

***STANLEY JOHN
WEYMAN***



***THE NEW
RECTOR***

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The New Rector

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CHAPTER I.

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"LE ROI EST MORT!"

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The king was dead. But not at once, not until after some short breathing-space, such as was pleasant enough to those whose only concern with the succession lay in the shouting, could the cry of "Long live the king!" be raised. For a few days there was no rector of Claversham. The living was during this time in abeyance, or in the clouds, or in the lap of the law, or in any strange and inscrutable place you choose to name. It may have been in the prescience of the patron, and, if so, no locality could be more vague, the whereabouts of Lord Dynmore himself, to say nothing of his prescience, being as uncertain as possible. Messrs. Gearn & Baker, his solicitors and agents, should have known as much upon this point as any one; yet it was their habit to tell one inquirer that his lordship was in the Cordilleras, and another that he was on the slopes of the Andes, and another that he was at the forty-ninth parallel--quite indifferently--these places being all one to Messrs. Gearn & Baker, whose walk in life had lain for so many years about Lincoln's Inn Fields that Clare Market had come to be their ideal of an uncivilized country.

And more, if the whereabouts of Lord Dynmore could only be told in words rather far-sounding than definite, there was room for a doubt whether his prescience existed at all. For,

according to his friends, there never was a man whose memory was so notably eccentric--not weak, but eccentric. And if his memory was impeccable, his prescience-- But we grow wide of the mark. The question being merely where the living of Claversham was during the days which immediately followed Mr. Williams's death, let it be said at once that we do not know.

Mr. Williams was the late incumbent. He had been rector of the little Warwickshire town for nearly forty years; and although his people were ready enough to busy themselves with the question of his successor, he did not lack honor in his death. His had been a placid life, such as suited an indolent and easy-going man. "Let me sit upon one chair and put up my feet on another, and there I am," he was once heard to say; and the town repeated the remark and chuckled over it. There were some who would have had the parish move more quickly, and who talked with a sneer of the old port-wine kind of parson. But if he had done little good, he had done less evil. He was kindly and open-handed, and he had not an enemy in the parish. He was regretted as much as such a man should be. Besides, people did not die commonly in Claversham. It was but once a year, or twice at the most, that any one who was any one passed away. And so, when the event did occur the most was made of it in an old-fashioned way. When Mr. Williams passed for the last time into his churchyard, there was no window which did not, by shutter or blind, mark its respect for him, not a tongue which wagged foul of his memory. And then the shutters were taken down and the blinds pulled up, and every one, from Mr. Clode, the curate, to the old people

at Bourne's Almshouses, who, having no affairs of their own, had the more time to discuss their neighbors', asked, "Who is to be the new rector?"

On the day of the funeral two of these old pensioners watched the curate's tall form as he came gravely along the opposite side of the street, to fall in at the door of his lodgings with two ladies, one elderly, one young, who were passing so opportunely that it really seemed as if they might have been waiting for him. He and the elder lady--she was so plump of figure, so healthy of eye and cheek, and was dressed besides with such a comfortable richness that it did one good to look at her--began to talk in a subdued, decorous fashion, while the girl listened. He was telling them of the funeral, how well the archdeacon had read the service, and what a crowd of Dissenters had been present, and so on: and at last he came to the important question.

"I hear, Mrs. Hammond," he said, "that the living will be given to Mr. Herbert of Easthope, whom you know, I think? To me? Oh, no, I have not, and never had, any expectation of it. Please do not," he added, with a slight smile and a shake of the head, "mention such a thing again. Leave me in my content."

"But why should you not have it?" said the young lady, with a pleasant persistence. "Every one in the parish would be glad if you were appointed. Could we not do something or say something--get up a petition or anything? Lord Dynmore ought, of course, to give it to you. I think some one should tell him what are the wishes of the parish. I do indeed!"

