VALENTINE WILLIAMS

THE RED MASS

Valentine Williams

The Red Mass

EAN 8596547184546

DigiCat, 2022
Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I

Table of Contents

THE PORTRAIT OF A SPOILED YOUNG MAN

Table of Contents

These have not known the sting of rain
Nor sweet storm waters, heavy falling;
And they have never felt the pain
Of burning sun;
And in the stillness never one
Has heard a wild bird calling.

The loud east wind may call and shout
Among the trees and sing and cry
Against the window panes, 'Come out!'
But they are still,
And, heedless of the east wind's will,
They live their lives and die.

From *In a Conservatory*, by Bernice Kenyon

The drum of the King's Guard was beating a ruffle.

Harshly the roll awoke the echoes of the Palace as the guard turned out to the huge lumbering coach that was bearing His Majesty from Saint James's to his castle of Windsor. The pigeons flew whirring up; and the old courtyard, its windows flashing in the morning sun,

reverberated to the din as the drummer, horridly mindful of the drum-major's curling cane, chin up, arms stiff, wrists flexible as tempered steel, briskly plied his sticks.

Stirringly the roll rang out over the placid morning air. It swelled forth into Saint James's Street. The ragged beggars caught the sound as they clamoured miserably for alms from the great gilt coaches that went lurching by. There were some, in tattered uniforms, whose dull eyes it fired with the light of brave old memories of the days when to them the drum was the very voice of war, the herald of victory and defeat, when the tall round case, with its emblazoned coat of arms and white leathers, was their familiar, constant companion, table for food and dicing, seat and pillow—pillow in sleep and death.

The drums of '94! The flames of war reddened the horizon of Europe, and amid clouds of drifting powder smoke, black against the blood-red sky, the eighteenth century was passing away. From one end of the Continent to the other the brazen-throated roll rang loud in men's ears as the drummers of Santerre, of Dumouriez and Pichegru, drummed a sad procession of periwigged, beribboned spectres to the grave. The sky-line was a mass of jostling figures, above which the shot-torn standards tossed while the blood-stirring, maddening, irresistible music of the drum roused the faubourgs, drowned the unheeded voice of majesty on the scaffold, and swept the barefoot republicans to victory....

The drum of the King's Guard beat a ruffle.

In his lodging in Saint James's Street, Hector Fotheringay, Lieutenant and Captain of His Majesty's Third Foot Guards, heard it as, clad in a frilled cambric shirt and white breeches, he sat before the mirror at his dressing-table. His stiff, tight scarlet coat with its heavy gold braid and epaulettes, his sword and sash and three-cornered hat, were lying on the bed where he had thrown them when, just now, he had come off King's Guard.

May was approaching its close. Though the hour was early, the Colour Court had been unpleasantly warm at guard-mounting. The sun had beat down fiercely upon the enclosed yard and he had seen the sweat glisten even upon the dusky face of Hassan, the negro cymbalist, as he marched by with the band in all the glory of his tall turban, with its red and white plume springing from the glittering crescent, and his silver chain and neck-plate.

The heat made the men slack, and Ashdown, the Captain of the Old Guard, had been sadly short of temper. He had found fault with everything and kept the drill-sergeant running up and down the ranks striking at the men with his heavy cane. He had even checked Fotheringay, his Lieutenant, because, forsooth, he found that his hair was not sufficiently powdered.

The mirror was a relic of the Court of Anne and the grandsires of his reigning majesty, mysteriously acquired on retirement by Buttrell, Fotheringay's landlord, for many years footman in the Royal service. Among the patches and powder, the eager glances and pouting lips of those artificial days, it must have reflected often the fretful, discontented

expression that now disfigured the handsome features of the young Guardsman.

He held a letter open in his hand. With a scowl on his face he referred from the letter to the glass. The letter was from his cousin Betty and marked a stage in one of their periodical tiffs.

