



CLASSICS TO GO

**THE
CAMERONIANS**
A NOVEL
VOLUME 1,2,3

JAMES GRANT

THE CAMERONIANS

A Novel

Volume 1, 2, 3

JAMES GRANT

PREFACE.

The old Scottish regiment from which the following story takes its title, and of which the hero is described as a member, is on the point of losing its identity, and after the July of this year will be united with the 90th Perthshire Light Infantry, as 'The Scottish Cameronian Rifles,' thus losing, of course, its scarlet uniform, colours, and facings—the royal yellow of Scotland, which, by a correspondence with Mr. Childers, in March last, the author was fortunate enough to secure (instead of buff) for all Scottish infantry, not laced with blue.

Of the merits of the new regimental system it is difficult to speculate as yet; but it will too probably create an endless confusion, and be long a source of regret to the entire army.

25, TAVISTOCK ROAD,
WESTBOURNE PARK.
May, 1881.

Volume 1.

CHAPTER I. EAGLESCRAIG.

'Twenty-sixth Regiment,' said the old general, raising his voice, as he rustled the morning paper importantly, after taking it from the ebony reading-easel (attached to the arm of his large and comfortable velvet easy-chair), whereon Mr. Tunley, the butler, always laid the journals, after he had duly aired and cut them. 'Twenty-sixth Regiment,' he added, coughing and clearing his voice, 'a detachment of this distinguished corps, says the *Ayr Observer*, has recently arrived at the castle of Dumbarton, under the command of Lieutenants Cecil Falconer and Leslie Fotheringhame.'

'Well, there is nothing remarkable in that, uncle,' said one of his young lady listeners, who seemed chiefly intent upon her breakfast, and not much interested by the intelligence.

'My old regiment—my old regiment still,' said the old man, musingly. 'Gad, I'll have the senior—what's his name? Cecil Falconer—over here, for a few days' cover-shooting.'

'And why not the other too?' asked the young lady who had just spoken, laughingly; 'we might have an admirer each, Annabelle.'

But Miss Erroll, to whom the name of Fotheringhame seemed not unknown, coloured and did not reply.

'Both could not leave their men at the same time,' said the general.

'Then I hope the senior is a pleasant fellow—he whom you propose to bring, Sir Piers,' said Mr. Hew Montgomerie, of whom more anon.

'All the Cameronians were pleasant fellows in my time,' said the general, tartly, 'and I have no doubt they are so still. And remember, girls, that the smartest officers are usually selected for detachment duty,' he added.

Those remarks passed in the cosy and elegant morning-room of Eaglescraig, the mansion of Sir Piers Montgomerie, Bart., who—a retired general officer—was G.C.B. and G.C.S.I. and Colonel of the Cameronian Regiment, and Governor of the Castle of Dumbarton: and the party at breakfast consisted only of Sir Piers, his remote kinsman and heir, Hew Montgomerie, of the Indian Civil Service, home on a year's leave; his grandniece and orphan ward Mary, also a Montgomerie; her friend Annabelle Erroll—both very handsome girls—and an old lady who presided over the silver tea-urn and Wedgewood breakfast equipage, Mrs. Garth, Mary's governess and friend, the widow of an old captain of the Cameronians—five personages, with whom we hope to make the reader fully acquainted in time.

Sir Piers was verging now on his seventieth year, but he was fresher and more hale and hearty than many a man of fifty. His features were still handsome and regular, though lined and wrinkled; his eyes were keen as those of a hawk, and his figure, still wonderfully erect, was clad in a rich maroon-coloured robe-de-chambre, with yellow silk facings, cord, and tassels, and he was seated near the blazing winter fire, with his feet on a velvet stool, and encased in slippers of Mary's handiwork.

Generous by nature, yet hot-tempered and proud—pride of birth had been a positive vice with him in early life—Sir Piers was a curious mixture of the testy old Indian general, accustomed to every luxury, including tyrannising over 'niggers,' with the country gentleman of the old school; and having a profound admiration for the service and everything pertaining thereto, like old Bismarck, he believed that every man should be a soldier and rejoice in being one.

In his latter years Sir Piers had not been with the Cameronians, but had seen a deal of service in India as a general officer, and, while slowly creeping up the list of his rank, had been appointed, in the usual courtesy of the army, full colonel of the old regiment in which he had been a subaltern and field-officer.

His hunting-days were well-nigh past now; yet, at a meet, all the field rejoiced to see the fine old man in his saddle, and with all his pride of bearing—for a wealthy parvenu, however honestly he had won his wealth, Sir Piers would have treated with chilling hauteur—he was never above conversing with some sturdy farmer of Kyle or Cunninghame, kindly and affably, on the price of stock, the fall of wheat, on breeding, fattening, or draining, and always winding up by some, often irrelevant, anecdote of his sporting experiences in India, or when he followed the drums of the Cameronians. Old as he was, he had never been known to shrink from a bullfinch, or be fished out of a brook; he was welcome in every homestead throughout the country-side, and the farmers' wives always assumed their brightest looks, brought forth their whitest tablecloths and the best contents of larder and pantry, in honour of the old Laird of Eaglescraig, when he came their way.

