GEORGE MEREDITH

EVAN HARRINGTON - COMPLETE

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CHAPTER I. ABOVE BUTTONS

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Long after the hours when tradesmen are in the habit of commencing business, the shutters of a certain shop in the town of Lymport-on-the-Sea remained significantly closed, and it became known that death had taken Mr. Melchisedec Harrington, and struck one off the list of living tailors. The demise of a respectable member of this class does not ordinarily create a profound sensation. He dies, and his equals debate who is to be his successor: while the rest of them who have come in contact with him, very probably hear nothing of his great launch and final adieu till the winding up of cash-accounts; on which occasions we may augur that he is not often blessed by one or other of the two great parties who subdivide this universe. In the case of Mr. Melchisedec it was otherwise. This had been a grand man, despite his calling, and in the teeth of opprobrious epithets against his craft. To be both generally blamed, and generally liked, evinces a peculiar construction of mortal. Mr. Melchisedec, whom people in private called the great Mel, had been at once the sad dog of Lymport, and the pride of the town. He was a tailor, and he kept horses; he was a tailor, and he had gallant adventures; he was a tailor, and he shook hands with his customers. Finally, he was a tradesman, and he never was known to have sent in a bill. Such a personage comes but once in a generation, and, when he goes, men miss the man as well as their money.

That he was dead, there could be no doubt. Kilne, the publican opposite, had seen Sally, one of the domestic

servants, come out of the house in the early morning and rush up the street to the doctor's, tossing her hands; and she, not disinclined to dilute her grief, had, on her return, related that her master was then at his last gasp, and had refused, in so many words, to swallow the doctor.

'“I won't swallow the doctor!” he says, “I won't swallow the doctor!”' Sally moaned. '“I never touched him,” he says, “and I never will.”'

Kilne angrily declared, that in his opinion, a man who rejected medicine in extremity, ought to have it forced down his throat: and considering that the invalid was pretty deeply in Kilne's debt, it naturally assumed the form of a dishonest act on his part; but Sally scornfully dared any one to lay hand on her master, even for his own good. 'For,' said she, 'he's got his eyes awake, though he do lie so helpless. He marks ye!'

'Ah! ah!' Kilne sniffed the air. Sally then rushed back to her duties.

'Now, there 's a man!' Kilne stuck his hands in his pockets and began his meditation: which, however, was cut short by the approach of his neighbour Barnes, the butcher, to whom he confided what he had heard, and who ejaculated professionally, 'Obstinate as a pig!' As they stood together they beheld Sally, a figure of telegraph, at one of the windows, implying that all was just over.

'Amen!' said Barnes, as to a matter-of-fact affair.

Some minutes after, the two were joined by Grossby, the confectioner, who listened to the news, and observed:

'Just like him! I'd have sworn he'd never take doctor's stuff'; and, nodding at Kilne, 'liked his medicine best, eh?'

'Had a-hem!—good lot of it,' muttered Kilne, with a suddenly serious brow.

'How does he stand on your books?' asked Barnes.

Kilne shouldered round, crying: 'Who the deuce is to know?'

'I don't,' Grossby sighed. 'In he comes with his “Good morning, Grossby, fine day for the hunt, Grossby,” and a ten-pound note. “Have the kindness to put that down in my favour, Grossby.” And just as I am going to say, “Look here, —this won't do,” he has me by the collar, and there's one of the regiments going to give a supper party, which he's to order; or the Admiral's wife wants the receipt for that pie; or in comes my wife, and there's no talking of business then, though she may have been bothering about his account all the night beforehand. Something or other! and so we run on.'

'What I want to know,' said Barnes, the butcher, 'is where he got his tenners from?'

Kilne shook a sagacious head: 'No knowing!'

'I suppose we shall get something out of the fire?' Barnes suggested.

'That depends!' answered the emphatic Kilne.

'But, you know, if the widow carries on the business,' said Grossby, 'there's no reason why we shouldn't get it all, eh?'

'There ain't two that can make clothes for nothing, and make a profit out of it,' said Kilne.

'That young chap in Portugal,' added Barnes, 'he won't take to tailoring when he comes home. D' ye think he will?'