> *You are not ill-looking really*, she wrote. *Your face is well enough, your sun-browned tint (which shows, at least, that the whole of your day is not spent at the gaming-table) is Vastly Becoming to your powdered hair, your blue eyes are Attractive, your nose has Distinction. But any pretence you may have to Good Looks is destroyed quite by the Overweening Arrogance of your expression. At the age of twenty-five, my dear Hector, you wear the Disillusioned Air of the Finished Courtier, not realising that you are too Young to appear Spoiled and too Old to appear Sulky.*

To his impatient scrutiny the old mirror disclosed an oval, sunburnt face, the white powdered hair emphasising the tan, bold, haughty, courageous eyes, in colour the deepest blue, an aquiline nose, a firm and well-shaped mouth, the upper lip decorated with a small and elegant black mustache, such as, in this year of grace 1794, officers of the Household Brigade, almost alone of the Army, wore. It was an arrogant, a discontented face, the face of a spoiled young man with a faint air of dissipation, which, but for a magnificent constitution and a natural love of fresh air and

hard exercise, would ere this have marred features of unusual attractiveness and beauty.

With a muttered exclamation Fotheringay turned from the mirror to the table in the centre of his bedroom. On the tray with his chocolate a pile of letters stood. He opened one or two, then flung the whole packet to the floor in a rage. They were all the same, bills, reminders, dunning letters. With a pang they recalled to him the unpleasant fact that, at the Thatched House Tavern on the previous evening, he had lost nine hundred guineas to Maxeter, of the Blues.

He was in a vile mood. He had returned to find his servant absent and no one to help him change his clothes. O'Dare was becoming intolerable, the idlest fellow in the whole Brigade of Guards. And yet the rascal was, in a way, indispensable. Never had he had a servant with such a way with duns. His Irish plausibility was never at a loss: his genial persuasiveness mollified in the most extraordinary fashion these thieving tradesmen, and had hitherto miraculously averted the supreme catastrophe, an appeal to the Commanding Officer.

He stood up and threw back one of the casement windows, letting into the room the sounds and smells of the London morning, the crash of heavy wheels over the cobbled street, the crack of whips, the raucous, discordant cries, the faint scent of wood fires, the stale odour of the open kennels....

Another day begun, another day of aimless idleness, the same unchanging round—a call at the Saint James's Coffee-House to read the papers, a stroll in the Mall, dinner at White's ... no, he had promised Montgomerie, a brother

officer, to dine with him at the Cocoa Tree ... then Vauxhall or Ranelagh, and, inevitably and ultimately, an adjournment to the Thatched House or White's or to one of the foreign gambling-dens in Soho. The round scarcely varied from day to day.

A Brigade of Guards was with the Duke of York in Flanders, regiments of the line garrisoned the coast towns, there was a great camp at Warley, and, in obedience to the clarion call of Mr. Pitt, volunteers were springing to arms against the threat of invasion. Yet London held Fotheringay. London with its life of parade and pipeclay, of tiresome levées and dull social functions, unchanging, endless, unbearable.

Unbearable but for Betty. It was she, he realised, not the town that fettered him to London. He might have managed a transfer to the first battalion in Flanders; for the Duke of Argyll, the Colonel of the Regiment, had been his dead father's friend and patron. But when he had consulted Betty on the project, his cousin, in one of her rare kind moods, had cried out she could not spare him. And so he had let the chance go by nor had of Betty any thanks for so doing.

For a whole week, he reflected, he had not seen her, the divine, the incomparable, the quick-tempered, the nimble-witted Lady Betty Marchmont. On his last visit her wilful elusiveness, her aloofness, her capricious refusal to read what was in his mind, had exasperated him. But he felt himself drawn to her again. He would call on her that very afternoon: an hour with Betty would, he decided, pleasantly bridge that gaping void between the intolerable dullness of

the Saint James's Coffee-House and 'Monty's' dinner at the Cocoa Tree.

There was a brisk tap at the folding doors between his bedroom and sitting-room, and O'Dare appeared, a pair of boots in his hand.

