Tales of Two People

[Illustrated]

By

Anthony Hope



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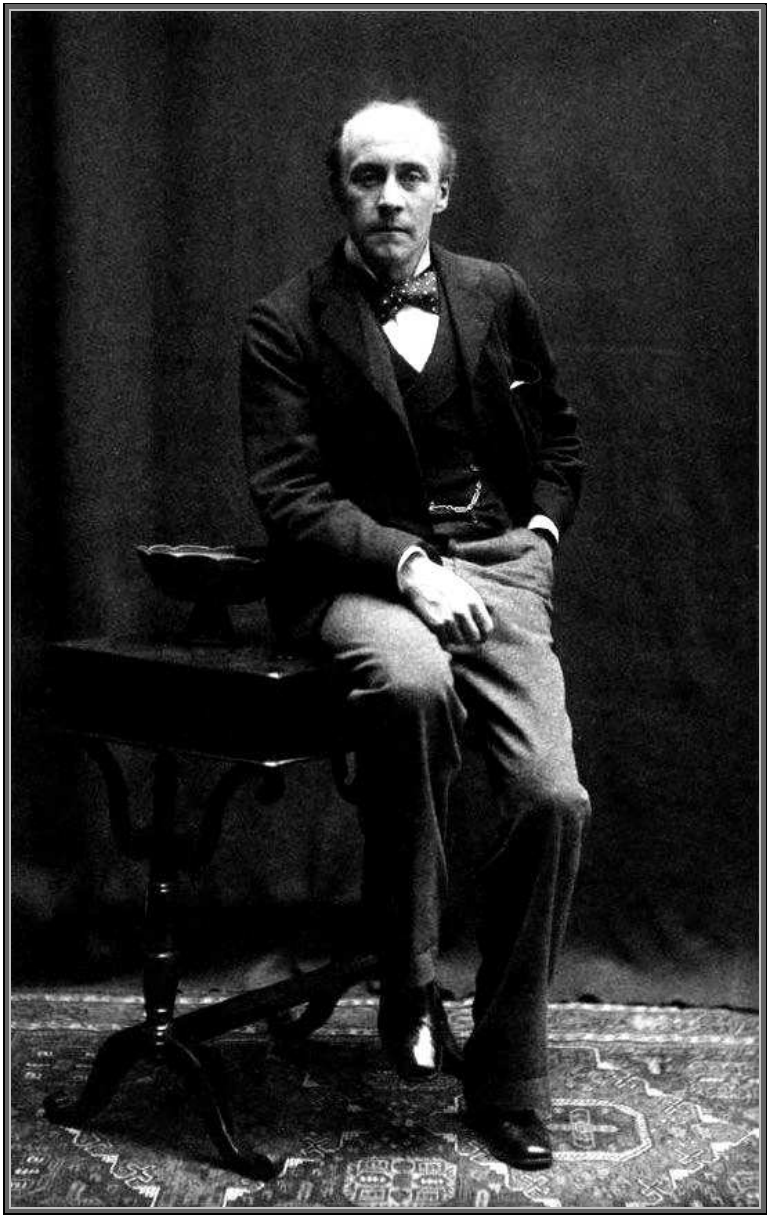
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Sir Anthony Hope



***Sir Anthony Hope Hawkins**, better known as **Anthony Hope** (1863 –1933), was an English novelist and playwright. He was a prolific writer, especially of adventure novels but he is remembered best for only two books: The Prisoner of Zenda (1894) and its sequel Rupert of Hentzau (1898). These works, "minor classics" of English literature, are set in the contemporaneous fictional country of Ruritania and spawned the genre known as Ruritanian romance. Zenda has inspired many adaptations, most notably the 1937 Hollywood movie of the same name.*

Hope trained as a lawyer and barrister, being called to the Bar by the Middle Temple in 1887. He had time to write, as his working day was not overly full during these early years and he lived with his widowed father, then vicar of St Bride's Church, Fleet Street. Hope's short pieces appeared in periodicals but for his first book he was forced to resort to a self-publishing press. A Man of Mark (1890) is notable primarily for its similarities to Zenda: it is set in an imaginary country, Aureataland and features political upheaval and humour. More novels and short stories followed, including Father Stafford in 1891 and the mildly successful Mr Witt's Widowin 1892. He stood as the Liberal candidate for Wycombe in the election of 1892 but was not elected. In 1893 he wrote three novels (Sport Royal, A Change of Air and Half-a-Hero) and a series of sketches that first appeared in the Westminster Gazette and were collected in 1894 as The Dolly Dialogues, illustrated by Arthur Rackham. Dolly was his first major literary success. A.E.W. Mason deemed these conversations "so truly set in the London of their day that the social historian would be unwise to neglect them," and said that they were written with "delicate wit [and] a shade of sadness."