She was a very pretty young lady, with bright brown eyes and hair and rather arch features, and the gentleman she was addressing had long found her face pleasant to look upon; but at this moment it really seemed to him as the face of an angel. Yet he only answered with a kind of depressed gratitude. "Thank you, Miss Hammond," he said. "If good wishes could procure me the living, I should have an excellent reason for hoping. But as things are, it is not for me."

"Pooh! pooh!" said Mrs. Hammond cheerily, "who knows?" And then, after a few more words, they went on their way, and he turned into his rooms.

The old women were still watching. "I don't well know who'll get it, Peggy," said one, "but I be pretty sure of this, as he won't! It isn't his sort as gets 'em. It's the lord's friends, bless you!"

So it appeared that she and Mr. Clode were of one mind on the matter. But was that really Mr. Clode's opinion? It was when the crow opened its beak that it dropped the piece of cheese; and so to this day the wise man has no chance or expectation of this or that until he gets it. And if a patron or a patron's solicitor has for some days had under his paperweight a letter written in a hand that bears a strange likeness to the wise man's--a letter setting forth the latter's claims and wisdom--what of that? That is a private matter, of course.

Be that as it may, there was scarcely a person in Claversham who did not give some time that evening, and on subsequent evenings too, to the interesting question who was to be the new rector. The rector was a big factor in the

town-life. Girls wondered whether he would be young, and hoped he would dance. Their mothers were sanguine that he would be unmarried, and their fathers that he would play whist. And one questioned whether he would buy Mr. Williams's stock of port, and another whether he would dine late. And some trusted that he would let things be, and some hoped that he would cleanse the stables. And only one thing was certain and sure and immutably fixed--that, whoever he was, he would not be able to please everybody.

Nay, the ripple of excitement spread far beyond Claversham. Not only at the archdeacon's at Kingsford Carbonel, five miles away among the orchards and hopyards, was there much speculation upon the matter, but even at the Homfrays', of Holberton, ten miles out beyond the Baer Hills, there was talk about it, and bets were made across the billiard-table. And in more distant vicarages and curacies, where the patron was in some degree known, there were flutterings of heart and anxious searchings of the "Guardian" and Crockford. Those who seemed to have some chance of the living grew despondent, and those who had none talked the thing over with their wives after the children had gone to bed, until they persuaded themselves that they would die at Claversham Rectory. Middle-aged men who had been at college with Lord Dynmore remembered that they had on one occasion rowed in the same boat with him; and young men who had danced with his niece thought secretly that, dear little woman as Emily or Annie was, they might have done better. And a hundred and eleven letters, written by people who knew less than Messrs. Gearn & Baker of the Andes, seeing that they did not know that Lord Dynmore

was there or thereabouts, were received at Dynmore Park and forwarded to London, and duly made up into a large parcel with other correspondence by Messrs. Gearn & Baker, and so were despatched to the forty-ninth parallel--or thereabouts.

CHAPTER II.

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"VIVE LE ROI!"

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It was at the beginning of the second week in October that Mr. Williams died; and, the weather in those parts being peculiarly fine and bright for the time of year, men stood about in the churchyard with bare heads, and caught no colds. And it continued so for some days after the funeral. But not everywhere. Upon a morning, some three perhaps after the ceremony at Claversham, a young gentleman sat down to his breakfast, only a hundred and fifty miles away, under such different conditions--a bitter east wind, a dense fog, and a general murkiness of atmosphere--that one might have supposed his not over-plentiful meal to be laid in another planet.

The air in the room--a meagrely furnished, much littered room, was yellow and choking, and the candles burned dimly in the midst of yellow halos. The fire seemed to be smouldering, and the owner of the room had to pay some attention to it before he sat down and found a letter lying beside his plate. He glanced at it doubtfully. "I do not know the handwriting," he muttered, "and it is not a subscription, for they never come in an east wind. I am afraid it is a bill."