'Curse you for an idle rascal!' exclaimed Fotheringay, springing up from his chocolate. 'Od rot you, where have you been?'

'I stepped out to Mr. Hoby's in Piccadilly to fetch your boots, sir,' said the man sullenly. 'They kept me waiting by rayson of th' account, sir ...'

'Damn that for an idle excuse! You were at the King's Head swilling ale, I'll warrant. Curse me if I don't send you up for a couple of dozen if I have any more of your idle ways! Come! Dress my hair again and be quick about it! Only this morning I received "goose" from Lord Ashdown about it. And, blast your eyes, don't breathe down my neck!'

A silken wrapper cast about the front of his fine linen shirt, he seated himself again before the mirror while O'Dare, his face set and sulky, busied himself with his duties.

His toilet completed, Fotheringay changed into undress uniform and prepared to sally forth.

'Tell my groom to bring my horse round to the Saint James's Coffee-House,' he said to O'Dare from the top of the stairs. 'And see that he doesn't keep me waiting, you idle ruffian! Well, Buttrell!'

The landlord, a fat man of fifty-odd, sleek as a firkin of butter, in a snuff-coloured suit and white cotton stockings, who was descending from the upper storey, bowed low.

'Your servant, Mr. Fotheringay, sir!'

'The chocolate was not hot this morning, Buttrell!' Fotheringay rapped out. 'See that it's properly warm another time—you charge enough for it, God knows! And, hark'ee, you needn't send in your bill again. When it pleases me, I'll pay it....'

'Begging your pardon, Mr. Fotheringay,' the landlord interposed, cringing and fawning, 'if so be as you could make it convenient to allow me a little something on account ...'

But the young man waved him aside. Insolent, proud, handsome, and beautifully dressed, he strode down the stairs.

Turning, the landlord found himself face to face with O'Dare.

'Treats us like dogs!' muttered the Irishman. 'There's no way of plazin' him at all, at all. He's the proud divil, so he is, bad luck to him!'

''Ush, O'Dare, 'ush, I beg!'—Mr. Buttrell raised in deprecation a fat red hand—'for shame, man, to say sich wicked things about your good kind master what 'as condescended to pick you up out of the gutter, as one might say ...'

'"Out of the gutter" is it, you fat, pork-fed flunky?' exclaimed the Irishman indignantly. 'The gutter be damned! There's no better name than O'Dare in the whole of Ireland. An', lavin' that on one side, is it the Brigade of Guards you're callin' the gutter? 'Tis a gintleman's life, I'd have ye know, Mr. Buttrell, forby 'tis rough awhiles, and I wouldn't have left the company but that I felt meself was a power too good for

thim hulkin' black Prasbyterians in the Third Guards. I declare to God, an' I don't care who hears me say it, that life in barracks was heaven compared to what I have to put up with from *him*! Tyranny, that's what it is, Mr. Buttrell. He's a tyrant, and he trates the pair of us like what we were his naygur slaves!'

'My goodness!' exclaimed the landlord, his fat face trembling like a jelly. 'I declare I don't know what's come over you. And 'im such a fine gen'elman and *h*eir to one of the finest properties in the country. 'E's 'aving 'is fling now and 'oo shall gainsay 'im, fine rich young gen'elman that 'e is, with 'is uncle, Sir John, at 'is back to pay 'is debts ...'

'Is ut his wealth that gives him lave to insult me?' demanded the Irishman fiercely. 'Thim days is passing, landlord. The toime is come for tyrants to trimble before ... before the thramp of pathriots. The suv'rin people is roisin' up to cast off its fetters ...'

'For the love of God, O'Dare,' cried Buttrell, and clapped a hand over the soldier's mouth. ''Tis rank treason you speak. 'Tis all very well for Dr. Priestley and ruffians like 'im to praise up the murderin' Frenchies at their meetings, but I'll have no talk like this in my house. Patriots, indeed! I'd like to get at 'em with my old besom, the infernal massacring scoundrels! Nothing would please me better than to see their Mossoo de Robespierre strapped up at the triangles, by Gad, with a couple of your drummers warming 'is back. There's treason in the air, O'Dare! You watch out you're not infected by it!'