He was a Justice of the Peace and Commissioner of Supply for the County; he read the *Field*, of course, as what country gentleman does not? He studied the War Office *Gazette* regularly, as if he expected his own name to appear there, once weekly; he was simple in all his tastes and happy in all his surroundings, yet, for all that, there was a skeleton in his house and heart, known, perhaps, to himself alone.

He was a childless man now—childless by an act of his own—and the title and estates, which he inherited from a long line of ancestors, were eventually to pass from him to the heir of entail, whom he strove hard, but in vain, to like or admire.

The latter, Hew Caddish Montgomerie, was then about thirty years of age. He was not ungentlemanly either in manner or bearing; but his face, like his disposition, was very defective. His eyes were called grey, and seemed to be grey at times; yet, on closer inspection, it was but too apparent that those shifty and furtive orbs of his were of different colours, for one was a species of bilious green.

They were closely set on each side of a nose that strongly resembled a shoe-horn, and his mouth, which was both cruel and licentious in contour, was partly concealed, or altered in expression, by a luxuriant brown moustache. He had come home, we have said, on leave from the C.S., a sharp hand at cards and with a billiard-cue, deeply dipped in debt, and with the current reputation, among his set, of being 'a bad lot.' His mother, daughter of a Sudder judge, was one of the old English family of Caddish, a name which Hew was wont to affirm was a corruption of Cavendish; be that as it may, the corruption thereof, in some instances, suited his character amazingly well.

'This is rather unlike your usual proud exclusiveness, Sir Piers,' said he, after a pause.

'What? inviting this young officer to knock over a few birds?'

'Yes—without an introduction.'

'Introduction? None was needed in my time; the epaulettes were introduction enough everywhere. The service is certainly *not* what it was in my day, the special school of honour and politeness; but I'll do the right thing, for all that. Let me see, which is senior—Falconer or Fotheringhame. Tunley, hand me the "Army List." Thanks. It *is* Falconer. I have known what it is to be on detachment in such a dull hole as Dumbarton, killing time till the spring drills come on, so I'll invite the senior.'

'And how about the poor junior?' asked Miss Erroll, colouring slightly again.

'Well, even to gratify you, Annabelle, I cannot bring him,' said the general, laughing. 'I remember once, when we were in cantonments at Barrackpore——' Hew smiled as the general began thus; but they were spared the probably prosy reminiscence, for just then Sir Piers' faded features clouded suddenly, as he put down the 'Army List' and said, in a changed voice: 'Had my boy Piers lived, he might now have been at the head of the regiment—five-and-twenty years ago—five-and-twenty years! My God, how long—how time has rolled away!'

His eyes, as he thought this, rather than spoke it all aloud, were cast for a moment furtively—as if he was ashamed of exhibiting any sudden emotion—on the full-length portrait of a handsome young subaltern, in the uniform of the Cameronians, scarlet faced with yellow,

massive gold epaulettes, and the silver sphinx on his belt-plate. It represented a spirited-looking young fellow with a proud and joyous expression of face, and a well-knit, well-set-up figure.

The shifty, parti-coloured eyes of Hew Montgomerie travelled for a moment in the same direction, and then he addressed himself to the grouse-pie, thinking the while that 'things were deucedly well ordered as they were, so far as he was concerned.' And then the meal proceeded somewhat silently, Mrs. Garth officiating over the cups, and Mr. Tunley, a paragon of old rubicund butlers, at the side-board, where the cold beef and grouse-pie were placed, among Indian jars and old silver race tankards.

Mary Montgomerie, the general's grand-niece and ward, and her chief friend and gossip, Annabelle Enroll, were both attractive and very handsome girls, each in her twentieth year, but different in their styles and complexions.

Of a good stature, and round, firm and graceful in form, Mary Montgomerie had well-defined eyebrows, eyes, and hair, all of the darkest brown; long lashes lent a great softness to her white-lidded eyes, and she had a quiet ease, elegance, and girlish innocence of manner; yet at times she was full of vivacity, born of the fact or knowledge that she had been, as an orphan, from her youth, much of a petted child, and reminded by many around her that she was the heiress of many a thousand and many an acre, provided that she wedded with the full approval of one who was not likely to be severe upon her—old Sir Piers, her grand-uncle and legal guardian; for she was the only daughter of his favourite younger brother—younger by several years.

As such she filled a void in his heart, and ever and anon the old man's eyes were wont to rest kindly, fondly, and admiringly upon her.