The idea for Hope's tale of political intrigue, The Prisoner of Zenda, being the history of three months in the life of an English gentleman, came to him at the close of 1893 as he was walking in London. Hope finished the first draft in a month and the book was in print by April. The story is set in the fictional European kingdom of 'Ruritania', a term which has come to mean 'the novelist's and dramatist's locale for court romances in a modern setting.' Zenda achieved instant success and its witty protagonist, the debonair Rudolf Rassendyll, became a well-known literary creation. The novel was praised by Mason, literary critic Andrew Lang, and Robert Louis Stevenson. The popularity of Zenda convinced Hope to give up the "brilliant legal career [that] seemed to lie ahead of him" to become a

full-time writer but he "never again achieved such complete artistic success as in this one book." Also in 1894, Hope produced The God in the Car, a political story.

CHAPTER I

AMBROSE, LORD LYNBOROUGH



COMMON opinion said that Lord Lynborough ought never to have had a peerage and forty thousand a year; he ought to have had a pound a week and a back bedroom in Bloomsbury. Then he would have become an eminent man; as it was, he turned out only a singularly erratic individual.

So much for common opinion. Let no more be heard of its dull utilitarian judgments! There are plenty of eminent men—at the moment, it is believed, no less than seventy Cabinet and ex-Cabinet Ministers (or thereabouts)—to say nothing of Bishops, Judges, and the British Academy—and all this in a nook of the world! (And the world too is a point!) Lynborough was something much more uncommon; it is not, however, quite easy to say what. Let the question be postponed; perhaps the story itself will answer it.

He started life—or was started in it—in a series of surroundings of unimpeachable orthodoxy—Eton, Christ Church, the Grenadier Guards. He left each of these schools of mental culture and bodily discipline, not under a cloud—that metaphor would be ludicrously inept—but in an explosion. That, having been thus shot out of the first, he managed to enter the second—that, having been shot out of the second, he walked placidly into the third—that, having been shot out of the third, he suffered no apparent damage from his repeated propulsions—these are matters explicable only by a secret knowledge of British institutions. His father was strong, his mother came of stock even stronger; he himself—Ambrose Caverly as he then was—was very popular, and extraordinarily handsome in his unusual outlandish style.

His father being still alive—and, though devoted to him, by now apprehensive of his doings—his means were for the next few years limited. Yet he contrived to employ himself. He took a soup-kitchen and ran it; he took a yacht and sank it; he took a public-house, ruined it, and got himself severely fined for watering the beer in the Temperance interest. This injustice rankled in him deeply, and seems to have permanently influenced his development. For a time he forsook the world and joined a sect of persons who called themselves “Theophilanthropists”—and surely no man could call himself much more than that? Returning to mundane affairs, he refused to pay his rates, stood for Parliament in the Socialist interest, and, being defeated, declared himself a practical follower of Count Tolstoy. His father advising a short holiday, he went off and narrowly escaped being shot somewhere in the Balkans, owing to his having taken too keen an interest in local politics. (He ought to have been shot; he was clear—and even vehement—on that point in a letter which he wrote to *The Times*.) Then he sent for Leonard Stabb, disappeared in company with that gentleman, and was no more seen for some years.