Kilne muttered: 'Can't say!' and Grossby, a kindly creature in his way, albeit a creditor, reverting to the first

subject of their discourse, ejaculated, 'But what a one he was!—eh?'

'Fine!—to look on,' Kilne assented.

'Well, he was like a Marquis,' said Barnes.

Here the three regarded each other, and laughed, though not loudly. They instantly checked that unseemliness, and Kilne, as one who rises from the depths of a calculation with the sum in his head, spoke quite in a different voice:

'Well, what do you say, gentlemen? shall we adjourn? No use standing here.'

By the invitation to adjourn, it was well understood by the committee Kilne addressed, that they were invited to pass his threshold, and partake of a morning draught. Barnes, the butcher, had no objection whatever, and if Grossby, a man of milder make, entertained any, the occasion and common interests to be discussed, advised him to waive them. In single file these mourners entered the publican's house, where Kilne, after summoning them from behind the bar, on the important question, what it should be? and receiving, first, perfect acquiescence in his views as to what it should be, and then feeble suggestions of the drink best befitting that early hour and the speaker's particular constitution, poured out a toothful to each, and one to himself.

'Here's to him, poor fellow!' said Kilne; and was deliberately echoed twice.

'Now, it wasn't that,' Kilne pursued, pointing to the bottle in the midst of a smacking of lips, 'that wasn't what got him into difficulties. It was expensive luckshries. It was being above his condition. Horses! What's a tradesman got to do

with horses? Unless he's retired! Then he's a gentleman, and can do as he likes. It's no use trying to be a gentleman if you can't pay for it. It always ends bad. Why, there was he, consorting with gentlefolks—gay as a lark! Who has to pay for it?'

Kilne's fellow-victims maintained a rather doleful tributary silence.

'I'm not saying anything against him now,' the publican further observed. 'It 's too late. And there! I'm sorry he's gone, for one. He was as kind a hearted a man as ever breathed. And there! perhaps it was just as much my fault; I couldn't say “No” to him,—dash me, if I could!'

Lymport was a prosperous town, and in prosperity the much-despised British tradesman is not a harsh, he is really a well-disposed, easy soul, and requires but management, manner, occasional instalments—just to freshen the account—and a surety that he who debits is on the spot, to be a right royal king of credit. Only the account must never drivel. 'Stare aut crescere' appears to be his feeling on that point, and the departed Mr. Melchisedec undoubtedly understood him there; for the running on of the account looked deplorable and extraordinary now that Mr. Melchisedec was no longer in a position to run on with it, and it was precisely his doing so which had prevented it from being brought to a summary close long before. Both Barnes, the butcher; and Grossby, the confectioner, confessed that they, too, found it hard ever to say 'No' to him, and, speaking broadly, never could.

'Except once,' said Barnes, 'when he wanted me to let him have a ox to roast whole out on the common, for the

Battle of Waterloo. I stood out against him on that. “No, no,” says I, “I'll joint him for ye, Mr. Harrington. You shall have him in joints, and eat him at home”;-ha! ha!'

'Just like him!' said Grossby, with true enjoyment of the princely disposition that had dictated the patriotic order.

'Oh!—there!' Kilne emphasized, pushing out his arm across the bar, as much as to say, that in anything of such a kind, the great Mel never had a rival.

'That “Marquis” affair changed him a bit,' said Barnes.

'Perhaps it did, for a time,' said Kilne. 'What's in the grain, you know. He couldn't change. He would be a gentleman, and nothing 'd stop him.'

'And I shouldn't wonder but what that young chap out in Portugal 'll want to be one, too; though he didn't bid fair to be so fine a man as his father.'

'More of a scholar,' remarked Kilne. 'That I call his worst fault—shilly-shallying about that young chap. I mean his.' Kilne stretched a finger toward the dead man's house. 'First, the young chap's to be sent into the Navy; then it's the Army; then he's to be a judge, and sit on criminals; then he goes out to his sister in Portugal; and now there's nothing but a tailor open to him, as I see, if we're to get our money.'