The letter was addressed to the Rev. Reginald Lindo, St. Barnabas Mission House, 383 East India Dock Road, London,

E. After scrutinizing it for a moment, he pulled a candle toward him and tore open the envelope.

He read the letter slowly, his teacup at his lips, and, though he was alone, his face grew crimson. When he had finished it he turned back and read it again, and then flung it down and, starting up, began to walk the room. "What a boy I am!" he muttered. "But it is almost incredible. Upon my honor it is almost incredible!"

He was still at the height of his excitement, now sitting down to take a mouthful of breakfast and now leaping up to pace the room, when his housekeeper entered and said that a woman from Tamplin's Rents wanted to see him.

"What does she want, Mrs. Baxter?" he asked.

"Husband is dying, sir," the old lady replied briefly.

"Do you know her at all?"

"No, sir. She is as poor a piece as I have ever seen. She says that she could not have come out, for want of clothes, if it had not been for the fog. And they are not particular here, as I know--the hussies!"

"Say that I shall be ready to go with her in less than five minutes," the young clergyman answered. "And here! Give her some tea, Mrs. Baxter. The pot is half full."

He bustled about; but nevertheless the message and the business he was now upon had sobered him, and as he buttoned up the letter in his breast-pocket, his face was grave. He was a tall young man, fair, with regular features, and curling hair cut rather short. His eyes were blue and pleasantly bold; and in his every action and in his whole carriage there was a great appearance of confidence and self-possession. Taking a book and a small case from a side-

table, he put on his overcoat and went out. A moment, and the dense fog swallowed him up, and with him the tattered bundle of rags, which had a husband, and very likely had nothing else in the world of her own. Tamplin's Rents not affecting us, we may skip a few hours, and then go westward with him as far as the Temple, which in the East India Dock Road is considered very far west indeed by those who have ever heard of it.

Here he sought a dingy staircase in Fig-tree Court, and, mounting to the second floor, stopped before a door which was adorned by about a dozen names, painted in white on a black ground. He knocked loudly, and, a small boy answering his summons with great alacrity and importance, our friend asked for Mr. Smith, and was promptly ushered into a room about nine feet square, in which, at a table covered with papers and open books, sat a small, dark-complexioned man, very keen and eager in appearance, who looked up with an air of annoyance.

"Who is it, Fred?" he said impatiently, moving one of the candles, which the fog still rendered necessary, although it was high noon. "I am engaged at present."

"Mr. Lindo to see you, sir," the boy announced, with a formality very funny in a groom of the chambers about four feet high.

The little man's countenance instantly changed, and he jumped up grinning. "Is it you, old boy?" he said. "Sit down, old fellow! I thought it might be my own solicitor, and it is well to be prepared, you know."

"But you are not really busy?" said the visitor, looking at him doubtfully.

"Well, I am and I am not," replied Mr. Smith; and, deftly tipping aside the books, he disclosed some slips of manuscript. "It is an article for the 'Cornhill,'" he continued; "but whether it will ever appear there is another matter. You have come to lunch, of course? And now, what is your news?"

He was so quick and eager that he reminded people who saw him for the first time of a rat. When they came to know him better, they found that a stauncher friend than Jack Smith was not to be found in the Temple. With this he had the reputation of being a clever, clear-headed man, and his sound common-sense was almost a proverb. Observing that Lindo did not answer him, he repeated, "Is anything amiss, old fellow?"

"Well, not quite amiss," Lindo answered, his face flushing a little. "But the fact is"--taking the letter from the breast-pocket--"that I have had the offer of a living, Jack."

Smith leaped up and clapped his friend on the shoulder. "By Jove! old man," he exclaimed heartily, "I am glad of it! Right glad of it! You must have had enough of that slumming. But I hope it is a better living than mine," he continued, with a comical glance round the tiny room. "Let us have a look! What is it? Two hundred and a house?"