He could always send for Stabb, so faithful was that learned student's affection for him. A few years Ambrose Caverly's senior, Stabb had emerged late and painfully from a humble origin and a local grammar school, had gone up to Oxford as a non-collegiate man, had gained a first-class and a fellowship, and had settled down to a life of research. Early in his career he became known by the sobriquet of "Cromlech Stabb"—even his unlearned friends would call him "Cromlech" oftener than by any other name. His elaborate monograph on cromlechs had earned him the title; subsequently he extended his researches to other relics of ancient religions—or ancient forms of religion, as he always preferred to put it; "there being," he would add, with the simplicity of erudition beaming through his spectacles on any auditor, orthodox or other, "of course, only one religion." He was a very large stout man; his spectacles were large too. He was very strong, but by no means mobile. Ambrose's father regarded Stabb's companionship as a certain safeguard to his heir. The validity of this idea is doubtful. Students have so much curiosity—and so many diverse scenes and various types of humanity can minister to that appetite of the mind.

Occasional rumours about Ambrose Caverly reached his native shores; he was heard of in Morocco, located in Spain, familiar in North and in South America. Once he was not heard of for a year; his father and friends concluded that he must be dead—or in prison. Happily the latter explanation proved correct. Once more he and the law had come to loggerheads; when he emerged from confinement he swore never to employ on his own account an instrument so hateful.

"A gentleman should fight his own battles, Cromlech," he cried to his friend. "I did no more than put a bullet in his arm—in a fair encounter—and he let me go to prison!"

"Monstrous!" Stabb agreed with a smile. He had passed the year in a dirty little inn by the prison gate—among scoundrels, but fortunately in the vicinity of some mounds distinctly prehistoric.

Old Lord Lynborough's death occurred suddenly and unexpectedly, at a moment when Ambrose and his companion could not be found. They were somewhere in Peru—Stabb among the Incas, Ambrose probably in less ancient company. It was six months before the news reached them.

"I must go home and take up my responsibilities, Cromlech," said the new Lord Lynborough.

"You really think you'd better?" queried Stabb doubtfully.

"It was my father's wish."

"Oh, well——! But you'll be thought odd over there, Ambrose."

"Odd? I odd? What the deuce is there odd about me, Cromlech?"

"Everything." The investigator stuck his cheroot back in his mouth.

Lynborough considered dispassionately—as he fain would hope. "I don't see it."

That was the difficulty. Stabb was well aware of it. A man who is odd, and knows it, may be proud, but he will be careful; he may swagger, but he will take precautions. Lynborough had no idea that he was odd; he followed his nature—in all its impulses and in all its whims—with equal fidelity and simplicity. This is not to say that he was never amused at himself; every intelligent observer is amused at himself pretty often; but he did not doubt merely because he was amused. He took his entertainment over his own doings as a bonus life offered. A great sincerity of action and of feeling was his predominant characteristic.

"Besides, if I'm odd," he went on with a laugh, "it won't be noticed. I'm going to bury myself at Scarsmoor for a couple of years at least. I'm thinking of writing an autobiography. You'll come with me, Cromlech?"

"I must be totally undisturbed," Stabb stipulated. "I've a great deal of material to get into shape."

"There'll be nobody there but myself—and a secretary, I daresay."

"A secretary? What's that for?"

"To write the book, of course."

"Oh, I see," said Stabb, smiling in a slow fat fashion. "You won't write your autobiography yourself?"

"Not unless I find it very engrossing."

"Well, I'll come," said Stabb.

So home they came—an unusual-looking pair—Stabb with his towering bulky frame, his big goggles, his huge head with its scanty black locks encircling a face like a harvest moon—Lynborough, tall, too, but lean as a lath, with tiny feet and hands, a rare elegance of carriage, a crown of chestnut hair, a long straight nose, a waving moustache, a chin pointed like a needle and scarcely thickened to the eye by the close-cropped, short, pointed beard he wore. His bright hazel eyes gleamed out from his face with an attractive restlessness that caught away a stranger's first attention even from the rare beauty of the lines of his head and face; it was regularity over-refined, sharpened almost to an outline of itself. But his appearance tempted him to no excesses of costume; he had always despised that facile path to a barren eccentricity. On every occasion he wore what all men of breeding were wearing, yet invested the prescribed costume with the individuality of his character: this, it seems, is as near as the secret of dressing well can be tracked.