And with stately tread Mr. Buttrell descended to the kitchen to read in the morning paper the latest news out of

the Low Countries.

O'Dare looked after him contemptuously. He shrugged his shoulders, and then, taking from his pocket a thin brochure, opened it where a page was turned down, and, immersed in his reading, returned to the bedroom.

On the outer cover of the pamphlet was printed in heavy black type: 'The Rights of Man. By Thomas Paine.'

CHAPTER II

Table of Contents

MR. GRAY

Table of Contents

In years to come, Hector Fotheringay was wont to look back upon that glittering May morning as the virtual beginning of his life. As he strolled forth into the sunshine, despite the brave weather, he was conscious of a quick feeling of unrest. It was as though the imminent change that, before another day should dawn, was to overtake his fortunes, had cast its lengthening shadow across his mind.

In truth, the times were unsettled enough. Great events were stirring. England was at death grips with an ancient foe in new and terrifying shape, and, only three days from London, the deadly machine of the regicides day by day in Paris was swamping history in seas of blood. And he was out of all these historic doings, Fotheringay reflected, condemned of his own volition to be a mere pawn in a red coat and march behind a band or drink and lounge and gamble through the long summer nights which, in Flanders and in Paris, were witness to such deeds of high adventure.

At the door of his lodging he stopped and surveyed Saint James's Street. From the windows of the clubs and coffee-houses, thronged with rich and well-fed loungers, his gaze descended to the filthy beggars that swarmed over the pavement. How their numbers had increased since the war with France and how many old soldiers and sailors trailed their ragged uniforms in the mire of the kennels! Even as he

stood a grotesque figure in stained and faded scarlet, who, with dog and bell, tapped his way along the pavement rolling his sightless eyeballs and screaming, 'Pray remember the blind man!' sought to clutch his fine lace coat with grimy hand, while an old sailor with tarry pigtail and face the colour of mahogany, who wheeled himself along in a little carriage, clasped him about the legs. When Fotheringay shook him roughly off and bade him begone, the fellow cursed him roundly for an 'aristocrat.'

A new spirit was abroad in the land, infection spread like a murrain from France, the young Guardsman angrily reflected. Even his own servant was not free from it. He noted the dense crowd that, as every day, thronged the pavement before Humphrey's shop where Mr. Gillray's disgraceful caricatures were exposed for sale. The fellow spared no one with his pencil and the common people made a god of him. Mr. Pitt who, thank Heaven, and none too soon, was taking action against the agitators, should lay an information against the ruffian. The filthy doctrines of the regicides were poisoning old England. One could scarcely contemplate the old Palace at the foot of the street without wondering whether it, like the monarchy it stood for, was as solid as it looked.

As he descended the street, the tap of a drum from the interior of the Palace again came to his ears. The brassy roll stirred him strangely. The sound of the drum always carried his thoughts to Paris. His mother had been French—he was glad now that she had not lived to see disaster overwhelm her beloved France—and her brother, the Marquis de Sainte-Valentine had perished, but eight months before, on the

scaffold, the last of his line. To tap of drum the tumbril had borne him to the Place de la Révolution, and, as he and his companions met their death, the letter from Coblence had told him, the drums had beaten again lest the victims should have been tempted to address the mob.

Fotheringay crossed the street in front of the Palace, past the Yeomen of the Guard, resting on their halberds, to the Saint James's Coffee-House. A prodigious buzz of conversation greeted his ears as he entered. The ground-floor room was densely crowded and every newspaper was the centre of an eager and animated group.

A big man in the undress uniform of the Horse Guards, who was breakfasting at a table against the wall, beckoned Hector over.

'Good-morning, Maxeter!' said Hector, stopping at the table.

