kind little woman, but only a child after all—good-bye, and good luck to you."

On the evening of January 12, 1885, not long after this conversation, my brother was dining with me when we heard the newspaper boys shouting in the street, "Death of Burnaby!" I felt sick, and asked my brother if he would go to the War Office and find out if it were true. He went at once, while I sat and listened to the shouting in the street of "Disaster in the Soudan!" "Death of Burnaby!"

When my brother returned it was to bring the sad news that it was, alas! only too true. I thought of his last words to me. Had he a premonition? And now—he had found out what he wanted to know—what was on the other side.

Later I received many letters from friends who were with him that day when he died as he would have wished to die, and I have always hoped that he lived long enough to hear the shouts of victory. There was a smile on his face as he died, so maybe he did.

It makes me so sad recalling that time when so many of my good friends went on the Great Adventure

that I hardly know how to go on writing, so I will turn to Fred's brother, the Rev. Evelyn Burnaby. They were at that time a very united family. In his youth Evelyn Burnaby was at Eton, and eventually went into the Church. He told me a story of the first wedding at which he officiated after taking Holy Orders. An old man in receipt of parish relief asked his advice as to marrying a woman of about his own age, which was eighty, and who did his weekly washing for him for the sum of ninepence. He remarked that if he married her it would save him ninepence, as she would do his washing for him at home.

On thinking the matter over, Mr. Burnaby asked the advice of his old housekeeper, who had been in the family many years, as to whether he ought to leave out of the Marriage Service the part referring to future generations. The advice she gave him was: "I should leave it in if I were you; the bride will take it as a great compliment"!

This marriage turned out happily, as marriages of convenience often do.

One of the finest characters that I can remember was Sir William Broadbent, who will ever live in my memory as one of the hardest working, most unselfish, and nicest minded of men, also one of the most human. He had a hard struggle as a young man, his father not being in a position to help him much; but he fought his way up the ladder, though often in low water financially.

He was small of stature, short-necked, and latterly inclined to *embonpoint*. His nose was always a trouble to him, being short and stumpy. As each little Broadbent appeared—and there were a good many of them—he carefully and anxiously examined their noses, to see if they had inherited his, to which he took exception. I am sure he would have given a

good deal to have found one of them with a Roman nose. But was there ever a baby born with anything but a button of a nose?

I believe the Doctor was brought up as a Wesleyan, and his early teaching remained with him all his life; but his views were broader than those of many I have met of that denomination.

He once allowed me to be where I could hear him giving a lecture to some medical students. It was beautiful and inspiring; I can remember part of it plainly. After dealing with some scientific and technical matters he said: "Shall it be said of us that we are familiar with pain and death but insensible to sorrow and suffering? Familiar, yes; insensible, no. We must keep our minds unperturbed and calm in the presence of the fiercest agony, but it need not be that sympathy and pity is extinguished within us.

"If death is, in our experience, an everyday event, we must not forget that to the dying man whose flagging pulse we feel it is the supreme moment when, all alone, he goes to meet his God."

Later in the same address he said: "They, as medical men, would enter households at all times and seasons, when anxiety had overthrown caution, or gratitude had overflowed reticence. Its inner life would be exposed to their view, and in many cases they would hear secrets involving the honour and happiness of individuals and families. These must ever be treated as sacred trusts."

There was much more that was beautiful, but I am afraid I do not remember his wording sufficiently to dare try and repeat it, and it would be wicked to mangle it. What I have quoted is entirely from memory, but is, I think, very nearly the exact words he used. It must be easy for experienced doctors to lecture on theories and explain medical conundrums,

but quite possible that they might neglect the human side, which is so important, so vital in the profession.

I have been told a story of a certain doctor who had been coaching a youth for the medical profession, and who had arrived very near the end of his course of instruction. One day he asked his instructor: "How should I look when entering a sick room?"

In tones of exasperation he was told: "I should look as little like a fool as possible if I were you."

Doctors do not always meet with the gratitude they deserve from those they help. I was in a big London hospital a short time ago visiting a man who had been in our employment. He had been through a very serious and difficult operation, and was being nursed with skill and efficiency.

During our conversation I remarked to him on how thankful he ought to be with everything so comfortable round him, the best doctors and surgeons, not forgetting the nurses. He replied: "Well, I do not know so much about that; it's their job. They are well paid, and if they did not do their job properly would be sacked. They are only doing what they are here for."

As it had been difficult to get the man into the hospital almost at a moment's notice to save his life, there not being a vacant bed in the surgical ward, and a good deal of persuasion had been necessary to make the hospital authorities find a special corner for the man, I felt his ingratitude. How much more must the doctors feel it who give their time, brains, and work, free, gratis, and for nothing! But doctors take things very philosophically, and, expecting nothing, are not disappointed.

Gratitude is not an everyday virtue. The late Marquess of Bath, who was exceedingly kind to his tenants, told one of them who had reached the age

of ninety years that he should live rent free for ten years. Observing that the man did not look very pleased, Lord Bath said: "What more can I do for you?" Receiving the reply: "Why, I should like it for life."

Mentioning the fact that Sir William Broadbent was late in life inclined to *embonpoint* recalls to my mind my younger brother, who when a small boy, on hearing my mother say she admired some woman, but regretted that she was inclined to *embonpoint*, asked what that meant, and was told it was an expression often used when people were growing too fat.

Not long after this a lady came to call whose figure was in a condition we pretended not to see. My brother looked at her through the open drawing-room window, then he climbed into the room, being the spoilt member of the family who dared do such things, and in an audible whisper said to our mother: "She's *onbongpong*, isn't she?" He was told to run away and play. He left the room trying to imitate the visitor's carriage and figure.

This youth as he grew up became a most amusing person and a great tease. Once when I made him escort me to a sacred concert, where I heard most beautifully sung a song entitled "Just as I am, without one plea," on our arriving at home again he announced to my husband that the song I had liked best was "Just as I am, without one flea," and that my favourite hymn was "Peace, perfect peace, with our loved ones *far away*"!