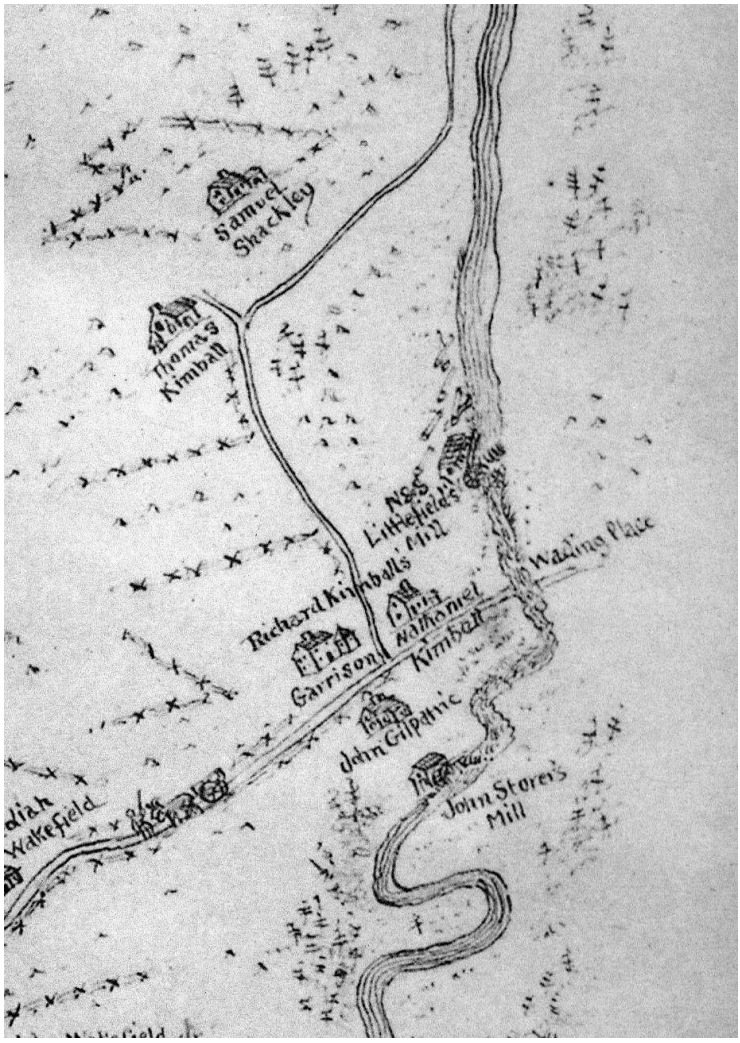
His manner was not always deemed so free from affectation; it was, perhaps, a little more self-conscious; it was touched with a foreign courtliness, and he employed, on occasions of any ceremony or in intercourse with ladies, a certain formality of speech; it was said of him by an observant woman that he seemed to be thinking in

a language more ornate and picturesque than his tongue employed. He was content to say the apt thing, not striving after wit; he was more prone to hide a joke than to tell it; he would ignore a victory and laugh at a defeat; yet he followed up the one and never sat down under the other, unless it were inflicted by one he loved. He liked to puzzle, but took no conscious pains to amuse.

Thus he returned to his “responsibilities.” Cromlech Stabb was wondering what that dignified word would prove to describe.

CHAPTER II

LARGELY TOPOGRAPHICAL



MISS GILLETSON had been studying the local paper, which appeared every Saturday and reached Nab Grange on the following morning. She uttered an exclamation, looked up from her small

breakfast-table, and called over to the Marchesa's small breakfast-table.

"Helena, I see that Lord Lynborough arrived at the Castle on Friday!"

"Did he, Jennie?" returned the Marchesa, with no show of interest. "Have an egg, Colonel?" The latter words were addressed to her companion at table, Colonel Wenman, a handsome but bald-headed man of about forty.

" 'Lord Lynborough, accompanied by his friend Mr Leonard Stabb, the well-known authority on prehistoric remains, and Mr Roger Wilbraham, his private secretary. His lordship's household had preceded him to the Castle.' "

Lady Norah Mountliffey—who sat with Miss Gilletson—was in the habit of saying what she thought. What she said now was: "Thank goodness!" and she said it rather loudly.

"You gentlemen haven't been amusing Norah," observed the Marchesa to the Colonel.

"I hoped that I, at least, was engaged on another task—though, alas, a harder one!" he answered in a low tone and with a glance of respectful homage.

