

perhaps while we're on the links. A pretty advertisement you'd get if that came off. A vicar's wife stolen by brigands. The reverend gentleman on the Q. Tee. Think of it in the evening papers!—How some of them would chaff you!"

The vicar played an approach shot and said, "This is really deplorable." He would have preferred to talk golf; but the doctor gave him no rest, and so he said presently:

"I wonder what Lady Evelyn thinks of it all? She went by me in the car yesterday and Bates was driving her. Now, I never see that before. * * * God bless me, what a shocking stroke!" He shook his head as the ball went skimming over the ground into the deepest and most terrible bunker on Moretown links—the doctor following it with that sympathetic if hypocritical gaze we turn upon an enemy's misfortunes. Impossible not to better such a miserable exhibition, he thought. Unhappy man, game of delight, the two were playing from the bunker together before a minute had passed!

"You and I would certainly do better at the mangle if this goes on," the doctor exclaimed with honest conviction; "the third bunker I've found to-day. A man cannot be well who does that."

"Rheumatism, undoubtedly," the vicar said slyly.

A boyish laugh greeted the thrust. "Shall we call it curiosity? Hang the game! What does it matter? You put a bit of india rubber into a flower pot and think you are a better man than I am. But you're not. I'd play you any day for the poor box. Let's talk of something else—Lady Evelyn, for instance."

"Will she marry him, Frederick?"

"Him—the sandy-haired foreigner with the gypsy friends?"

"Is there any other concerned?"

"Oh, don't ask me. Do I keep her pocketbook?"

"I wish you did, my dear fellow. From every point of view, this marriage would be deplorable."

"From every point of view but that of the two people concerned, perhaps. She is a girl with a will of her own—do you think she would marry him if she didn't like him?"

"She might, from spite. There are better reasons, perhaps worse. You told me at their first meeting that you believed her to be in love with him."

"I was an idiot. Let's finish the round. The man will probably live to be hanged—what does it matter?"

"Well, if it doesn't matter to you, it matters to nobody. I'll tell you something queer—a thing I saw last night. It's been in my head all day. I'll tell you as we go to the next green."

They drove a couple of good balls and set out from the tee with lighter hearts. As they went, the vicar unburdened himself of that secret which golf alone could have prevented him disclosing an hour ago.

"I told you that I dined with Sir John Hall last night," he said in a low voice; "well, young John drove me home, and, of course, he went thru the park. Poor boy, his case is quite hopeless. He drives his horse to death round and round the house on the off chance of seeing the flash of her gown between the trees. Well, he drove me home and just as we entered the park, what do you think—why, three or four men passed us at the gallop—soldiers, I say, in white uniforms with gold sashes and gold sword hilts. I saw them as plainly as I see you now—the earl was one of them—the young count another. Now, what do you think of it? Are they mad, or is some great jest being played? I give it up. This sort of thing is beyond my experience—it should be a case for you, Frederick, tho' if you can make anything of it, I'm a Dutchman."

The doctor shook his head. He did not doubt the truth of the vicar's story, but he made believe to doubt it.

"You dined with John Hall, Harry?"

"I have told you so."

"Sixty-three port, I suppose, on the top of champagne."

"That is mere foolishness, Frederick."

"Admittedly, forgive me—I can be serious and am. Here's an affair which a man might write about in textbooks. This grown man puts on a coat he may have worn in his youth and rides like a steeplechaser thru the park. Why does he do it? What's he after? I'll tell you, his lost youth, that's what he's after. Trying to catch up Time and give the fellow the go-by. I've seen that disease in many shapes, but this is a new one. Try to think it out. This young count comes over from Rumania; he brings these gypsy rascals with him. Their tongue, their dress, their music, speak to the earl as his youth used to speak to him. He's living for a moment a life he lived thirty years ago. I can see him grasping at the straws of youth every time I go up to the Hall. These midnight carousals are so much midnight madness. The man is saying to Age, you shall not have me. Ten years of respectability go at one fell swoop. He'd sell those he loved best on earth to win back one year of the days which have been. That's my diagnosis. The bacillus, La Jeunesse! And that's a bacillus you cannot cure, Harry."