'Ah! and he hasn't got too much spirit to work to pay his father's debts,' added Barnes. 'There's a business there to make any man's fortune-properly directed, I say. But, I suppose, like father like son, he'll becoming the Marquis, too. He went to a gentleman's school, and he's had foreign training. I don't know what to think about it. His sisters over there—they were fine women.'

'Oh! a fine family, every one of 'em! and married well!' exclaimed the publican.

'I never had the exact rights of that “Marquis” affair,' said Grossby; and, remembering that he had previously laughed knowingly when it was alluded to, pursued: 'Of course I heard of it at the time, but how did he behave when he was blown upon?'

Barnes undertook to explain; but Kilne, who relished the narrative quite as well, and was readier, said: 'Look here! I 'll tell you. I had it from his own mouth one night when he wasn't—not quite himself. He was coming down King William Street, where he stabled his horse, you know, and I met him. He'd been dining out-somewhere out over Fallow field, I think it was; and he sings out to me, “Ah! Kilne, my good fellow!” and I, wishing to be equal with him, says, “A fine night, my lord!” and he draws himself up—he smelt of good company—says he, “Kilne! I'm not a lord, as you know, and you have no excuse for mistaking me for one, sir!” So I pretended I had mistaken him, and then he tucked his arm under mine, and said, “You're no worse than your betters, Kilne. They took me for one at Squire Uplift's to-night, but a man who wishes to pass off for more than he is, Kilne, and impose upon people, he says, “he's contemptible, Kilne! contemptible!” So that, you know, set me thinking about “Bath” and the “Marquis,” and I couldn't help smiling to myself, and just let slip a question whether he had enlightened them a bit. “Kilne,” said he, “you're an honest man, and a neighbour, and I'll tell you what happened. The Squire,” he says, “likes my company, and I like his table. Now the Squire 'd never do a dirty action, but the Squire's

nephew, Mr. George Uplift, he can't forget that I earn my money, and once or twice I have had to correct him.” And I'll wager Mel did it, too! Well, he goes on: “There was Admiral Sir Jackson Racial and his lady, at dinner, Squire Falco of Bursted, Lady Barrington, Admiral Combleman—our admiral, that was; 'Mr. This and That', I forget their names—and other ladies and gentlemen whose acquaintance I was not honoured with.” You know his way of talking. “And there was a goose on the table,” he says; and, looking stern at me, “Don't laugh yet!” says he, like thunder. “Well, he goes on: Mr. George caught my eye across the table, and said, so as not to be heard by his uncle, 'If that bird was rampant, you would see your own arms, Marquis.'” And Mel replied, quietly for him to hear, 'And as that bird is couchant, Mr. George, you had better look to your sauce.' Couchant means squatting, you know. That's heraldry! Well, that wasn't bad sparring of Mel's. But, bless you! he was never taken aback, and the gentlefolks was glad enough to get him to sit down amongst 'em. So, says Mr. George, “I know you're a fire-eater, Marquis,” and his dander was up, for he began marquising Mel, and doing the mock polite at such a rate, that, by-and-by, one of the ladies who didn't know Mel called him “my lord” and “his lordship.” “And,” says Mel, “I merely bowed to her, and took no notice.” So that passed off: and there sits Mel telling his anecdotes, as grand as a king. And, by and-by, young Mr. George, who hadn't forgiven Mel, and had been pulling at the bottle pretty well, he sings out, “It 's Michaelmas! the death of the goose! and I should like to drink the Marquis's health!” and he drank it solemn. But, as far as I can make out, the women part of the