"If you refer to me, you've been admirably successful," the Marchesa assured him graciously—only with the graciousness there mingled that touch of mockery which always made the Colonel rather ill at ease. "Amuse" is, moreover, a word rich in shades of meaning.

Miss Gilletson was frowning thoughtfully. "Helena can't call on him—and I don't suppose he'll call on her," she said to Norah.

"He'll get to know her if he wants to."

"I might call on him," suggested the Colonel. "He was in the service, you know, and that—er—makes a bond. Queer fellow he was, by Jove!"

Captain Irons and Mr Stillford came in from riding, late for breakfast. They completed the party at table, for Violet Dufaure always took the first meal of the day in bed. Irons was a fine young man, still in the twenties, very fair and very bronzed. He had seen fighting and was great at polo. Stillford, though a man of peace (if a solicitor may so be called), was by no means inferior in physique. A cadet of a good county family, he was noted in the hunting field and as a long-distance swimmer. He had come to Nab Grange to confer with the Marchesa on her affairs, but, proving himself an acquisition to the party, had been pressed to stay on as a guest.

The men began to bandy stories of Lynborough from one table to the other. Wenman knew the London gossip, Stillford the local traditions: but neither had seen the hero of their tales for many years. The anecdotes delighted Norah Mountliffey, and caused Miss Gilletson's hands to fly up in horror. Nevertheless it was Miss Gilletson who said, "Perhaps we shall see him at church to-day."

"Not likely!" Stillford opined. "And—er—is anybody going?"

The pause which habitually follows this question ensued upon it now. Neither the Marchesa nor Lady Norah would go—they were both of the Old Church. Miss Dufaure was unlikely to go, by reason of fatigue. Miss Gilletson would, of course, go, so would Colonel Wenman—but that was so well known that they didn't speak.

"Any ladies with Lynborough's party, I wonder!" Captain Irons hazarded. "I think I'll go! Stillford, you ought to go to church—family solicitor and all that, eh?"

A message suddenly arrived from Miss Dufaure, to say that she felt better and proposed to attend church—could she be sent?

"The carriage is going anyhow," said Miss Gilletson a trifle stiffly.

"Yes, I suppose I ought," Stillford agreed. "We'll drive there and walk back?"

"Right you are!" said the Captain.

By following the party from Nab Grange to Fillby parish church, a partial idea of the locality would be gained; but perhaps it is better to face the complete task at once. Idle tales suit idle readers; a history such as this may legitimately demand from those who study it some degree of mental application.

If, then, the traveller lands from the North Sea (which is the only sea he can land from) he will find himself on a sandy beach, dipping rapidly to deep water and well adapted for bathing. As he stands facing inland, the sands stretch in a long line southerly on his left; on his right rises the bold bluff of Sandy Nab with its swelling outline, its grass-covered dunes, and its sparse firs; directly in front of him, abutting on the beach, is the high wall enclosing the Grange property; a gate in the middle gives access to the grounds. The Grange faces south, and lies in the shelter of Sandy Nab. In front of it are pleasure-grounds, then a sunk fence, then spacious meadow-lands. The property is about a mile and a half (rather more than less) in length, to half-a-mile in breadth. Besides the Grange there is a small farmhouse, or bailiff's house, in the south-west corner of the estate. On the north the boundary consists of moorlands, to the east (as has been seen) of the beach, to the west and south of a public road. At the end of the Grange walls this road turns to the right, inland, and passes by Fillby village; it then develops into the highroad to Easthorpe with its market, shops, and station, ten miles away. Instead, however, of pursuing this longer route, the traveller from the Grange grounds may reach Fillby and Easthorpe sooner by crossing the road on the west, and traversing the Scarsmoor Castle property, across which runs a broad carriage road, open to the public. He will first—after entering Lord Lynborough's gates—pass over a bridge which spans a little river, often nearly dry, but liable to be suddenly flooded by a rainfall in the hills. Thus he enters a beautiful demesne,

rich in wood and undergrowth, in hill and valley, in pleasant rides and winding drives. The Castle itself—an ancient grey building, square and massive, stands on an eminence in the north-west extremity of the property; the ground drops rapidly in front of it, and it commands a view of Nab Grange and the sea beyond, being in its turn easily visible from either of these points. The road above mentioned, on leaving Lynborough's park, runs across the moors in a south-westerly line to Fillby, a little village of some three hundred souls. All around and behind this, stretching to Easthorpe, are great rolling moors, rich in beauty as in opportunities for sport, yet cutting off the little settlement of village, Castle, and Grange from the outer world by an isolation more complete than the mere distance would in these days seem to entail. The church, two or three little shops, and one policeman, sum up Fillby's resources: anything more, for soul's comfort, for body's supply or protection, must come across the moors from Easthorpe.

