

LADY BETTY'S INDISCRETION.

"Horror! I'm sick to death of it!"

There was a servant in the room gathering the tea-cups, but Lady Betty Stafford, having been brought up in the purple, was not to be deterred from speaking her mind by a servant. Her cousin was either more prudent or less vivacious; he did not answer on the instant, but stood looking through one of the windows at the leafless trees and slow-drooping rain in the Mall, and only turned when Lady Betty pettishly repeated her statement.

"Had a bad time?" he then vouchsafed, dropping into a chair near her, and looking first at her in a good-natured way, and then at his boots, which he seemed to approve.

"Horrid!" she replied.

"Many people here?"

"Hundreds of them! Whole tribes?" she exclaimed. She was a little lady, plump and pretty, with a pale, clear complexion and bright eyes. "I am bored beyond belief. And—and I have not seen Stafford since morning," she added.

"Cabinet Council?"

"Yes," she answered, viciously. "A Cabinet Council, and a Privy Council, and a Board of Trade, and a Board of Green Cloth, and all the other Boards. Horror, I am sick to death of it! What's the use of it all?"

"Country go to the dogs!" he said oracularly, still admiring his boots.

"Let it!" she retorted, not relenting a whit. "I wish it would! I wish the dogs joy of it!"

He made an extraordinary effort at diffidence. "I thought," he said, "that you were becoming political, Betty. Going to write something, and all that?"

"Rubbish! But here is Mr. Atley. Mr. Atley will you have a cup of tea?" she continued, speaking to the newcomer.

"Where will he sit here, presently? Where is Mr. Stafford?"

"Mr. Stafford will take a cup of tea in the library, Lady Betty," replied the Secretary. "He asked me to bring it to him. He is copying an important paper."

Sir Horace forced his boots, and in a fit of momentary interest, asked, "They have come to terms?"

The Secretary nodded. Lady Betty said "Pshaw!" A man brought in the fresh paper. The next moment Mr. Stafford himself came quickly into the room, an open telegram in his hand.

He nodded pleasantly to his wife and her cousin. But his thin, dark face wore—generally did—a preoccupied look. Country people to whom he was pointed out on the streets called him, according to their political leanings, either insignificant or a prig, or a "dry sort," or sometimes said, "How young he is!" But those whose fate it was to face the Minister in the House knew that there was something in him more to be feared even than his imperiousness, his honesty, or his precision; and that was a sudden warmth, which was apt to carry away the House at unexpected times. On one of these occasions, it was rumored, Lady Betty had seen him and fallen in love with him. Whether he had thrown the handkerchief to her—well that was another matter, and whether the apparently incongruous match would answer—that, too, remained to be seen.

"More telegrams?" she cried now. "It rains telegrams! How I hate them!"

"Why?" he asked. "Why should you?" He really wondered.

She made a face at him. "Here is your tea," she said abruptly.

"Thank you; you are very good," he replied. He took the cup and set it down absentmindedly. "Atley," he continued, speaking to the Secretary, "you have not corrected the report of my speech at the club, have you? No, I know you have had no time. Will you run your eye over it presently and see if it is all right, and send it to the Times—I do not think I need see it, if it is all right at the latest?" The editor, he added, tapping the pink paper in his hand, "seemed to doubt us. I have to go to Fitzgerald's now, so you must copy Lord Pilgrimage's terms, too, please. I had meant to do it myself, but I shall be with you before you have finished."

"What are the terms?" Lady Betty asked. "Lord Pilgrimage has not agreed to—"

"To permit me to communicate them," he replied with a grave smile. "No. So you must pardon me, my dear. I have passed my word for absolute secrecy. And, indeed, it is important to me as to Pilgrimage that they should not be divulged."

"They are sure to leak out," she retorted. "They always do."

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He looked his astonishment, while the other two laughed softly, partly to avoid embarrassment, perhaps. My lady said these things, and no one took them seriously.

"You had better play the Secretary for once, Lady Betty," said Atley, who was related to his chief. "You will then be able to satisfy your curiosity. Shall I resign my term?"

She looked eagerly at her husband for the third part of a second—looked for assent, perhaps. But she read no playfulness in his face, and her own fell. He was thinking about other things. "No," she said, almost sullenly, dropping her eyes to the carpet; "I should not spoil well."

Soon after that they dispersed, this being Wednesday, Mr. Stafford's day for dining out. Every one knows that Ministers dine only twice a week, on Wednesday and Sunday; and Sunday is ever sacred to the children where there are any, lest they should grow up and not know their father by sight. Lady Betty came into the library at a quarter to eight, and found her husband still at his desk, a pile of papers before him waiting for his signature. As a fact, he had only just sat down, displacing his Secretary, who had gone up stairs to dress.