Her complexion was fair and creamy, her features regular and minute, yet they were hardly ever in repose, for every variety of expression, as thought inspired it, flitted over the ever-changing face.

Though less favoured by fortune, and even by nature, her friend Miss Erroll was nevertheless a charming girl of the blonde type, with grey-blue eyes and fair hair shot with gold, as it seemed, in the sunlight, soft, plentiful, and wavy as the darker tresses of Mary, and her eyebrows and their lashes were just a shade darker than her hair. In the tone and tenour of her ways she was less impulsive than Mary Montgomerie, who at times would come down the house stairs at a headlong rush, while Annabelle followed with calm step and slow, or would quietly seek a gate in the hunting-field, while Mary, with her horse's head uplifted by her light, unerring hand, cleared the nearest hedge at a flying leap, and with a laugh that rang like a merry silver bell.

Both girls were eminently graceful and full of charming manners and pretty winning words and ways; but the difference of their temperaments was indicated even by the style of their morning-dresses, for the robe of Annabelle was pale blue, as became the character of her beauty, while that of Mary was of warm maize colour, tied with fluttering scarlet ribbons, with rosettes of the same to match on her tiny slippers. The loose, wide, falling sleeves of this garment coquettishly showed her round white arm at times, from the taper wrist to the dimpled elbow, and then she would smile and hastily let them fall forward when she

caught the quick, shifty eyes of Hew Montgomerie cast admiringly on her.

The fifth of our *dramatis personæ*, as yet, is Mrs. Griselda Garth, or, as she preferred to be called with the old Scoto-French courtesy, that is now passing away, 'Mrs. Captain Garth.' The widow of a Cameronian officer who had died on service in the East, a calm, subdued, and gentle, white-haired old lady, she had found now, for life, a quiet home at Eaglescraig, and had acted for more than twelve years as a species of tender mother to Mary; and thus, after her duties as a governess were past, she remained as her mentor, companion, and chaperon, honoured, loved, and trusted by Mary and old Sir Piers, who had been her husband's friend.

'If Mr. Falconer avails himself of my invitation, and I don't see very well how he can decline it,' said the latter, returning to his late idea, and viewing it somewhat in the light of a regimental order, 'the dog-cart can meet him at the Montgomerie Arms in Ardrossan; and you, Hew, will do me the favour to drive him here to Eaglescraig.'

'Yes; that will be in better taste than sending a servant,' added Mary.

'Excuse me, Sir Piers,' said Hew, almost sulkily, as his chronic jealousy already took the alarm; 'but I don't care for acting as charioteer to a total stranger.'

'As you please,' replied Sir Piers haughtily, as he always disliked to have his wishes thwarted; 'some one else will obey my orders, I have no doubt.'

Eaglescraig, in the Bailiwick of Cunninghame, we may describe as a magnificent modern villa, with plate-glass oriels, a pillared portico, a stately perron, and balustraded

terrace, whereon the peacocks spread their plumes and strutted to and fro. It had been, somewhat incongruously we must admit, added to, or engrafted on, the tall, old, square baronial tower that for ages had been, from the lofty bluff known as the Eaglescraig, a landmark of the sea, and which started up gaunt and grim, with grated windows, corbelled battlements, and tourelles at the angles—a tower the pride of the general's heart as the cradle of his house, and the home of his ancestors, all unsuited though it was to modern usages, taste, and requirements—an edifice so massive and old, that Hardy Knute, when he dwelt in the adjacent castle of Glengarnock, may have shared in it the hospitality of that Sir Hew Montgomerie who fought at the battle of Largs, and whose coat-of-arms, three *fleurs-de-lis*, with three annulets quarterly, crested by a maiden holding a man's head, may still be seen above its northern door; and these Sir Piers had now reproduced upon everything else, from the carriage panels to the dogs' collars and the salt-spoons.

On one side the house of Eaglescraig commanded a view which, on a summer day, was a delightful one, when there was just breeze enough to swell the passing sails—the glorious Firth of Clyde, with the dark-blue peaks of Arran in the distance, widening out into the ocean, with ships homeward bound after many a tedious, rough, or prosperous voyage; others with their prows turned towards the far horizon, bearing with them, perhaps, expatriated Highland emigrants, their hearts filled with sorrow and regret, rather than with the thoughts of 'high emprise,' so necessary for an exile's success in the doubtful future.

Close in shore, below the beetling cliff, when the wind is from the land, may be seen the many coasting vessels and steamers plying to and fro, shooting clear, as if by magic, from many a rocky promontory and bluff, where, thick as

gnats, the sea-birds wheel and scream; and in many a sheltered cove the boats, brown-tarred and clinker-built, moored or safely beached, for the people there are all hardy and thrifty fisher-folk.