company was a little in the dark. So Mel waited till there was a sort of a pause, and then speaks rather loud to the Admiral, “By the way, Sir Jackson, may I ask you, has the title of Marquis anything to do with tailoring?” Now Mel was a great favourite with the Admiral, and with his lady, too, they say—and the Admiral played into his hands, you see, and, says he, “I 'm not aware that it has, Mr. Harrington.” And he begged for to know why he asked the question—called him, “Mister,” you understand. So Mel said, and I can see him now, right out from his chest he spoke, with his head up “When I was a younger man, I had the good taste to be fond of good society, and the bad taste to wish to appear different from what I was in it”: that's Mel speaking; everybody was listening; so he goes on: “I was in the habit of going to Bath in the season, and consorting with the gentlemen I met there on terms of equality; and for some reason that I am quite guiltless of,” says Mel, “the hotel people gave out that I was a Marquis in disguise; and, upon my honour, ladies and gentlemen—I was young then, and a fool—I could not help imagining I looked the thing. At all events, I took upon myself to act the part, and with some success, and considerable gratification; for, in my opinion,” says Mel, “no real Marquis ever enjoyed his title so much as I did. One day I was in my shop—No. 193, Main Street, Lymport—and a gentleman came in to order his outfit. I received his directions, when suddenly he started back, stared at me, and exclaimed:

'My dear Marquis! I trust you will pardon me for having addressed you with so much familiarity.' I recognized in him one of my Bath acquaintances. That circumstance, ladies

and gentlemen, has been a lesson to me. Since that time I have never allowed a false impression with regard to my position to exist. I desire," says Mel, smiling, "to have my exact measure taken everywhere; and if the Michaelmas bird is to be associated with me, I am sure I have no objection; all I can say is, that I cannot justify it by letters patent of nobility." That's how Mel put it. Do you think they thought worse of him? I warrant you he came out of it in flying colours. Gentlefolks like straight-forwardness in their inferiors—that's what they do. Ah!' said Kilne, meditatively, 'I see him now, walking across the street in the moonlight, after he 'd told me that. A fine figure of a man! and there ain't many Marquises to match him.'

To this Barnes and Grossby, not insensible to the merits of the recital they had just given ear to, agreed. And with a common voice of praise in the mouths of his creditors, the dead man's requiem was sounded.

CHAPTER II. THE HERITAGE OF THE SON

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Toward evening, a carriage drove up to the door of the muted house, and the card of Lady Racial, bearing a hurried line in pencil, was handed to the widow.

It was when you looked upon her that you began to comprehend how great was the personal splendour of the husband who could eclipse such a woman. Mrs. Harrington was a tall and a stately dame. Dressed in the high waists of the matrons of that period, with a light shawl drawn close over her shoulders and bosom, she carried her head well; and her pale firm features, with the cast of immediate affliction on them, had much dignity: dignity of an unrelenting physical order, which need not express any remarkable pride of spirit. The family gossips who, on both sides, were vain of this rare couple, and would always descant on their beauty, even when they had occasion to slander their characters, said, to distinguish them, that Henrietta Maria had a Port, and Melchisedec a Presence: and that the union of a Port and a Presence, and such a Port and such a Presence, was so uncommon, that you might search England through and you would not find another, not even in the highest ranks of society. There lies some subtle distinction here; due to the minute perceptions which compel the gossips of a family to coin phrases that shall express the nicest shades of a domestic difference. By a Port, one may understand them to indicate something unsympathetically impressive; whereas a Presence would

seem to be a thing that directs the most affable appeal to our poor human weaknesses. His Majesty King George IV., for instance, possessed a Port: Beau Brummel wielded a Presence. Many, it is true, take a Presence to mean no more than a shirt-frill, and interpret a Port as the art of walking erect. But this is to look upon language too narrowly.

On a more intimate acquaintance with the couple, you acknowledge the aptness of the fine distinction. By birth Mrs. Harrington had claims to rank as a gentlewoman. That is, her father was a lawyer of Lymport. The lawyer, however, since we must descend the genealogical tree, was known to have married his cook, who was the lady's mother. Now Mr. Melchisedec was mysterious concerning his origin; and, in his cups, talked largely and wisely of a great Welsh family, issuing from a line of princes; and it is certain that he knew enough of their history to have instructed them on particular points of it. He never could think that his wife had done him any honour in espousing him; nor was she the woman to tell him so. She had married him for love, rejecting various suitors, Squire Uplift among them, in his favour. Subsequently she had committed the profound connubial error of transferring her affections, or her thoughts, from him to his business, which, indeed, was much in want of a mate; and while he squandered the guineas, she patiently picked up the pence. They had not lived unhappily. He was constantly courteous to her. But to see the Port at that sordid work considerably ruffled the Presence—put, as it were, the peculiar division between them; and to behave toward her as the same woman who had attracted his youthful ardours was a task for his