'Join us, Fotheringay,' invited the big man, his mouth full. 'Let me present you to my friend, Mr. Gray.'

He indicated a natty little ant of a man of middle-age, very neatly dressed in sober brown with spotless linen of the finest texture at neck and wrists. He was clean-shaven and wore a brown wig.

'I am honoured, Mr. Fotheringay,' said Mr. Gray, rising and bowing.

Hector saluted him punctiliously. He remembered having seen him at odd times at the coffee-house.

'The luck was against you at the Thatched House last night, Fotheringay,' observed Maxeter.

'Yes, curse it,' Fotheringay agreed. 'Nine hundred guineas, wasn't it? You'll have to wait a day or two for your

money, Max. I've got to journey down to Somersetshire to that old skinflint, my uncle, and see if I can raise the wind!'

Maxeter laughed.

'There's no hurry about it,' he said. 'But why don't you marry, man, and get rid of the leading-strings? Mr. Fotheringay here,' he explained to Mr. Gray, 'is, under his late father's will, deprived of the full control of his fortune until such time as he marries. Sir John Fotheringay, his uncle, is his guardian and controller of the purse ...'

'Sir John Fotheringay?' said Mr. Gray. 'He was with the Army in America, I think? Aye, I know him!'

'Then you number among your acquaintance a damned old skinflint, sir,' Fotheringay broke in hotly. 'Four times a year have I to travel down to the wilds of the West Country and weary myself to death in the set of fox-hunting country squires with whom my uncle delights to pass his time. Each time I must stay a fortnight, for so he will have it, and of that a week at least is spent in the stormings and blusterings, the reproaches and reprimands, which the mention of my debts invariably calls forth!'

'Sir John has the reputation of belonging to the old school,' observed Mr. Gray sedately.

'He has stayed in it too long, sir,' replied Fotheringay severely. 'He thinks that an officer of the Guards may do with a hundred pounds a year as he could in the days of Corporal John. Why, dammit, Maxeter here pays his *valet de chambre* as much!'

'And he's worth every penny of it, curse me!' heartily vociferated Maxeter. 'Peyraud has not his equal in London for the tying of cravats. The Prince would have taken him

from me, but I protested to His Royal Highness that it was unfair, "for you, Sir," I told him, "are, so to say, *hors concours*!" He was devilish amused!'

An excitable voice that cried out suddenly in French now drew their attention to the next table. Three men, all dressed in the height of fashion, but with certain niceties that stamped them as foreigners, sat there, an open newspaper before them. One of them, a dark young man with a passionate face, who wore the riband of the Order of Saint Louis on his breast, was exclaiming excitedly:

'*Ils se moquent de nous! Ils se moquent de nous!*'

One of his companions, a foppishly attired youth of about twenty-five, who was drinking sherry, nodded his head in approval.

'What can one expect of a government that bows always to the will of the people?' remarked the third man, whose large and fleshy face wore an undoubted air of authority. He had narrow eyes and thin lips that shut with a snap.

'Is there bad news from France again?' asked Fotheringay in a low voice of Maxeter. 'The *émigrés* seem very excited.'

'The Duke of York has had a drubbing at Tourcoing by Lisle,' Maxeter answered. 'And, if Mr. Gray's information be correct, he owed his safety only to the swiftness of his horse.'

'I had the news from Mr. Secretary Dundas himself,' replied Mr. Gray. 'The Marquis d'Aligre seems mightily put out about it!'

'Which is he?' asked Fotheringay.

'The old man with the fat face. He brought a vast fortune out of France with him and steadily declines to give a sol to

aid the grievous distress among his fellow *émigrés*. The one with the riband is the Vicomte de Solesmes: the young man I do not know.'

Meanwhile the conversation among the *émigrés* had been resumed.

'They are all shopkeepers,' declared the Vicomte. 'They are not a race of soldiers as we. They have the strength and the determination of which soldiers can be made, but their soul is in their shop!'