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"It is a verbatim copy," said the secretary, dryly. "The question is, who furnished it? Lord Pilgrimage, I am authorized to say, has not permitted his note of agreement to pass out of his possession—even up to the present moment."

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dwell on it, they were very bright, and her face was flushed. Her foot could be heard tapping on the carpet. Presently she remembered herself and fell to work, vehemently slamming such drawers as were open and locking them.

The private secretary found her doing this in the secretary's manner. He twisted his hat in his hands and looked suddenly sick and sad—as if he were about to join in the groan at a prayer-meeting. "Lord Pilgrimage," he said, in a voice he vainly strove to render commonplace, "going to the Sandown Spring meeting to-day?"

The tone was really so lugubrious—to say nothing of a shake of the head with which he could not help accompanying the statement—that a faint smile played on Mr. Stafford's lip. "I must take the next possible opportunity. I will see him to-morrow."

Mr. Scratchley assented to that and bowed himself out, after another word or two, looking more gloomy and careworn than usual. The interview had not been altogether to his liking, and he knew that he had spoken more roundly to Mr. Stafford; perhaps even asked for a categorical denial of the charge. But the Minister's manner had overawed him. He had found it impossible to put the question, and that which he had said he would do he had had to make for Lord Pilgrimage! That had put the coping stone to his dissatisfaction.

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In another minute he was speeding one way and the Staffords in their brougham another, while Sir Horace walked at his leisure down to his club. The Minister and his wife drove along in silence, for he forgot to ask her what she wanted, and she said to the lady she made quite a tell him. Never had she seemed more recklessly gay, more piquant, more audaciously witty than she showed herself this evening.

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"For the present I agree with Lord Pilgrimage, that it alters the position—and perhaps the Coalition will be damaged in the eyes of a large section of his supporters—seriously damaged," said Mr. Scratchley, shaking his head and frowning.

"Possibly. From every point of view the thing is to be deplored. But I will call on Lord Pilgrimage," continued the Minister, "after lunch. Will you tell him so?"

A curious embarrassment showed itself in the secretary's manner. He twisted his hat in his hands and looked suddenly sick and sad—as if he were about to join in the groan at a prayer-meeting. "Lord Pilgrimage," he said, in a voice he vainly strove to render commonplace, "going to the Sandown Spring meeting to-day?"

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"I will come at once. For this matter, Atley," he continued, when the door was closed again, "let it rest for the present where it is. I am aware I can depend upon you"—he paused, seeking a word of discretion. "One thing is certain, however. There is an end of the arrangement made yesterday. Probably the Queen will send for Templeton. I shall see Lord Pilgrimage to-morrow, but probably that will be the end of it."

Atley went away marveling at his coolness; trying to retrace the short steps of conversation, and so to discern how far the Minister had gone with him, and where he had turned off upon a resolution of his own. He failed to see the clue, however, and marvelled still more as the day wore on and others succeeded it—days of political crisis. Out of doors the world, or that little jot of it which has its center at Westminster was in confusion. The newspapers, morning and evening, found ready sale, and a new resource to the Coalition scandal, the resignation of Ministers, the sending for Lord This and Mr. That, the certainty of a dissolution, provided matters enough. In all this Atley found nothing to do with his own case, and he felt that which he had seen in the morning—the unnatural calm, as it seemed to him—which prevailed in the house in Carlton Terrace. For a day or two, indeed, there was much going to and fro, much closing and button-holing, for rather longer the secretary read anxiety and apprehension in one countenance—Lady Betty's. But things settled down. The knocker presently found peace—such comparative peace as falls to knockers in Carlton Terrace. Lady Betty's brow grew clear as her eye found no reflection of his anxiety in Mr. Stafford's face. In a word, the secretary failed to discern the faintest sign of domestic trouble.

The late Minister indeed was taking things very much more coolly than he had done. Lady Betty had failed to taunt him, and the triumph of old foes had failed to goad him to a last effort. Apparently it had occurred to him that the country might for a time exist without him. He was standing in wonder, and he had seen the face, and there were rumors that he would take a long holiday.

A week saw all these things happen. And then, one day as Atley sat writing in the library, Mr. Stafford being out, Lady Betty came into the room for some writing. Rising to find her what she wanted, he was holding the door open for her to pass out, when she said, "Shut the door Mr. Atley," she said, pointing to it. "I want to ask you a question."