Lindo handed the letter to him. It was written from Lincoln's Inn Fields, and was dated the preceding day. It ran thus:

"Dear Sir:--We are instructed by our client, the Right Honorable the Earl of Dynmore, to invite your acceptance of the living of Claversham in the county of Warwick, vacant by

the death on the 15th instant of the Rev. John Williams, the late incumbent. The living, of which his lordship is the patron, is a town rectory, of the approximate value of 810/ per annum and a house. Our client is travelling in the United States, but we have the requisite authorities to proceed in due form and without delay, which in this matter is prejudicial. We beg to have the pleasure of receiving your acceptance at as early a date as possible,

"And remain, dear Sir,

"Your obedient servants,

"Gearns & Baker.

"To the Rev. Reginald Lindo, M.A."

The barrister read this letter with even greater surprise than seemed natural, and, when he had done, looked at his companion with wondering eyes. "Claversham!" he ejaculated. "Why, I know it well!"

"Do you? I have never heard you mention it."

"I knew old Williams!" Jack continued, still in amaze. "Knew him well, and heard of his death, but little thought you were likely to succeed him. My dear fellow, it is a wonderful piece of good fortune! Wonderful! I shake you by the hand! I congratulate you heartily! But how did you come to know the high and mighty earl? Unbosom yourself, my dear boy!"

"I do not know him--do not know him from Adam!" replied the young clergyman gravely.

"You don't mean it?"

"I do. I have never seen him in my life."

Jack Smith whistled. "Are you sure it is not a hoax?" he said, with a serious face.

"I think not," the rector-elect replied. "Perhaps I have given you a wrong impression. I have had nothing to do with the earl; but my uncle was his tutor."

"Oh!" said Smith slowly, "that makes all the difference. What uncle?"

"You have heard me speak of him. He was vicar of St. Gabriel's, Aldgate. He died about a year ago--last October, I think. Lord Dynmore and he were good friends, and my uncle used often to stay at his place in Scotland. I suppose my name must have come up some time when they were talking."

"Likely enough," assented the lawyer. "But for the earl to remember it, he must be one in a hundred!"

"It is certainly very good of him," Lindo replied, his cheek flushing. "If it had been a small country living, and my uncle had been alive to jog his elbow, I should not have been so much surprised."

"And you are just twenty-five!" Jack Smith observed, leaning back in his chair, and eyeing his friend with undisguised and whimsical admiration. "You will be the youngest rector in the Clergy List, I should think! And Claversham! By Jove, what a berth!"

A queer expression of annoyance for a moment showed itself in Lindo's face. "I say, Jack, stow that!" he said gently, and with a little shamefacedness. "I mean," he continued, smoothing down the nap on his hat, "that I do not want to look at it altogether in that way, and I do not want others to regard it so."

"As a berth, you mean?" Jack said gravely, but with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Well, from the loaves and fishes point of view," Lindo commenced, beginning to walk up and down the room. "I do not think an officer, when he gets promotion, looks only at the increase in his pay. Of course I am glad that it is a good living, and that I shall have a house, and a good position, and all that. But I declare to you, Jack, believe me or not as you like, that if I did not feel that I could do the work as I hope, please God, to do it, I would not take it up--I would not, indeed. As it is, I feel the responsibility. I have been thinking about it as I walked down here, and upon my honor for a while I thought I ought to decline it."

"I would not do that!" said Gallio, dismissing the twinkle from his eye, and really respecting his old friend, perhaps, a little more than before. "You are not the man, I think, to shun either work or responsibility. Did I tell you," he continued in a different tone, "that I had an uncle at Claversham?"

"No," said Lindo, surprised in his turn.

"Yes, and I think he is one of your church wardens. His name is Bonamy, and he is a solicitor. His London agent is my only client," Jack said jerkily.

"And he is one of the church wardens! Well, that is strange--and jolly!"

"Umph! Don't you be too sure of that!" retorted the barrister sharply. "He is a--well, he has been very good to me, and he is my uncle, and I am not going to say anything against him. But I am not quite sure that I should like him

for my church warden. *Your* church warden! Why, it is like a fairy tale, old fellow!"