Fotheringay flushed up.

''Fore God,' he said to his companions, 'their impertinence is intolerable. Do you know what they say?'

Maxeter yawned.

'I have said all the French I know,' he remarked cheerfully.

Mr. Gray leaned forward.

'I see you know French, Mr. Fotheringay,' he said. 'My advice to you is to turn a deaf ear to the political arguments of these gentlemen. They are of the type of French nobleman which, to my way of thinking, is one of the few excuses for the conduct of the Jacobins.'

But the Vicomte, who waxed more excited with the warmth of his eloquence, was speaking again.

'Look around us!' he exclaimed. 'The town is full of idle officers. They look brave enough in their red coats now, but when it comes to fighting they run ... like their famous Duc d'Yorck!'

With a crash Fotheringay's chair fell over. The young Guardsman had sprung to his feet. He strode to the Frenchmen's table.

'You and your friends,' he said, addressing the Vicomte in polished and exquisite French without a trace of English accent, 'will take yourselves out of this coffee-house and will return only at the risk of receiving the chastisement which your impertinence merits.'

He had spoken in a ringing voice and a dead hush fell upon the room. Very white the Vicomte rose to his feet.

'By what right, Monsieur, do you interfere in a private conversation?'

'By the right conferred by respect for the uniform which I have the honour to wear. You will permit me to add, Monsieur, that it would be more fitting for you and your friends to be in the field seeking to liberate your country than to seek shelter here to criticise those who are doing it for you!'

The Vicomte's eyes blazed. He was about to speak when the Marquis rested a pudgy hand on his laced sleeve. He fixed his small eyes, dulled with years of vice, on the Guardsman's hot and angry face. He did not rise.

'Monsieur, you insult us!'

Fotheringay shrugged his shoulders.

'My remarks were addressed to your friend,' he said. 'But you can accept them for yourself if you wish!'—he paused —'they will cost you nothing!'

The hand of the Marquis d'Aligre flashed to his sword; but now the room fell into an uproar. A party of officers stepped between the adversaries.

'I shall kill you for this!' exclaimed the Vicomte over a barrier of restraining arms. Then to the Marquis: 'No, no, Marquis, he is my man!'

'My friend, Lord Maxeter, will be glad to receive any friend of yours!' Fotheringay retorted. 'Max,' he went on, 'I count on you!'

Some one handed him his hat. It was Mr. Gray, looking at him curiously with his keen eyes. Fotheringay bowed to him stiffly and strode out of the coffee-house.

CHAPTER III

Table of Contents

THE MAN ON THE SOFA

Table of Contents

The whole day had gone wrong, the young man reflected, as he slowly rode towards Chelsea where the Lady Betty Marchmont lived with her aunt, the Dowager Countess of Orifex. He was more concerned than he would admit over the state of his money affairs, for there were transactions with certain seedy Hebrews of Long Acre which he had sedulously withheld from the knowledge of his guardian. His capital was not large, and he knew, what Maxeter and his other friends did not, that the estates to which he was heir were already heavily encumbered. He was growing increasingly conscious that his means would not indefinitely stand the strain of his life as a man of fashion. He would have to make up his mind to marry and settle down before it was too late.

His encounter with the *émigrés* had upset him. He cared nothing that two duels, perhaps three, would follow the brisk brush of that morning. But the Vicomte's sneer about the town being full of red coats rankled. It rankled because, as far as Fotheringay was concerned, it was a palpable hit.

'I'll kill him for that!' he muttered, and savagely dug his spurs into Paladin's sides.

His nerves were yet jangling when he was ushered into the prim drawing-room of Lady Orifex. Betty was at the clavecin humming over to herself an old song of Lulli's,

while her aunt's companion, Baroness von Schlippenbach, the impoverished daughter of one of George II's Hanoverian Court, bent over her embroidery frame at the window.

The melody broke off abruptly, as he entered, on a note that jarred and sung. Betty rose and dropped in mockery a deep curtsey.