One point remains—reserved to the end by reason of its importance. A gate has been mentioned as opening on to the beach from the grounds of Nab Grange. He who enters at that gate and makes for the Grange follows the path for about two hundred yards in a straight line, and then takes a curving turn to the right, which in time brings him to the front door of the house. But the path goes on—growing indeed narrower, ultimately becoming a mere grass-grown track, yet persisting quite plain to see—straight across the meadows, about a hundred yards beyond the sunk fence which bounds the Grange gardens, and in full view from the Grange windows; and it desists not from its course till it reaches the rough stone wall which divides the Grange estate from the highroad on the west. This wall it reaches at a point directly opposite to the Scarsmoor lodge; in the wall there is a gate, through which the traveller must pass to gain the road.

There is a gate—and there had always been a gate; that much at least is undisputed. It will, of course, be obvious that if the residents

at the Castle desired to reach the beach for the purpose of bathing or other diversions, and proposed to go on their feet, incomparably their best, shortest, and most convenient access thereto lay through this gate and along the path which crossed the Grange property and issued through the Grange gate on to the seashore. To go round by the road would take at least three times as long. Now the season was the month of June; Lord Lynborough was a man tenacious of his rights—and uncommonly fond of bathing.

On the other hand, it might well be that the Marchesa di San Servolo—the present owner of Nab Grange—would prefer that strangers should not pass across her property, in full view and hail of her windows, without her permission and consent. That this, indeed, was the lady's attitude might be gathered from the fact that, on this Sunday morning in June, Captain Irons and Mr Stillford, walking back through the Scarsmoor grounds from Fillby church as they had proposed, found the gate leading from the road into the Grange meadows securely padlocked. Having ignored this possibility, they had to climb, incidentally displacing, but carefully replacing, a number of prickly furze branches which the zeal of the Marchesa's bailiff had arranged along the top rail of the gate.

"Boys been coming in?" asked Irons.

"It may be that," said Stillford, smiling as he arranged the prickly defences to the best advantage.

The Grange expedition to church had to confess to having seen nothing of the Castle party—and in so far it was dubbed a failure. There was indeed a decorous row of servants in the household seat, but the square oaken pew in the chancel, with its brass rods and red curtains in front, and its fireplace at the back, stood empty. The two men reported having met, as they walked home through Scarsmoor, a very large fat man with a face which they described variously, one likening it to the sinking sun on a misty day, the other to a copper saucepan.

"Not Lord Lynborough, I do trust!" shuddered little Violet Dufaure. She and Miss Gilletson had driven home by the road, regaining the Grange by the south gate and the main drive.

Stillford was by the Marchesa. He spoke to her softly, covered by the general conversation. "You might have told us to take a key!" he said reproachfully. "That gorse is very dangerous to a man's Sunday clothes."

"It looks—businesslike, doesn't it?" she smiled.

"Oh, uncommon! When did you have it done?"

"The day before yesterday. I wanted there to be no mistake from the very first. That's the best way to prevent any unpleasantness."

"Possibly." Stillford sounded doubtful. "Going to have a notice-board, Marchesa?"

"He will hardly make that necessary, will he?"

"Well, I told you that in my judgment your right to shut it against him is very doubtful."

"You told me a lot of things I didn't understand," she retorted rather pettishly.

He shrugged his shoulders with a laugh. No good lay in anticipating trouble. Lord Lynborough might take no notice.

In the afternoon the Marchesa's guests played golf on a rather makeshift nine-hole course laid out in the meadows. Miss Gilletson slept. The Marchesa herself mounted the top of Sandy Nab, and reviewed her situation. The Colonel would doubtless have liked to accompany her, but he was not thereto invited.