And so it seemed to Lindo when, an hour later, the small boy, with the same portentous gravity of face, let him out and bade him good-day. As the young parson started eastward, along Fleet Street first, he looked at the moving things round him with new eyes, from a new standpoint, with a new curiosity. The passers-by were the same, but he was changed. He had lunched, and perhaps the material view of his position was uppermost, for those in the crowd who specially observed the tall young clergyman noticed in his bearing an air of calm importance and a strong sense of personal dignity, which led him to shun collisions, and even to avoid jostling his fellows, with peculiar care. The truth was that he had all the while before his eyes, as he walked, an announcement which was destined to appear in the "Guardian" of the following week:

"The Rev. Reginald Lindo, M.A., St. Barnabas' Mission, London, to be Rector of Claversham. Patron, the Earl of Dynmore."

CHAPTER III.

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AN AWKWARD MEETING.

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A fortnight after this paragraph in the "Guardian" had filled Claversham with astonishment and Mr. Clode with a modest thankfulness that he was spared the burden of office, a little dark man--Jack Smith, in fact--drove briskly into Paddington Station, and, disregarding the offers of the porters, who stand waiting on the hither side of the journey like Charon by the Styx, and see at a glance who has the obolus, sprang from the hansom without assistance, and bustled on to the platform.

Here he looked up and down as if he expected to meet some one, and then, glancing at the clock, found that he had a quarter of an hour to spare. He made at once for the bookstall, and, with a lavishness which would have surprised some of his friends, bought "Punch," a little volume by Howells, the "Standard," and finally, though he blushed as he asked for it, the "Queen." He had just gathered his purchases together and was paying for them, when a high-pitched voice at his elbow made him start. "Why, Jack! what in the world are you buying all those papers for?" The speaker was a girl about thirteen years old, who in the hubbub had stolen unnoticed to his side.

"Hullo, Daintry," he answered. "Why did you not say that you were here before? I have been looking for you. Where is

Kate? Oh, yes, I see her," as a young lady turning over books at the farther end of the stall acknowledged his presence by a laughing nod. "You are here in good time," he went on, while the younger girl affectionately slipped her arm through his.

"Yes," she said. "Your mother started us early. And so you have come to see us off, after all, Jack?"

"Just so," he answered drily. "Let us go to Kate."

They did so, the young lady meeting them halfway. "How kind of you to be here, Jack!" she said. "As you have come, will you look us out a comfortable compartment? That is the train over there. And please to put this, and this, and Daintry's parcel in the corners for us."

This and this were a cloak and a shawl, and a few little matters in brown paper. In order to possess himself of them, Jack handed Kate the papers he was carrying.

"Are they for me?" she said, gratefully indeed, but with a placid gratitude which was not perhaps what the donor wanted. "Oh, thank you. And this too? What is it?"

"'Their Wedding Journey,'" said Jack, with a shy twinkle in his eyes.

"Is it pretty?" she answered dubiously. "It sounds silly; but you are supposed to be a judge. I think I should like 'A Chance Acquaintance' better, though."

Of course the little book was changed, and Jack winced. But he had not time to think much about it, for he had to bustle away through the rising babel to secure seats for them in an empty compartment of the Oxford train, and see their luggage labelled and put in. This done, he hurried back, and pointed out to them the places he had taken. "Oh,

dear, they are in a through carriage," Kate said, stopping short and eyeing the board over the door.

"Yes," he answered. "I thought that that was what you wanted."

"No, I would rather go in another carriage, and change. We shall get to Claversham soon enough without travelling with Claversham people."

"Indeed we shall," Daintry chimed in. "Let us go and find seats, and Jack will bring the things after us."