He was in deadly earnest and the vicar looked grave enough. In his dim way, he understood the doctor and believed him to be speaking the truth. Lord Melbourne had been an enigma to him from the first; an aristocrat and

not an aristocrat; one of the Melbournes and yet an alien; a man whose mask of reservation the keenest eyes could not pierce; a silent man when one asked for that key by which alone the secret chambers of his mind could be entered. Of such a one any fable might be told and believed. The vicar understood that he had come face to face with some mystery; but of its witnesses he could make nothing.

"I do believe you are right," he said at length; "there have been tales as strange in the story of the house—generally concerning a lady, I fear. At least Evelyn can know nothing of this," he added a little thoughtfully; "it would be a great misfortune for her."

"Heritage has little regard for the fortunes of others," said the doctor. "I don't suppose she would have married an Englishman—she's not the girl to do it. That comes of educating them abroad—I would sooner send a daughter of mine to fight the Russians than to a school in Paris. Make Englishwomen of them, I say, and leave the fal-de-lals alone. What's it worth to a girl if she can jabber French and has lost her English heart? No, my dear vicar, England for me and English roses for my home. Evelyn will marry this man because France taught her to think well of foreigners. If she had gone to a Derbyshire school, he might as well have proposed to Cleopatra's monument on the Thames Embankment. I'm sorry for her, truly, but words won't change the thing, and that's the end of it. Let's go and lunch. We have done nothing ill for one morning, anyway."

They went to lunch and afterward to the business of a common day. As it fell out, they did not meet again until after church upon the following Sunday, when the vicar, still wearing his surplice as he crossed from the vestry to the parsonage, found the doctor waiting for him with the air of one who has important tidings and must impart them quickly.

"No bad news from the Hall?" he exclaimed, so much was that great house now in his mind.

The doctor, however, drew him aside and told him in a word.

"The count's gone," he said quickly. "He comes back in October. The earl told me so himself. She's to marry him in the winter, and that's the end of it, Harry."

The vicar shook his head gravely.

"The beginning of it, Frederick, the beginning," he said wistfully.

BOOK II.

The Englishman.

CHAPTER XVII.

Gavin Ord Begins His Work.

In that manner Gavin Ord arrived at Melbourne Hall and took up his residence there has already been recorded in the early pages of this narrative.

He came upon a night in August, three weeks precisely after the departure of Count Odin for Bukharest. Of the people of the Hall he knew little save that which common gossip and the tittle-tattle of the newspapers had taught him; nor was his the temperament to be troubled overmuch by the strange hallucination which had attended his journey from Moretown to the manor. That which some people would have called an apparition, he attributed to fatigue and the hour of the night; and while an uneasy feeling that this simple account of it might not ultimately satisfy him was not to be lightly dismissed, the hospitalities of the great house and the work to which he had been called there quickly dispelled the impression of it, and left him with some shame that he had been such an easy victim to a vulgar delusion. For the rest, curiosity remained the only intruder between him and the work he had been summoned to do.

The Lady Evelyn! Where had he seen her before? How came it that her face was so familiar to him?

Every hour that he lived at the Hall quickened this impression of familiarity. Her very voice could make him start, as the one whom he knew well were speaking to him. Her stately movements, her gestures, tormented his memory as tho' the inciting it to recall forgotten scenes for him. At the luncheon table, upon the second day, he made bold to tell her of his immovable idea.

"We have met somewhere, Lady Evelyn," he said, "I cannot tell where, but it was in some such house as this—in the gardens of such a house. And that is odd, for to my knowledge I was never in a Tudor house before. Now, say that I am dreaming it; that it is just one of those foolish ideas which come to one in sleep and are remembered when waking. It could hardly be anything else, of course."

Evelyn flushed crimson while he was speaking; but she retained her composure sufficiently to declare that she had no recollection of such an occasion.

"We rarely go from here," she said evasively. "I cannot recollect visiting any Tudor house in England—you see so many, Mr. Ord. It would be natural to have such an idea, I think."