'The Baroness and I,' she said, casting down her beautiful eyes, 'are profoundly sensible of the honour Mr. Fotheringay does us in remembering our poor existence!'

And with spreading skirts she sank down before him once more.

'You seemed to be so glad to be rid of me the last time, Betty,' the young man answered, flushing, 'that I had thought my presence would not be missed!'

'Nor has it, sir! Nor has it!' Lady Betty flashed back, tossing her head. 'Strange as it may seem I have managed very well to amuse myself without you. Indeed, I wonder that you should have troubled to-day!'

And opening her large eyes in feigned amazement at him, she dropped into a gilt *bergère* and began to play with her little spaniel.

Fotheringay drew up a chair and sat down beside her.

'Indeed, Betty, I have been much taken up with my military duties ...' he began. He tried to mollify her; but her reception of him had increased his exasperation and, even as he spoke, he was conscious that he had made a false start.

'So I observed at the Rotunda on Wednesday night,' she answered with a teasing smile. 'I had believed I had seen you in gallant company with Mr. Angelo and Mr. Bannister,

the actor, and ... and others who, no doubt, were likewise engaged in military duties ...'

'You were at Ranelagli on Wednesday?' said the young man. 'I did not see you. With whom were you?'

'I am so much taken with my social duties, I vow, that I scarce remember,' she rejoined mockingly. 'With Mrs. Sheringham and Major Doyle, I believe I was. A great number of people joined our party. I think the Prince of Wales was there ...'

Fotheringay bit his lip.

'You fly high, Betty, my dear,' he said. 'I did not know you numbered His Royal Highness among your acquaintance.'

'Odd as it may seem, I do,' she retorted with a toss of her head. 'And no later than last night I was at Carlton House to hear the Prince play in the quartet of chamber music. On the violoncello His Royal Highness is quite admirable!'

Fotheringay shrugged his shoulders. There were few men of his set who would venture to discuss the character of the Prince of Wales with an unmarried girl.

'Betty,' he said in a low voice, 'get rid of the Baroness. I want to talk to you.'

'Schlippenbach,' observed the girl in a resigned tone, 'will you leave us? Cousin Hector is going to talk secrets!'

'*Teueres Kind*,' said the Baroness, looking up from her work, 'scarcely I think it is brober that a yong maiden shouldt alone remain vith a yong man. Your oldt Schlippenbach iss disgreet. It is a family dradition. Queen Garoline of plessed memory hass said of my late Papa, "Der Schlippenbach" she hass said "iss domb like a fish!"'

But the girl stood up.

'Schlippenbach!' she cried peremptorily. 'Leave us when I tell you!'

The old Baroness, a haggard and acidulated spinster, her powdered hair piled high in the fashion of a bygone age, had learnt the lesson of years of humble dependence. Her thin and mittened hands folded in front of her, she rose and with a guttural 'I go!' glided silently from the room.

'Ugh!' ejaculated Betty, resuming her seat. 'Every time I see her I am terrified of poverty and old age!'

'Betty,' said Fotheringay, taking her hand, 'there is something I wish to say to her ladyship your aunt. But before I speak to her I want to consult you, to ... to ...'

Betty whipped her hand away.

'My dear Hector,' she said. 'Is this a proposal?'

'Don't mock me, Betty,' Fotheringay pleaded. 'Since you came to town two months ago to be presented I have discovered again my old playmate of our childhood years. Do you remember the old days at Frome? Your aunt brought you to spend Christmas with my mother. You were in mourning for your father then, such a solemn little girl in black. We were sweethearts then, dear Betty, and since I have seen you again in London it has come upon me that you are the only woman for whom I have ever cared. It has seemed to me sometimes that I was not wholly indifferent to you. Dearest Betty, I want to seek happiness with you again at Cranwell where my father and mother began their married life. On my marriage the property, now administered by my uncle, comes back to me. We will live on our estates; our friends shall visit us; and, from time to time, we will travel up to London to taste the delights of the

town. How does the prospect please you, Betty? May I speak to your aunt?'