He assented meekly--very meekly for sharp Jack Smith--and presently came along with his arms full of parcels, to find them ensconced in the nearer seats of a compartment, which contained also one gentleman who was already deep in the "Times." Jack, standing at the open door, could not see his face, for it was hidden by the newspaper, but he could see that his legs wore a youthful and reckless air; and he raised his eyebrows interrogatively. "Pooh!" whispered Daintry in answer. "How stupid you are! It is all right. I can see he is a clergyman by his boots!"

Jack smiled at this assurance, and, putting in the things he was holding, shut the door and stood outside, looking first at the platform about him, on which all was flurry and confusion, and then at the interior of the carriage, which seemed in comparison peaceful and homelike. "I think I will come with you to Westbourne Park," he said suddenly.

"Nonsense, Jack!" Kate replied, with crushing decision. "We shall be there in five minutes, and you will have all the trouble of returning for nothing."

He acquiesced meekly--poor Jack! "Well," he said, with a new effort at cheerfulness, "you will soon be at home, girls.

Remember me to the governor. I am afraid you will be rather dull at first. You will have one scrap of excitement, however."

"What is that?" said Kate, very much as if she were prepared to depreciate it before she knew what it was.

"The new rector!"

"He will make very little difference to us!" the girl answered, with an accent almost of scorn. "Papa said in his letter that he thought it was a great pity a local man had not been appointed--some one who knew the place and the old ways. You say he is clever and nice; but either way it will not affect us much."

No one noticed that the "Times" newspaper in the far corner of the compartment rustled suspiciously, and that the clerical boots became agitated on a sudden, as though their wearer meditated a move; and, in ignorance of this, "I expect I shall hate him!" said Daintry calmly.

"Come, you must not do that," Jack remonstrated "You must remember that he is not only a very good fellow, but a great friend of mine."

"Then we ought indeed to spare him!" Kate said frankly, "for you have been very good to us and made our visit delightful."

His face flushed with pleasure even at those simple words of praise. "And you will write and tell me," he continued eagerly, "that you have reached your journey's end safely."

"One of us will," was the answer. "Daintry," Kate went on calmly, "will you remind me to write to Jack to-morrow evening?"

His face fell sadly. So little would have made him happy. He looked down and kicked the step of the carriage, and made his tiny moan to himself before he spoke again. "Good-bye," he said then. "They are coming to look at your tickets. You are due out in one minute. Good-bye, Daintry."

"Good-bye, Jack. Come and see us soon," she cried earnestly, as she released his hand.

"Good-bye, Kate." Alas! Kate's cheek did not show the slightest consciousness that his clasp was more than cousinly. She uttered her "Good-bye, Jack, and thank you so much," very kindly, but her color never varied by the quarter of a tone, and her grasp was as firm and as devoid of shyness as his own.

He had not much time to be miserable, however, then, for, the ticket-collector coming to the window, Jack had to fall back, and in doing so made a discovery. Kate, hunting for her ticket in one of those mysterious places in which ladies will put tickets, heard him utter an exclamation, and asked, "What is it, Jack?"

To her surprise, the collector having by this time disappeared, he stretched out his hand through the window to some one beyond her. "Why, Lindo!" he cried, "is that you? I had not a notion of your identity. Of course you are going down to take possession."

Kate, trembling already with a horrible presentiment, turned her head. Yes, it was the clergyman in the corner who answered Jack's greeting and rose to shake hands with him, the train being already in motion. "I did not recognize your voice out there," he said, looking rather hot.

"No? And I did not know you were going down to-day," Jack answered, walking beside the train. "Let me introduce you to my cousins, Miss Bonamy and Daintry. I am sorry that I did not see you before. Good luck to you! Good-bye, Kate!"