But on the landward side the view was different, and there the eye could wander over the tolerably flat and very fertile acres of Sir Piers Montgomerie, wood, wold and pasture, the richest part, perhaps, of the rich dairy-farm producing land in a district of which, as the old rhyme says:

'Kyle for a man,
And Carrick for a coo;
Cunninghame for butter and cheese,
And Galloway for woo'.'

So the general's invitation to Lieutenant Cecil Falconer was written by Mary and despatched, to the great annoyance of Hew, and all in Eaglescraig knew that in another day or two the recipient thereof, who had accepted it, was coming.

Mary Montgomerie and her friend Annabelle Erroll were too much accustomed to society, and the gaiety of fashionable life, to feel even any girlish excitement at the prospect of a young sub being added to their present small circle at Eaglescraig; nevertheless, in the seclusion of their dressing-closet, it was voted and passed by them, *nem. con.*, that the said addition would not be unacceptable; and, on lot being laughingly cast as to whom he should fall a victim, the prize was Mary's.

And after this they ceased to think upon the subject—certainly, at least, so far as the latter lady was concerned.

CHAPTER II.

HEW'S LOVE-MAKING.

During the few days that passed before the arrival of the expected guest at Eaglescraig, Hew was more than usually attentive to the general's wealthy ward; and one forenoon when they were idling in the long avenue, which led through the Dovecot Park down the woodland slope towards the highway, he resolved, if possible, to bring matters to a successful issue with her.

For fully a month past, since his appearance at Eaglescraig, Mary had been used to this love-making of his, apparently, as she treated him half coquettishly, and yet so 'chaffingly,' that—but for his extreme vanity, or obtuseness—he must have seen that he had no chance of success.

Mary valued his attentions at their real worth, and times there were when he eyed her gloomily—yea, angrily, for he trusted more in Sir Piers' influence, wishes, and authority, to bend her to his will, than to any merit of his own.

Thus his love-making was a curious combination of earnestness, banter, and sullenness; earnestness caused by the girl's great beauty, which he certainly valued, and her great wealth, which he valued much more, on one hand; and on the other, genuine dislike of India, with his own impecunious circumstances, and a knowledge of Sir Piers' wishes. The banter came at times, because he was really incapable of loving any girl truly; and the sullenness was born of his lack of success, with a chronic jealousy of every other man who addressed her.

On this forenoon in the Dovecot Park, Annabelle Erroll did not accompany them, so Hew proceeded to utilise the

occasion.

Mary looked bewitchingly beautiful and piquante in her rich brown sealskin, a grey skirt and a coquettish black velvet hat with a scarlet feather. She kept her hands obstinately in her tiny muff; thus Hew had no pretence for capturing one of them in any way as a suggestive preliminary to something more, and could only walk by her side and utter his soft nothings from time to time, to which she listened, half amused and half bored the while, and not helping him in any way.

The winter day was clear and bright, and the keen gusty breeze that swept from the sea over Eaglescraig imparted a rosebud tint to Mary's usually pale cheeks that enhanced her beauty by adding a fresh light to her eyes. The gusts of wind whirled showers of yellow and brown leaves across the sward, and drifts of stormy clouds through the sky over land and Firth, yet Mary's spirits were a high pressure, and though but little sunshine lit the December landscape, she was full of merriment and the *espièglerie* that were natural to her.

The dovecot they were approaching, like most of the ancient edifices of that kind in Scotland, was built in the form of an enormous beehive, some twenty feet high, and full of columbaria for the pigeons, which were flying in clouds around it, or perched on the summit thereof. It was, in due conformity to an ancient act of the Scottish Parliament, placed in the very centre of the Montgomerie estate, so that the birds should not prey upon the corn of other proprietors; and the reason why so many of these antique dovecots in Scotland survive the mansions to which they belonged, is supposed to be an old superstition, that if the dovecot is destroyed, the lady of the land dies within the year.

Near that of Eaglescraig are two large yellow rings or circles strongly marked in the green-sward (like those on the hill of Craiganrarie), drawn by the sword of an evil Montgomerie, who had trafficked in Satanic influence, and thus had formed round him an orbit of protection, before summoning his sable majesty, and round which the latter had to keep running, so long as he was visible to mortal eyes.

'You do worry me, Hew,' said Mary, with something of a saucy laugh, 'and I have every mind to stand in the conjuror's circle and defy you to approach me.'

'Do you deem me, then, so distasteful, so odious, and such an incarnation of evil?'

'No; but seriously, what is the aim, the object of all this attention, Cousin Hew? for though the tie is a remote one certainly, I may call you cousin, I believe.'

'Do, dearest Mary.'

'Well?' she asked, curtly and impatiently.

'The aim and object, you say?'

'Yes, yes.'

'To marry you, of course; that is—that is, if you will have me, and please Sir Piers,' he replied, with perfect deliberation and more apparent coolness than he usually felt.