"Oh, perfectly and perhaps foolish. Our brains play us strange tricks, and, often enough, the wildest of them have the least meaning. I know a man in Paris who dreamed three nights running that he would be thrown out of a motorcar on his way to Monte Carlo. He put off the visit in consequence and

was knocked down next day by a cab in the Rue Quatre Septembre. I don't mean to say that he was killed, but he had a nasty fall, and that was the price he paid for dreaming. I try to dismiss these things as soon as they come to me. Here's a case in point—You and I clearly have never met—unless it were in London," he added, with another keen glance at her.

Evelyn could not suppress the high color in her cheeks, and they were crimson when she found her father's eyes watching her curiously as tho' some train of thought had been set in motion by the argument. Perfectly well did she know that Gavin Ord had seen her in London, on the stage of the Carlton theater; and that discovery had looked her in the face twice in as many months. This time, however, she feared it less; for she had come to believe by this time that she would presently be compelled to tell her story to all the world before many weeks had passed.

"We are not often in London," the earl said dryly; "with such a house as this, why should we be? Lady Evelyn cares nothing for society. I regard it as the refuge of the mentally destitute. If I travel, it is from one solitude to another. A man is never so much master of himself and of the world as when he is alone. Can we consider the modern life as anything but a glorification of the aggregate and not of the individual? Your profession is the best friend you have, Mr. Ord. Those who follow noble ends establish nobility in their own characters. That's a creed I wish I had known twenty years ago. You are a young man and should recite it every day while your youth remains to you."

Gavin replied that a man was neither older nor younger than his ideas; and the drift of the conversation being changed to Evelyn's evident relief, they fell again to their plans for the restoration of the Hall and that which must be done before the wet weather set in.

Until this time, Evelyn had scarcely noticed Gavin or taken any interest in his coming to the manor. The truce between her father and herself left her in a dream world from which there appeared to be no gate of escape whatever. She had neither counselor nor friend. To Count Odin she had said, "You shall have my answer in three months' time." Her father's almost passionate desire for this marriage, which his own youth had contrived, won from her no promise more definite than that which she had given to the count. The time had passed for any but the frankest expressions upon either side. In the plainest words, the earl told her that this Rumanian had crossed Europe to demand the liberty of a man who had long been but a number in a prison upon the shores of the Black sea.

"Let Georges Odin be released," he had said, "and unless you are his son's wife, he will kill me."

Lady Evelyn knew this to be no chimera of weakness or fear. The vengeance of the mountains would follow Robert Forrester even to the glades of Derbyshire. Witnesses to the truth still pitched their tents beneath the giant yews—the smoke of the gypsy camp drifted day by day, blue and lingering over the waters of the river. From these there was no escape, for they were the sentinels of the absent count's honor, and they dogged the earl's footsteps wherever he turned. When Gavin Ord appeared at the manor, their suspicions were instantly aroused. They hid from him, and yet watched him every hour. Who was he; whence had he come? And was he also the enemy of the man who had been Zallony's friend? This they made it their purpose to discover, entering even Gavin's bedroom for that purpose.

He was very far from being a timid man or the episode referred to would quickly have driven him from Derbyshire, despite the engrossing interest of the work to which he had been called there. This was the third day of his residence at the Hall. Being left to himself immediately after dinner, he continued to draw for an hour and to read for another before retiring to sleep in the great black bed which tradition, loving the slumbers of kings, had allotted in its accustomed way to that very wakeful person, James II. His bedroom was high up in the northern tower of the house; a low-pitched spacious apartment with some fine Chippendale chairs in it and a dressing table for which any Bond street dealer would cheerfully have paid a thousand pounds. Gavin delighted in these things because he was an artist; while the attendant luxury, the service of man and valet, the superb fittings of the bathroom adjoining his bedroom, the fruit, the cigars, the books which decorated the apartment, seemed in some way to be the reward of his own labors, not to speak of the attainments of long-cherished ambitions.