magnificent mind, and may have ranked with him as an indemnity for his general conduct, if his reflections ever stretched so far. The townspeople of Lymport were correct in saying that his wife, and his wife alone, had, as they termed it, kept him together. Nevertheless, now that he was dead, and could no longer be kept together, they entirely forgot their respect for her, in the outburst of their secret admiration for the popular man. Such is the constitution of the inhabitants of this dear Island of Britain, so falsely accused by the Great Napoleon of being a nation of shopkeepers. Here let any one proclaim himself Above Buttons, and act on the assumption, his fellows with one accord hoist him on their heads, and bear him aloft, sweating, and groaning, and cursing, but proud of him! And if he can contrive, or has any good wife at home to help him, to die without going to the dogs, they are, one may say, unanimous in crying out the same eulogistic funeral oration as that commenced by Kilne, the publican, when he was interrupted by Barnes, the butcher, 'Now, there's a man!—'

Mrs. Harrington was sitting in her parlour with one of her married nieces, Mrs. Fiske, and on reading Lady Racial's card she gave word for her to be shown up into the drawing-room. It was customary among Mrs. Harrington's female relatives, who one and all abused and adored the great Mel, to attribute his shortcomings pointedly to the ladies; which was as much as if their jealous generous hearts had said that he was sinful, but that it was not his fault. Mrs. Fiske caught the card from her aunt, read the superscription, and exclaimed: 'The idea! At least she might have had the

decency! She never set her foot in the house before—and right enough too! What can she want now? I decidedly would refuse to see her, aunt!'

The widow's reply was simply, 'Don't be a fool, Ann!'

Rising, she said: 'Here, take poor Jacko, and comfort him till I come back.'

Jacko was a middle-sized South American monkey, and had been a pet of her husband's. He was supposed to be mourning now with the rest of the family. Mrs. Fiske received him on a shrinking lap, and had found time to correct one of his indiscretions before she could sigh and say, in the rear of her aunt's retreating figure, 'I certainly never would let myself, down so'; but Mrs. Harrington took her own counsel, and Jacko was of her persuasion, for he quickly released himself from Mrs. Fiske's dispassionate embrace, and was slinging his body up the balusters after his mistress.

'Mrs. Harrington,' said Lady Racial, very sweetly swimming to meet her as she entered the room, 'I have intruded upon you, I fear, in venturing to call upon you at such a time?'

The widow bowed to her, and begged her to be seated.

Lady Racial was an exquisitely silken dame, in whose face a winning smile was cut, and she was still sufficiently youthful not to be accused of wearing a flower too artificial.

'It was so sudden! so sad!' she continued. 'We esteemed him so much. I thought you might be in need of sympathy, and hoped I might—Dear Mrs. Harrington! can you bear to speak of it?'

'I can tell you anything you wish to hear, my lady,' the widow replied. Lady Racial had expected to meet a woman

much more like what she conceived a tradesman's wife would be: and the grave reception of her proffer of sympathy slightly confused her. She said:

'I should not have come, at least not so early, but Sir Jackson, my husband, thought, and indeed I imagined—You have a son, Mrs. Harrington? I think his name is—'

'Evan, my lady.'

'Evan. It was of him we have been speaking. I imagined that is, we thought, Sir Jackson might—you will be writing to him, and will let him know we will use our best efforts to assist him in obtaining some position worthy of his—superior to—something that will secure him from the harassing embarrassments of an uncongenial employment.'

The widow listened to this tender allusion to the shears without a smile of gratitude. She replied: 'I hope my son will return in time to bury his father, and he will thank you himself, my lady.'

'He has no taste for—a—for anything in the shape of trade, has he, Mrs. Harrington?'

'I am afraid not, my lady.'

'Any position—a situation—that of a clerk even—would be so much better for him!'

The widow remained impassive.

'And many young gentlemen I know, who are clerks, and are enabled to live comfortably, and make a modest appearance in society; and your son, Mrs. Harrington, he would find it surely an improvement upon—many would think it a step for him.'