'I won't consult grand-uncle on *that* matter, Cousin Hew. Besides, now that I think of it, I don't want to marry.'

'Indeed! I thought marriage was the sole aim of every girl's existence.'

'In novels more than in real life, perhaps. Besides, marriage is only to be thought of when the man and the hour come.'

'It is the end of all anxieties,' urged Hew, who thought no doubt of his monetary ones.

'I have none to end; and with many girls it is only the beginning of a set of troubles which none of them expect. But let us drop this very funny conversation.'

'Why?'

'You surely would not seek a wife with half a heart, or none!'

'The half of your heart, Mary, is worth the whole of any other woman's!' replied Hew, with more warmth and gallantry than he had yet shown; but the provoking Mary only laughed, and as she drew near the dovecot, some of the pigeons, to whom her figure was familiar, and whom she was wont to bring food for, came wheeling and fluttering round her, and one, after nestling in her neck—a pretty sight—alighted on her left hand, and while she stroked and fed it with the right, Hew could not but remark that the snow-white pigeon was not whiter than her slender fingers.

'I would I were that pigeon,' said he, sentimentally.

""Would I were a glove upon that hand!"—now don't be a goose and attempt to act Romeo, as I cannot be your Juliet,' said Mary, laughing outright; and now he began to eye her with his gloomiest expression in his parti-coloured orbs,

while she caressed the bird, and sang, as if to it, part of Lady Anne Lindsay's song:

"Why tarries my love? Ah, where does he roam?
My love is long absent from me.
Come hither, sweet dove, I'll write to my love,
And send him a letter by thee.

"Her dove she did deck, she drew o'er his neck
A bell and a collar so gay;
She tied to his wing a scroll with a string,
Then kissed him and sent him away."

Suiting the action to the word, she kissed the pigeon and tossed it from her with a merry ringing laugh, for she had ever a light glad heart, and was full of pretty, yet haughty and winsome ways.

Hew, in the vanity of his nature, could not see how hopeless it was for him to press his suit with a girl who never listened to him seriously, and who never tried, even in the least degree, to care for him; for there was something in Hew Caddish Montgomerie that made Mary totally indifferent to all he could urge, and so she felt neither regret for, nor gratitude to him: thus she could hear unmoved the avowal and proposal from his lips, which seldom fail to stir in one way or another the hearts of most women, and which, whoever utters them, are seldom or never forgotten.

'Let us be friends, Hew,' said she, in reply to another appeal; 'I do not love you—I cannot love you as you wish, and I dare not and would not marry where I did not love.'

Hew eyed her still more gloomily and almost revengefully, while she played with the spray of a wild-rose

tree, till a little cry escaped her, as a thorn entered her delicate hand.

'Do permit me, Mary,' he urged, and tenderly enough he extracted the thorn, and bowing over her hand, pressed it to his lips; but Mary almost angrily snatched it away, just as the sound of wheels was heard, and there bowled up the winding avenue a dog-cart, the driver and the occupant of which must have seen, and no doubt misunderstood, the whole situation.

'Our new guest with his gun-case and portmanteaus,' said Hew, with much annoyance.

'Who?' asked Mary, still more annoyed, as she thought of what Hew had done.

'Have you forgotten?'

'Oh! you mean Mr. Cecil Falconer.'

'Yes, that fellow from Dumbarton. Now don't, please, run off to the house, Mary; we shall meet him and his military appetite betimes, no doubt, when the gong sounds for dinner.'

Mary had now an undefined sense of provocation, and in silence turned away towards the house, accompanied by Hew, who found his chance was gone for that day, and Mary never gave him another if it could be avoided.

Thus ere long he began to fear that until Sir Piers' demise, and the baronetcy and broad acres of Eaglescraig became his by succession, he might have to face the Indian C.S. again; and seek how to meet his debts by trying—as he had often done—his fortune at 'the board of green cloth.'

CHAPTER III. FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

The sense of having borne a part in a scene—an event which is dreaded by well-bred folks—prevented Mary from making her appearance till dinner-time, when, after achieving a most effective toilette, she entered the lighted drawing-room.

Though almost totally unembarrassed by any memory of Hew's absurd love-making, she had nevertheless been provoked that the new guest should have been cognisant of his gallantry in the avenue. She could but hope that he had forgotten it, which was certainly not the case, and ere she had left her dressing-closet, she paused before the pier-glass to peep at her own sweet face and all her bravery, ere she swept away down the great staircase to the drawing-room, where already the general and their visitor were on the best of terms, laughing and, as Mrs. Garth phrased it, 'talking shop in full swing.'