The girl sat very erect in the high-backed chair, her face inscrutable.

'Your proposal does me great honour, my dear Hector,' she said, 'but I beg you to put it from your mind. It is impossible.'

The young man started back.

'Am I so unsuitable a *parti*, then?' he asked. 'My estates are large and, with the careful management which I shall bestow, will return a more than comfortable income. And, on my uncle's death, as you know, I shall succeed to the baronetcy!'

'I will never live in the country again,' the girl exclaimed passionately. 'I was never meant for a hum-drum life among cows and sheep and poultry. I hate the country, do you understand? I hate it. When my father was killed in the American War, I was left a penniless orphan and all my life that I can remember has been spent in retirement as a dependent on my aunt's generosity. I have only begun to live since I came to London. I have beauty, I have wit, and in London I mean to stay!'

'Town life is hollow,' said Fotheringay gravely. 'Its pleasures are soon exhausted. There is no happiness in the town, my dear!'

The girl stamped her foot.

'*You* have had your fling!' she cried. 'There is no novelty in London life to *you*. But what do *I* know of life? Whom do I ever see at Stoke Norton except old Dr. Benfield or the Squire or Parson Clutterbuck? Here in London a woman may

sway empires, may make and unmake men, there are fortunes at her command. Mrs. Sheringham says that with my looks I may make a great match. The Prince is greatly *épris*, Major Doyle tells me.'

'With all respect for His Royal Highness,' said Fotheringay, 'the Prince of Wales is no fit acquaintance for an unmarried girl!'

Fiercely Lady Betty turned on him.

'And are you any different? With your painted women and your drunken parties and your gambling night and day? And when you tire of it and the money begins to give out ... don't deny it, every one says you are *criblé de dettes*...! you come to me and offer me to become a squire's wife in Somerset!'

'Better a squire's wife than a Prince's mistress!' Fotheringay retorted hotly.

'Oh!' cried the girl indignantly, 'how dare you say such things to me?'

'You put them in my mouth,' cried the young man vehemently. 'You speak as if there were no such thing as love. Has love no place in your thoughts?'

'If I could meet a *man* ...' she said.

'And yet I thought ... you gave me reason to think ... you cared for me?'

'You do yourself too much honour, cousin,' she replied coldly.

'When I would have taken service with our battalion in Flanders, you dissuaded me from so doing, if I remember rightly ...' he began.

But, furiously, she cut him short.

'Yes,' she said. 'And you bowed to a woman's whim! You let a woman command you when your comrades are lying out in the open under the grapeshot of the enemy, when your own uncle, your mother's brother, died for his faith on the scaffold. Oh! I wonder you have the courage to look your men in the face. When crimes are being perpetrated that cry to Heaven aloud for the vengeance of a man's strong right arm, you in your fine uniform prance about London, an autocrat among your soldiers, drinking and dicing whilst women of your own mother's birth and race are being foully massacred in Paris. If I met a man I could respect and love, I'd follow him to the ends of the earth. But as for you, I respect more highly Pichegru's ragged Republicans! At least they are ready to die for what they believe!'

White to the lips, Fotheringay stood up and bowed to her. Blindly he took his hat and sword from the old servant in the panelled hall and blindly rode away. By five o'clock, when Montgomerie called at the Saint James's Coffee-House to fetch him to dine at the Cocoa Tree, he was drunk.

He had very little recollection afterwards of the dinner. He remembered a note arriving from Maxeter saying that he was meeting the seconds of the Vicomte de Solesmes that evening and would let Fotheringay know what was decided. For the rest the meal was a confusion of bunches of lights that bent and swayed at him in their big branch candlesticks, of loud voices talking together, of laughter, the popping of corks, of speeches, of songs. There followed a journey in a coach to some gardens where, the soft air of the May evening reviving him, he partly recovered his