The train was moving faster and faster, and Jack was soon left behind on the platform gazing pathetically at the black tunnel which had swallowed it up. In the carriage there was silence, and in the heart of one at least of the passengers the most horrible vexation. Kate could have bitten out her tongue. She was conscious that the clergyman had bowed in acknowledgment of Jack's introduction and had muttered something. But then he had sunk back in his corner, his face wearing, as it seemed to her, a frown of scornful annoyance. Even if nothing awkward had been said, she would still have shunned, for a certain reason, such a meeting as this with a new clergyman who did not yet know Claversham. But now she had aggravated the matter by her heedlessness. So she sat angry, and yet ashamed, with her lips pressed together and her eyes fixed upon the opposite cushion.

For the Rev. Reginald, he had been by no means indifferent to the criticisms he had unfortunately overheard. Always possessed of a fairly good opinion of himself, he had lately been raising his standard to the rectorial height; and, being very human, he had come to think himself something of a personage. If Jack Smith had introduced him under the same circumstances to his aunt, there is no saying how far the acquaintance would have progressed or how long the new incumbent might have fretted and fumed. But presently he stole a look at Kate Bonamy and melted.

He saw a girl, slightly above the middle height, graceful and rounded of figure, with a grave stateliness of carriage which oddly became her. Her complexion was rather pale, but it was clear and healthy, and there was even a freckle here and a freckle there which I never heard a man say that he would have had elsewhere. If her face was a trifle long, with a nose a little aquiline and curving lips too wide, yet it was a fair and dainty face, such as Englishmen love. The brown hair, which strayed on to the broad white brow and hung in a heavy loop upon her neck, had a natural waviness--the sole beauty on which she prided herself. For she could not see her eyes as others saw them--big gray eyes that from under long lashes looked out upon you, full of such purity and truth that men meeting their gaze straightway felt a desire to be better men and went away and tried--for half an hour. Such was Kate outwardly. Inwardly she had faults of course, and perhaps pride and a little temper were two of them.

The rector was still admiring her askance, surprised to find that Jack Smith, who was not very handsome himself, had such a cousin, when Daintry roused him abruptly. For some moments she had been gazing at him, as at some unknown specimen, with no attempt to hide her interest. Now she said suddenly, "You are the new rector?"

He answered stiffly that he was; being a good deal taken aback at being challenged in this way. Remonstrance, however, was out of the question, and Daintry for the moment said no more, though her gaze lost none of its embarrassing directness.

But presently she began again. "I should think the dogs would like you," she said deliberately, and much as if he had not been there to hear; "you look as if they would."

Silence again. The rector smiled fatuously. What was a beneficed clergyman, whose dignity was young and tender, to do, subjected to the criticism of unknown dogs? He tried to divert his thoughts by considering the pretty sage-green frock and the gray fur cape and hat to match which the elder girl was wearing. Doubtless she was taking the latest fashions down to Claversham, and fur capes and hats, indefinitely and mysteriously multiplying, would listen to him on Sundays from all the nearest pews. And Daintry was silent so long that he thought he had done with her. But no. "Do you think that you will like Claversham?" she asked, with an air of serious curiosity.

"I trust I shall," he said, a flush rising to his cheek.

She took a moment to consider the answer conscientiously, and, thinking badly of it, remarked gravely, "I don't think you will."

This was unbearable. The clergyman, full of a nervous dread lest the next question should be, "Do you think that they will like you at Claversham?" made a great show of resuming his newspaper. Kate, possessed by the same fear, shot an imploring glance at Daintry; but, seeing that the latter had only eyes for the stranger, hoped desperately for the best.

Which was very bad. "It must be jolly," remarked the unconscious tormentor, "to have eight hundred pounds a year, and be a rector!"

"Daintry!" Kate cried in horror.

"Why, what is the matter?" asked Daintry, turning suddenly to her sister with wide-open eyes. Her look of aggrieved astonishment at once overcame Lindo's gravity, and he laughed aloud. He was not without a charming sense, still novel enough to be pleasing, that Daintry was right. It was jolly to be a rector and have eight hundred a year!