'Yes, yes,' she heard Sir Piers saying, 'it was there at the storming of that hill-fort that the notable dispute took place between Douglas of "Ours" and Bruce of the Bengal Infantry, as to which was senior and who should lead the stormers; till Douglas, when the bullets, egad! were flying like hail down the breach, lowered his sword and said, "When a Bruce is to lead, a Douglas may be proud to follow; lead on, and I shall follow you!" He was shot down a minute after, and the next who was knocked over was your good-man, Mrs. Garth—poor John! Ah! my niece,' he interrupted himself, on seeing the suddenly arrested gaze of their guest. 'Mr. Falconer of "Ours," Mary—Miss Montgomerie.'

Mary gave him her hand and a smile of welcome, and was at once put at her ease, as Sir Piers resumed his anecdote, to which, though she had heard it a hundred times before, Mrs. Garth listened with rapt attention, as became an 'old campaigner,' while Annabelle Erroll, who seemed already to have discovered that she and Mr. Falconer had some friend or friends in common, was conversing away with more than her usual fluency and animation.

'Is she already smitten by our new sub?' thought Mary.

Falconer had certainly a striking face and striking figure, and both were well calculated to please a woman's eye. In plain but accurate evening costume, the funereal costume of festive civilisation, he seemed every inch a gentleman and a handsome fellow; calm, self-possessed, and in about his twenty-fifth year; soldier-like, perfectly well-bred, as it eventually proved, was well-read and a skilful musician.

His nose was somewhat aquiline; his eyes and close-shaven hair were, like Mary's, of the darkest brown, and his moustaches, as Annabelle afterwards whispered to her, were 'the perfection' of such appendages. He had a placid and perfectly assured manner, very different from Hew's alternate restlessness and *insouciance*; yet his eyes bespoke a latent fire of character and a spirit that was full of courage and energy; and now Hew, who had been preparing for the coming meal by having either sherry and bitters, or a hideous compound called a 'cocktail,' which he had taught the butler, Tunley, to make up, came lounging in, with scrutiny and gloom in his eyes, to complete the little circle grouped near the fire.

By nature suspicious and envious, he barely accorded their visitor a touch of his hand, and from that moment

these two young men felt—they knew not why—an instinctive dislike of each other.

The dinner-gong cut short another anecdote of the general's, and recalled his thoughts from pig-sticking and Central India; he gave, with courtly old-fashioned politeness, his arm to Mrs. Garth; Mary took that of Cecil Falconer, and smiling Annabelle Erroll fell to the lot of the amiable Hew, while Mr. Tunley and the servants drew up rank entire in the vestibule; then, of course, the meal that followed was like any other in such an establishment, perfect, from the soup and dry sherry to the coffee and Maraschino.

'Tunley,' said Sir Piers, 'fill Mr. Falconer's glass. Glad to welcome you to Eaglescraig,' he added, bowing over a brimming glass of sherry; 'glad, indeed, to welcome one of my old Cameronians. I hope that, like me, you are proud of the old corps?'

'I am indeed, Sir Piers!' responded the young fellow with a kindling eye, that doubtless, like his heart, brightened under the genial and charming influences of his surroundings. 'I share, sir, to the full, the opinion of someone who says that no soldier is worth his salt unless he feels that he is as good as any man about him, and twice as good as any opposed to him.'

'Bravo, Falconer I you are one after my own heart! Gad, but he is a fine fellow,' he added in a low voice to Mrs. Garth; 'reminds me powerfully of some one I knew, long ago. *Who* the deuce can it be?'

In the extremity of his kindness at that moment, he actually thought him like his dead son, so the old man's whole heart went out to the new-comer, in whose favour

this fanciful idea operated powerfully. 'His father and mother have long been dead, I understand, and he joined the Cameronians fresh from school—a mere boy, as I did myself.'

He looked almost tenderly on the young man, who was quite unconscious that he was an object of any particular interest; and his eyes kindled, but a sigh escaped as he recalled his own hot youth, and

'Thought of the days that were long since gone by,
When his limbs were strong and his courage was
high,'

and ere his once firm and stately stride had given place to what he called 'a species of half-pay shamble.'

'By the way, Falconer,' said Sir Piers, whose pet weakness was pedigree, 'there was an old family of your name, who had an estate in this Bailiwick of Cunninghame—perhaps you are a branch of it?'

The young man coloured rather perceptibly (as Hew was not slow to perceive and make a note of), and said with a smile:

'I was educated out of Scotland; my father died in my youth, and my mother set no store on such fortuitous things as name or pedigree.'

'A sad mistake,' said Sir Piers, shaking his white head. 'The Falconers I speak of were a branch of the Falconers, lords of Halkertoun, who took their name from their office, being falconers to our kings of old, as we learn from Douglas—aye, so far back as the twelfth century.'

'I know not, general, of what Falconers I come,' replied the young officer a little curtly; then he added, with a smile: 'I only know that I was not born with the proverbial silver spoon, but with a wooden one, of the largest size.'