'I am bound to thank you for the interest you take in my son, my lady.'

'Does it not quite suit your views, Mrs. Harrington?' Lady Racial was surprised at the widow's manner.

'If my son had only to think of himself, my lady.'

'Oh! but of course,'—the lady understood her now—'of course! You cannot suppose, Mrs. Harrington, but that I should anticipate he would have you to live with him, and behave to you in every way as a dutiful son, surely?

'A clerk's income is not very large, my lady.'

'No; but enough, as I have said, and with the management you would bring, Mrs. Harrington, to produce a modest, respectable maintenance. My respect for your husband, Mrs. Harrington, makes me anxious to press my services upon you.' Lady Racial could not avoid feeling hurt at the widow's want of common gratitude.

'A clerk's income would not be more than L100 a year, my lady.'

'To begin with—no; certainly not more.' The lady was growing brief.

'If my son puts by the half of that yearly, he can hardly support himself and his mother, my lady.'

'Half of that yearly, Mrs. Harrington?'

'He would have to do so, and be saddled till he dies, my lady.'

'I really cannot see why.'

Lady Racial had a notion of some excessive niggardly thrift in the widow, which was arousing symptoms of disgust.

Mrs. Harrington quietly said: 'There are his father's debts to pay, my lady.'

'His father's debts!'

'Under L5000, but above L4000, my lady.'

'Five thousand pounds! Mrs. Harrington!' The lady's delicately gloved hand gently rose and fell. 'And this poor young man—'she pursued.

'My son will have to pay it, my lady.'

For a moment the lady had not a word to instance. Presently she remarked: 'But, Mrs. Harrington, he is surely under no legal obligation?'

'He is only under the obligation not to cast disrespect on his father's memory, my lady; and to be honest, while he can.'

'But, Mrs. Harrington! surely! what can the poor young man do?'

'He will pay it, my lady.'

'But how, Mrs. Harrington?'

'There is his father's business, my lady.'

His father's business! Then must the young man become a tradesman in order to show respect for his father? Preposterous! That was the lady's natural inward exclamation. She said, rather shrewdly, for one who knew nothing of such things: 'But a business which produces debts so enormous, Mrs. Harrington!'

The widow replied: 'My son will have to conduct it in a different way. It would be a very good business, conducted properly, my lady.'

'But if he has no taste for it, Mrs. Harrington? If he is altogether superior to it?'

For the first time during the interview, the widow's inflexible countenance was mildly moved, though not to any mild expression.

'My son will have not to consult his tastes,' she observed: and seeing the lady, after a short silence, quit her seat, she rose likewise, and touched the fingers of the hand held forth to her, bowing.

'You will pardon the interest I take in your son,' said Lady Racial. 'I hope, indeed, that his relatives and friends will procure him the means of satisfying the demands made upon him.'

'He would still have to pay them, my lady,' was the widow's answer.

'Poor young man! indeed I pity him!' sighed her visitor. 'You have hitherto used no efforts to persuade him to take such a step,—Mrs. Harrington?'

'I have written to Mr. Goren, who was my husband's fellow-apprentice in London, my lady; and he is willing to instruct him in cutting, and measuring, and keeping accounts.'

Certain words in this speech were obnoxious to the fine ear of Lady Racial, and she relinquished the subject.

'Your husband, Mrs. Harrington—I should so much have wished!—he did not pass away in—in pain!'

'He died very calmly, my lady.'

'It is so terrible, so disfiguring, sometimes. One dreads to see!—one can hardly distinguish! I have known cases where death was dreadful! But a peaceful death is very beautiful! There is nothing shocking to the mind. It suggests heaven! It seems a fulfilment of our prayers!'

'Would your ladyship like to look upon him?' said the widow.

Lady Racial betrayed a sudden gleam at having her desire thus intuitively fathomed.

'For one moment, Mrs. Harrington! We esteemed him so much! May I?'

The widow responded by opening the door, and leading her into the chamber where the dead man lay.