That laugh came in happily. It seemed to sweep away the cobwebs of embarrassment which had lain so thickly about two of the party. Lindo began to talk pleasantly, pointing out this or that reach of the river, and Kate, meeting his cheery eyes, put aside a faint idea of apologizing which had been in her head, and replied frankly. He told them tales of summer voyages between lock and lock, and of long days idly spent in the Wargrave marshes; and, as the identification of Mapledurham and Pangbourne and Wittenham and Goring rendered it necessary that they should all cross and recross the carriage, they were soon on excellent terms with one another, or would have been if the rector had not still detected in Kate's manner a slight stiffness for which he could not account. It puzzled him also to observe that, though they were ready, Daintry more particularly, to discuss the amusements of London and the goodness of cousin Jack, they both grew reticent when the conversation turned toward Claversham and its affairs.

At Oxford he got out to go to the bookstall.

"Jack was right," said Daintry, looking after him. "He *is* nice."

"Yes," her sister allowed, rising and sitting down again in a restless fashion. "But I wish we had not fallen in with him,

all the same."

"It cannot be helped now," said Daintry, who was evidently prepared to accept the event with philosophy.

Not so her sister. "We might go into another carriage," she suggested.

"That would be rude," said Daintry calmly.

The question was decided for them by the young clergyman's return. He came along the platform, an animated look in his face. "Miss Bonamy," he said, stopping at the open door with his hand extended, "there is some one in the refreshment-room whom I think that you would like to see. Mr. Gladstone is there, talking to the Duke of Westminster, and they are both eating buns like common mortals. Will you come and take a peep at them?"

"I don't think that we have time," she objected.

"There is sure to be time," Daintry cried. "Now, Kate, come!" And she was down upon the platform in a moment.

"The train is not due out for five minutes yet," Lindo said, as he piloted them through the crowd to the doorway. "There, on the left by the fireplace," he added.

Kate glanced, and turned away satisfied. Not so Daintry. With rapt attention in her face, she strayed nearer and nearer to the great men, her eyes growing larger with each step.

"She will be talking to them next," said Kate, in a fidget.

"Perhaps asking him if he likes Downing Street," Lindo suggested slyly. "There, she is coming now," he added, as Miss Daintry turned and came to them at last.

"I wanted to make sure," she said simply, seeing Kate's impatience, "that I should know them again. That was all."

"Quite so; I hope you have succeeded," Kate answered drily. "But, if we are not quick, we shall miss our train." And she led the way back with more speed than dignity.

"There is plenty of time--plenty of time," Lindo answered, following them. He could not bear to see her pushing her way through the mixed crowd, and accepting so easily a footing of equality with it. He was one of those men to whom their womenkind are sacred. He took his time, therefore, and followed at his ease; only to see, when he emerged from the press, a long stretch of empty platform, three porters, and the tail of a departing train. "Good gracious!" he stammered, with dismay in his face. "What does it mean?"

"It means," Kate said, in an accent of sharp annoyance--she did not intend to spare him--"that you have made us miss our train, Mr. Lindo. And there is not another which reaches Claversham today!"

CHAPTER IV.

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BIRDS IN THE WILDERNESS.

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"There! That was your fault!" said Daintry, turning from the departing train.

The young rector could not deny it. He would have given anything for at least the appearance of being undisturbed; but the blood came into his cheek, and in his attempt to maintain his dignity he only succeeded in looking angry as well as confused and taken aback. He had certainly made a mess of his escort duty. What in the world had led him to go out of his way to make a fool of himself? he wondered. And with these Claversham people!

"There may be a special train to-day," Kate suggested suddenly. She had got over her first vexation, and perhaps repented that she had betrayed it so openly. "Or we may be allowed to go on by a luggage-train, Mr. Lindo. Will you kindly see?"

He snatched at the relief which her proposal held out to him, and went away to inquire. But almost at once he was back again. "It is most vexatious!" he said loudly. "It is only three o'clock, and yet there is no way of getting to Claversham to-night! I am very sorry, but I never dreamed the company managed things so badly. Never!"

"No," said Kate drily.