Sir Piers felt intuitively that he had touched a delicate subject, and changed it at once, though for a Scotsman not to know what kith or kin he came of seemed certainly incomprehensible; but Hew, aware of the vast value he attached to the most fortuitous circumstances of birth, family, and position, thought:

'No pedigree! By Jove! our Cameronian will find but small favour here now.'

'Tunley has got some magnificent Marcobruner and Lafitte in the cellar, Falconer,' said Sir Piers; 'I must have your opinion—but if I only look at them, I should have a twinge of my old enemy the gout.'

Falconer bowed his thanks, and was turning again to address Mary, when Sir Piers took his attention by plunging once more into Central India, and a stream of anecdotes about 'what the service and the regiment were in *my* time,' till the ladies withdrew, and, to Hew's disgust, there followed, of course, a professional conversation, on which he was totally unable to enter; thus he could only sip his wine, toy with the grape-scissors, or crack an occasional nut, while hearing Sir Piers laughing at jokes that seemed destitute of all fun to him, and all matters of 'shop' were discussed with the keenest relish—the new head-dress for the Line, the new pattern musket, and endless anecdotes of the mess-room and parade, to all of which Hew, not unnaturally, perhaps, listened with ill-disguised impatience; and even when the conversation halted irregularly between music and literature, or art and politics, home and foreign,

he could not enter thereon, as Hew abhorred all books save a betting one, and read no journal save the *Sporting Times*.

Cecil Falconer rose to rejoin the ladies, but the general was in no mood to spare him, and insisted again and again on one more glass of dry sherry, 'just as a white-washer;' and of course that, 'by the way,' reminded him of 'how we used to be annoyed at Agra by the musk-rats running over the wine-bottles, and communicating a confounded flavour of musk to the sherry, which is no improvement to the wine, I can tell you; and it is a curious fact that every English resident in India tastes musk in his wine at some time or other, though there are some who assert it is a mere superstition. When we were at Agra and elsewhere up country, we had deuced little money among us in the Cameronians, yet somehow we always spent a devil of a lot of it; for every fellow drew a bill on every other fellow, so there was a regular crossfire of blue paper from right to left.'

To these and other reminiscences Falconer listened with his mind full of the bright smile accorded to him by Mary Montgomerie, when he had adroitly anticipated Hew in opening the door when the ladies departed to the drawing-room, whither he longed to follow them, and from whence the notes of the piano seemed to come as an invitation to do so, but he was compelled to endure anecdotes about India *ad nauseam*.

'By Jove, Sir Piers,' said Hew, wearily, 'I detest India; I've had enough of it!'

'I don't mean you to have any more of it, Hew, and you know that well,' replied Sir Piers kindly, his heart mellowed with wine; 'but you are mistaken in your views of it. "India," says a writer, correctly, I think, "is quite a misrepresented

country, and has nothing objectionable in it, but a tiger or two, and a little heat in the warm part of the day."

The night was considerably advanced when they joined the ladies. Mrs. Garth had already retired; and the jolly old general, who had fully partaken of more wine than he usually did, stood in orderly-room fashion, with his feet apart on the rich hearthrug and his back to the fire, winking, blinking, smiling blandly, and not sure whether he was expected to take the field at the head of the Cameronians to-morrow; while at the piano there was performed a little brilliant singing, which Hew, with growing irritation, secretly stigmatised as 'the most duffing caterwauling!' and sat apart sulking (wine had usually this effect upon him), and leaving to Falconer the inevitable and pleasant task of turning the music leaves, and his eyes watched alternately the handsome and well-formed young fellow, who bent with ease and confidence admiringly over the singers, who, with voices sweetly attuned, were performing a duet, and the forms of the latter, so different in the character of their beauty—Mary with her hair of rich dark brown, and Annabelle, the blonde, with her sunny coils, that shone with a remarkable sheen in the flood of radiance that fell from the chandelier.

But the night waned apace, and at last it was necessary to separate, if any justice was to be done to the cover shooting on the morrow, now close at hand.

Hew gave Falconer his hand, which to the latter seemed clammy and quite like the tail of a fish; but the general insisted on escorting him to his 'quarters,' as he said, and conducted him, candle in hand, along one or two stately corridors adorned with fine paintings—two, that were of Cardinal York and King James VIII., evinced the Jacobite proclivities of Sir Piers' ancestors—and there, too, were

trophies of the chase, both European and Asiatic. Never had Hew or the girls known the usually grave and rather stately old baronet 'in such a merry pin' (Hew suggested 'so screwed'); but as he threaded the corridors he was heard to sing a scrap of an old Anglo-Indian ditty:

'Good-bye to the *batta!*—to lighten
The pangs of each blooming cadet;
And the brows of the captains to brighten,
They've doubled the one epaulette;
They've added some lace to our jackets,
Augmented the price of our caps,
In the hope that the half-batta rackets
Will merge in the glare of our "traps."
Just as any new plaything bewitches
The sulks out of little boys whipped;
And before they've well pulled up their breeches,
They wholly forget they've been stripped.'