At that period, when threats of invasion had formerly stirred up the military fire of us Islanders, the great Mel, as if to show the great Napoleon what character of being a British shopkeeper really was, had, by remarkable favour, obtained a lieutenancy of militia dragoons: in the uniform of which he had revelled, and perhaps, for the only time in his life, felt that circumstances had suited him with a perfect fit. However that may be, his solemn final commands to his wife, Henrietta Maria, on whom he could count for absolute obedience in such matters, had been, that as soon as the breath had left his body, he should be taken from his bed, washed, perfumed, powdered, and in that uniform dressed and laid out; with directions that he should be so buried at the expiration of three days, that havoc in his features might be hidden from men. In this array Lady Racial beheld him. The curtains of the bed were drawn aside. The beams of evening fell soft through the blinds of the room, and cast a subdued light on the figure of the vanquished warrior. The Presence, dumb now for evermore, was sadly illumined for its last exhibition. But one who looked closely might have seen that Time had somewhat spoiled that perfect fit which had aforetime been his pride; and now that the lofty spirit had departed, there had been extreme difficulty in persuading the sullen excess of clay to conform to the

dimensions of those garments. The upper part of the chest alone would bear its buttons, and across one portion of the lower limbs an ancient seam had started; recalling an incident to them who had known him in his brief hour of glory. For one night, as he was riding home from Fallow field, and just entering the gates of the town, a mounted trooper spurred furiously past, and slashing out at him, gashed his thigh. Mrs. Melchisedec found him lying at his door in a not unwonted way; carried him up-stairs in her arms, as she had done many a time before, and did not perceive his condition till she saw the blood on her gown. The cowardly assailant was never discovered; but Mel was both gallant and had, in his military career, the reputation of being a martinet. Hence, divers causes were suspected. The wound failed not to mend, the trousers were repaired: Peace about the same time was made, and the affair passed over.

Looking on the fine head and face, Lady Racial saw nothing of this. She had not looked long before she found covert employment for her handkerchief. The widow standing beside her did not weep, or reply to her whispered excuses at emotion; gazing down on his mortal length with a sort of benignant friendliness; aloof, as one whose duties to that form of flesh were well-nigh done. At the feet of his master, Jacko, the monkey, had jumped up, and was there squatted, with his legs crossed, very like a tailor! The imitative wretch had got a towel, and as often as Lady Racial's handkerchief travelled to her eyes, Jacko's peery face was hidden, and you saw his lithe skinny body doing grief's convulsions till, tired of this amusement, he obtained possession of the warrior's helmet, from a small round table

on one side of the bed; a calque of the barbarous military-Georgian form, with a huge knob of horse-hair projecting over the peak; and under this, trying to adapt it to his rogue's head, the tricksy image of Death extinguished himself.

All was very silent in the room. Then the widow quietly disengaged Jacko, and taking him up, went to the door, and deposited him outside. During her momentary absence, Lady Racial had time to touch the dead man's forehead with her lips, unseen.

CHAPTER III. THE DAUGHTERS OF THE SHEARS

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Three daughters and a son were left to the world by Mr. Melchisedec. Love, well endowed, had already claimed to provide for the daughters: first in the shape of a lean Marine subaltern, whose days of obscuration had now passed, and who had come to be a major of that corps: secondly, presenting his addresses as a brewer of distinction: thirdly, and for a climax, as a Portuguese Count: no other than the Senor Silva Diaz, Conde de Saldar: and this match did seem a far more resplendent one than that of the two elder sisters with Major Strike and Mr. Andrew Cogglesby. But the rays of neither fell visibly on Lymport. These escaped Eurydices never reappeared, after being once fairly caught away from the gloomy realms of Dis, otherwise Trade. All three persons of singular beauty, a certain refinement, some Port, and some Presence, hereditarily combined, they feared the clutch of that fell king, and performed the widest possible circles around him. Not one of them ever approached the house of her parents. They were dutiful and loving children, and wrote frequently; but of course they had to consider their new position, and their husbands, and their husbands' families, and the world, and what it would say, if to it the dreaded rumour should penetrate! Lymport gossips, as numerous as in other parts, declared that the foreign nobleman would rave in an extraordinary manner, and do things after the outlandish fashion of his country: for from him, there was no doubt, the shop had been most

successfully veiled, and he knew not of Pluto's close relationship to his lovely spouse.