To this historic chamber he retired on the evening of the third day, and having added a little to his plans, read some pages of a county history and smoked a final and contemplative pipe, he undressed and got into bed, and for an hour or more slept that refreshing sleep which attends judicious success and a mind little given to trivialities. From this, against all habit, he passed to dreams, at first welcome and pleasing; dreams of broad acres and sheltering trees and a land of plenty—then to visions more disturbing, and to one, chiefly of a storm passing over the woods and his own spirit abroad in the storm and unable to find harborage. As

a weary bird that can reach no shelter and is buffeted by every wind, so did he, in his dream, appear to be cast out from the world and unable to return to his home and kindred; a wanderer thru a tempestuous night, beyond whose horizon, far beyond it but ever growing more distant, there arose the crimson light of day and the dawning beams of the hidden sun. Strive as he would he could not cast the darkness from him or shut out the sounds of wild winds blowing in his ears. Unseen hands held him back; voices mocked him; he heard the rustling of wings and was conscious of the movements of unknown figures. And then he awoke to find a light shining full in his face and to see two black eyes peering down at him beyond it. But for an instant he saw them; then the light was blown out swiftly and utter darkness fell. He knew that he was not alone; but feared nothing, he knew not why.

Some man had entered his room while he slept and stood, he imagined, even at that moment so close to his bedside that he had but to put out a hand to touch him. Who the man was or what his errand might be, Gavin did not attempt even to guess. More by force of habit than from any other reason, he asked aloud, "Who is there, what do you want?"—but he did not expect to be answered, nor did any sound follow his question. Lying quite still upon the bed and beginning to be a little alarmed as his senses came back to him, he listened intently for an echo of footsteps across the polished floor, arguing that the unknown man would wear no boots and must turn the handle of a door to go. This was no burglar, he felt sure; and he was half willing to believe that he had dreamed the whole episode when a footfall made itself plainly audible, and was followed by a deep breath as of one who until that time had been afraid to breathe at all. Again Gavin asked, "What is it, what do you want?" The silence continued unbroken, and the fear of things unknown robbed him for the moment of the voice to repeat the question. This he set down afterward to the traditions of Melbourne Hall and his intimate knowledge of them. He would not have been afraid in any other house.

Gavin stretched out his hand and tried to switch on the electric light. A clumsy effort in an unfamiliar room found him passing his fingers idly over a wainscoted wall; and when he felt for the reading lamp by his bedside, he overturned it with his elbow and could not replace the plug which his maladroitness had detached. Alarmed now as he never believed that any situation could alarm him, he sprang from his bed and felt with both hands extended for the figure which the room concealed. Hither, thither, with an oath upon his clumsiness, he sought the unknown, his hands touching unfamiliar objects, the darkness seeming almost to mock him. That unknown man was still in the room he had no doubt whatever; for the interludes repeated the sound of quick breathing and he heard a garment rustling just as he had heard it in his sleep. Once, indeed, he felt the warm breath upon his cheek and struck savagely at an enemy of sounds, who still uttered no word nor would acknowledge his presence. Had he been calmer he might have known that the darkness also deceived the intruder and that he, too, was at a loss to escape; but this Gavin did not discover until the door opened suddenly and a flash of light from the corridor struck across the room like a sunbeam suddenly admitted by a lifted blind. Then he saw the face of the escaping man for the second time and stood amazed at its familiarity.

"The old gypsy I saw in the park yesterday walking with the earl," he said, astonished, and then, "What in the devil's name is he doing here?"

That should not have been a difficult question to answer, and Gavin instantly determined to make no mention of it until the morning. The fellow was probably a thief, who had the run of the house and had taken advantage of its master's forbearance. It would be sufficient to name the circumstance at the breakfast table and to leave the rest to the earl, who could act in the matter as he pleased. None the less, Garvin found his nerves much shaken and sleep for the remainder of the night was out of the question. Switching on every lamp in his room, and locking and bolting the heavy door, he sat by the open window and asked himself into what house of mysteries he had stumbled and what secrets it was about to reveal to him. But chiefly he asked where he had met the Lady Evelyn before. * * * and memory befriending him suddenly, as memory will at a crisis, he exclaimed aloud:

"The Carlton theater—Haddon Hall—Etta Romney, by all that's amusing!"

Was the thought also a chimera of the night? He knew not what to think. The dawn found him still at his window debating it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A Duel Over the Teacups.

Gavin had always been an early riser and one who flouted the modern idea that the world should be aired before men went abroad. Faithful to his habit, the following morning found him riding in the park a little after 7 o'clock; and not until the sweet cold air of the highlands had recompensed him for a waking night did he return