'Ah, yes, Falconer, my lad, that song was known long before your day, when the beggars cut down the *batta*. But here you are—no, here; this is the door. Good-night; hope you'll sleep sound. No need for a chowree to whisk inside the curtains here, as in India, and after making them safe all round the mattress, spring in through the hole you leave (like Harlequin through his hoop), lest a cloud of mosquitoes follow. I remember, at Dumdum—no, at Dinapore, my son Piers and Ballachulish of the Cameronians——' Then his voice broke as he spoke of his son, and he added: 'But I'll tell you about it to-morrow. Breakfast at nine, and then—hey for the covers!'

And now Sir Piers, whose voice had become certainly somewhat 'feathery,' betook him to his own room, pausing on the way more than once, candle in hand, as his aristocratic ideas of family, and that pride of birth which

had been his ruling passion and sin in early life, occurred to him, and he muttered, pausing in his progress to bed, and shaking his white head:

'Doesn't know what Falconers he's of—a strange thing—a pity. My boy Piers forgot, too, what Montgomeries he was of, once on a time. A fine fellow, though!'

As for the latter, he was simply enchanted with Eaglescraig and all the details thereof: the beauty of the two girls, each so different in its character, and the *savoir vivre* of the old general. As for Hew, he forgot all about him.

Meanwhile, a few rooms distant, the lady's-maid was sleepily combing out the dark and luxuriant tresses of Mary Montgomerie, and the light of a shaded lamp fell softly and tenderly upon the graceful figures of herself and Annabelle, seated in their *robes de chambre* (chatting as young girls will always do when preparing for rest), on the looped-up lace curtains of their pretty beds, knotted one with blue and the other with rose-coloured ribbons; on the toilet-tables, with their glittering trinkets, and crystal bottles with gold or silver stoppers; on vases of conservatory flowers, and all the pretty luxuries which are usually to be found in the vicinity of youth, wealth, and beauty, as each girl sat smilingly contemplating herself in a long looking-glass, with all her rippling hair floating down over her white shoulders.

'And you like him?' said Mary, after the maid had withdrawn.

'Oh, so much!' exclaimed Annabelle; 'he is quite a dear fellow.'

'He has a gentle voice and gentle eyes, certainly,' said Mary, musingly.

'And to me looks somehow like one who has a history beyond that of other young men.'

'A history—what a funny idea! Of course he'll have a history, which, perhaps, like other young subs, he would rather not have made patent to everyone. But you and he seemed to have some little interest in common, Annabelle?'

'Had we?' said the latter, colouring a little.

'He spoke to you often of his friend, the other sub—what is his name?'

'Leslie Fotheringhame,' replied Annabelle in a low voice.

'Do you wish Sir Piers had invited him?'

'Perhaps, Mary,' said Annabelle, with a little forced laugh. 'Yet better not, better not,' she thought, with a memory of the days when her hand had thrilled at the touch of Leslie's, even before words of love had been spoken, and there had only been in her ear those broken utterances which a woman seldom, perhaps never, forgets.

So, save in the instance of Hew, all their first impressions of each other were favourable, and the young girls, as each laid her head on her pillow, began already to scheme out pleasant little visions, they scarcely knew of what.

CHAPTER IV. COVER SHOOTING.

Jovial and laughing was the party which assembled at breakfast next day, in the bright morning-room of Eaglescraig, though the December landscape looked bleak enough without.

Mary, in all the freshness of her morning beauty, presided at one end of the loaded table, and Mrs. Garth at the other. Sir Piers was still in his room; but there was Cecil Falconer, in a shooting-suit of the best taste, and having of course innumerable pockets; Hew in rather 'loud'-patterned knickerbockers; a couple of jolly, red-faced country gentlemen, the village doctor, and old Mr. John Balderstone (of whom much more anon), the trusted land agent and local factor of Sir Piers, and deemed one of the best shots in the Bailiwick of Cunninghame, a hale, hearty, ruddy-faced man, with an ample paunch and short sturdy legs encased in long brown gaiters.

'How is Sir Piers this morning, Mr. Hew?' he asked that personage, who was intent on a pile of grouse pie, for the breakfast was a genuine Scottish one, a veritable dinner, with the addition of tea and coffee pots covered with elaborate cosies of Mary's handiwork. 'Well, I hope, and that he goes to shoot with us?'

'Well?—I should think so; hearty and lively,' replied Hew, with his mouth full; 'by Jove, he looks as if he was likely to live for ever! He's got the receipt for old Parr's life pills, and the secret of Methuselah too,' was the ungenerous—even coarse—response of Hew, half spoken to himself, and speaking volumes as to his secret thoughts; a response which made worthy old John Balderstone first raise and