The marriages had happened in this way. Balls are given in country towns, where the graces of tradesmen's daughters may be witnessed and admired at leisure by other than tradesmen: by occasional country gentlemen of the neighbourhood, with light minds: and also by small officers: subalterns wishing to do tender execution upon man's fair enemy, and to find a distraction for their legs. The classes of our social fabric have, here and there, slight connecting links, and provincial public balls are one of these. They are dangerous, for Cupid is no respecter of class-prejudice; and if you are the son of a retired tea-merchant, or of a village doctor, or of a half-pay captain, or of anything superior, and visit one of them, you are as likely to receive his shot as any shopboy. Even masquerading lords at such places, have been known to be slain outright; and although Society allows to its highest and dearest to save the honour of their families, and heal their anguish, by indecorous compromise, you, if you are a trifle below that mark, must not expect it. You must absolutely give yourself for what you hope to get. Dreadful as it sounds to philosophic ears, you must marry. This, having danced with Caroline Harrington, the gallant Lieutenant Strike determined to do. Nor, when he became aware of her father's occupation, did he shrink from his resolve. After a month's hard courtship, he married her straight out of her father's house. That he may have all the credit due to him, it must be admitted that he did not once compare, or possibly permit himself to reflect on, the dissimilarity in their

respective ranks, and the step he had taken downward, till they were man and wife: and then not in any great degree, before Fortune had given him his majority; an advance the good soldier frankly told his wife he did not owe to her. If we may be permitted to suppose the colonel of a regiment on friendly terms with one of his corporals, we have an estimate of the domestic life of Major and Mrs. Strike. Among the garrison males, his comrades, he passed for a disgustingly jealous brute.

The ladies, in their pretty language, signalized him as a 'finick.'

Now, having achieved so capital a marriage, Caroline, worthy creature, was anxious that her sisters should not be less happy, and would have them to visit her, in spite of her husband's protests.

'There can be no danger,' she said, for she was in fresh quarters, far from the nest of contagion. The lieutenant himself ungrudgingly declared that, looking on the ladies, no one for an instant could suspect; and he saw many young fellows ready to be as great fools as he had been another voluntary confession he made to his wife; for the candour of which she thanked him, and pointed out that it seemed to run in the family; inasmuch as Mr. Andrew Cogglesby, his rich relative, had seen and had proposed for Harriet. The lieutenant flatly said he would never allow it. In fact he had hitherto concealed the non-presentable portion of his folly very satisfactorily from all save the mess-room, and Mr. Andrew's passion was a severe dilemma to him. It need scarcely be told that his wife, fortified by the fervid brewer, defeated him utterly. What was more, she induced him to be

an accomplice in deception. For though the lieutenant protested that he washed his hands of it, and that it was a fraud and a snare, he certainly did not avow the condition of his wife's parents to Mr. Andrew, but alluded to them in passing as 'the country people.' He supposed 'the country people' must be asked, he said. The brewer offered to go down to them. But the lieutenant drew an unpleasant picture of the country people, and his wife became so grave at the proposal, that Mr. Andrew said he wanted to marry the lady and not the 'country people,' and if she would have him, there he was. There he was, behaving with a particular and sagacious kindness to the raw lieutenant since Harriet's arrival. If the lieutenant sent her away, Mr. Andrew would infallibly pursue her, and light on a discovery. Twice cursed by Love, twice the victim of tailordom, our excellent Marine gave away Harriet Harrington in marriage to Mr. Andrew Cogglesby.

Thus Joy clapped hands a second time, and Horror deepened its shadows.

From higher ground it was natural that the remaining sister should take a bolder flight. Of the loves of the fair Louisa Harrington and the foreign Count, and how she first encountered him in the brewer's saloons, and how she, being a humorous person, laughed at his 'loaf' for her, and wore the colours that pleased him, and kindled and soothed his jealousy, little is known beyond the fact that she espoused the Count, under the auspices of the affluent brewer, and engaged that her children should be brought up in the faith of the Catholic Church: which Lymport gossips called, paying the Devil for her pride.