"Pray do, Lady Betty," he answered. "It is this," she said, meeting his eyes boldly, and a brighter, a more dainty little creature than she looked then, had seldom tempted man. "Mr. Stafford's resignation—had it any, Mr. Atley, do you wish to see it?"

"I have just seen it," he said, "something that was in the Times this day week."

His own cheek colored violently enough. "If ever," he was saying to himself, "I could or may be useful to you, do with it, please." But he did not answer. "Something, perhaps," the question was sudden. Her eyes were on his face. He found it impossible to prevaricate. "Something, perhaps," he said.

"My husband has never been dead, and he is about to die, I think, very soon."

He bowed, having no words adapted to the situation. But he repeated his resolution (as above) more furiously.

"He has never appeared even aware of it," she persisted. "Are you sure that he is?"

He wondered at her innocence or her audacity. That such a lady should be so much mischievous! The thought irritated him. "It was impossible that he should not see it. Lady Betty," he said with a faint smile. "Quite impossible."

"Ah!" he replied, with a faint sigh. "Well, he has never spoken to me about it. And you think it really had something to do with his resignation, Mr. Atley?"

"Most certainly," he said. He was not inclined to spare her this time.

She nodded thoughtfully, and then, with a quiet "Thank you," went out.

"Well," muttered the secretary to himself when the door was fairly shut behind her. "It occurred to me to look it up. It is full of errors, so full that it is clear the printers had not corrected proof Atley prepared. Therefore I conclude that Atley's copy of the terms went to the Times instead of the speech. But how was the mistake made?"

"That is the question." Happily the private secretary came into the room at this juncture. "Atley," Mr. Stafford said at once, "I want you. Carry your mind back a week—to this day week. Are you sure that you sent the report of my speech at the club to the Times?"

"Am I sure?" replied the other confidently, nothing daunted by being so abruptly challenged. "I am quite sure I did, sir. I remember the circumstances. I found the report—it was typewritten, you remember—lying on the blotting pad when I came down dressed for dinner. I slipped it into an envelope and put it in the box. I can see myself doing it now."

"But how do you know that it was the report you put in the envelope?"

"You had indosed it 'Corrected report'—W. Stafford," replied Atley triumphantly.

"Ah!" said Stafford, dropping his hands and eyes and sitting down suddenly. "I remember! Mr. Stafford came in, and my wife came in."—The Cornhill Magazine.

Saved by Bees. An exchange says: "Once when the Turks had begun to scale the wall of a church in Transylvania, a girl's wit saved the people from capture and death. Behind the church was a little garden and in it a dozen beehives were kept. The girl's duty to care for them was to go daily up the fortress wall and hurl it down upon the enemy. Again and again she repeated the process until ten or more swarms of maddened bees were stinging the Turks. They were obliged to retreat, and unable to cope with the insect foe, beat a hasty retreat. They had been discomfited by a young girl's device."

A FRIEND'S ADVICE. How a Casual Conversation Resulted in Saving the Life of a Thoughtless Young Man. Two friends were seated at a lunch-table and consulting the bill of fare. One looked fresh and bright, the other pale and agitated. After studying the bill all over, the last-named person said: "It's no use. I have no appetite. I cannot eat."

"His friend looked anxious. "What is the matter?" he inquired. "I don't know. I have a cough in the morning, a tickle in the throat, difficulty in breathing, my pulse is quick, my breath short and I have a heaviness across my chest. In the evening I feel chilly; during the day feverish. I don't know what it is."

"My dear fellow, you have the symptoms of consumption. I know, because I was in the same terrible path once myself. You must do something at once."

"What can I do?" was the anxious inquiry. "Be careful, exercise, and drink pure whisky several times a day."

"But I can't do that. I have been in the habit of drinking whisky."

"Do much the better. Then it will cure you. I used Dr. J. C. Williams' Pink Pills for more than a year, and still take it regularly. I am a temperance man, as you know, and I am anxious to do all I can to preserve my health. I know what will restore and preserve it."

"You are not there, I know, and you know that actually took place, substantially as narrated. It is a statement of the experience of thousands of other people throughout America. Dr. J. C. Williams' Pink Pills will check consumption, will prevent pneumonia, and give life and color. It is nourishing. It is pure. It can be procured by mail, and the name of the Dispensary should be excused to secure only the genuine."

"Yes," he said gravely. "Only that, I think. But for that I should have remained in—with Lord Pilgrimage of course. Perhaps things are better as they are, my dear."

Lady Betty sprang from her seat with all her old vivacity. "Well!" she cried, "well, I am sure! Then why, I should like to know, did Mr. Atley tell me that my letter to the Times had something to do with it?"

"Did not say so," quoth Sir Horace. "Absurd!"

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