Helena Vittoria Maria Antonia, Marchesa di San Servolo, was now in her twenty-fourth year. Born of an Italian father and an English mother, she had bestowed her hand on her paternal country, but her heart remained in her mother's. The Marchese took her as his second wife and his last pecuniary resource; in both capacities

she soothed his declining years. Happily for her—and not unhappily for the world at large—these were few. He had not time to absorb her youth or to spend more than a small portion of her inheritance. She was left a widow—stepmother of adult Italian offspring—owner for life of an Apennine fortress. She liked the fortress much, but disliked the stepchildren (the youngest was of her own age) more. England—her mother's home—presented itself in the light of a refuge. In short, she had grave doubts about ever returning to Italy.

Nab Grange was in the market. Ancestrally a possession of the Caverlys (for centuries a noble but unennobled family in those parts), it had served for the family's dower house, till a bad race-meeting had induced the squire of the day to sell it to a Mr Cross of Leeds. The Crosses held it for seventy years. Then the executors of the last Cross sold it to the Marchesa. This final transaction happened a year before Lynborough came home. The "Beach Path" had, as above recorded, been closed only for two days.

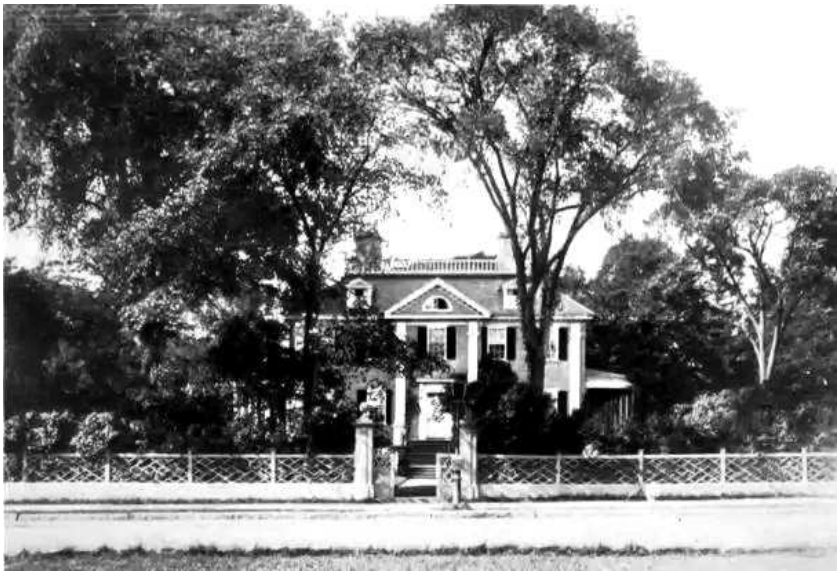
The path was not just now in the Marchesa's thoughts. Nothing very definite was. Rather, as her eyes ranged from moor to sea, from the splendid uniformity of the unclouded sky to the ravishing variety of many-tinted earth, from the green of the Grange meadows (the one spot of rich emerald on the near coastline, owing its hues to Sandy Nab's kindly shelter) to the grey mass of Scarsmoor Castle—there was in her heart that great mixture of content and longing that youth and—(what put bluntly amounts to)—a fine day are apt to raise. And youth allied with beauty becomes self-assertive, a claimant against the world, a plaintiff against facts before High Heaven's tribunal. The Marchesa was infinitely delighted with Nab Grange—graciously content with Nature—not ill-pleased with herself—but, in fine, somewhat discontented with her company. That was herself? Not precisely, though, at the moment, objectively. She was wondering whether her house party was all that her youth and her beauty—to say nothing of her past endurance of the Marchesa—entitled her to claim and to enjoy.

Then suddenly across her vision, cutting the skyline, seeming to divide for a moment heaven above from earth beneath, passed a tall meagre figure, and a head of lines clean as if etched by a master's needle. The profile stood as carved in fine ivory; glints of colour flashed from hair and beard. The man softly sang a love song as he walked—but he never looked towards the Marchesa.

She sat up suddenly. "Could that be Lord Lynborough?" she thought—and smiled.

CHAPTER III

OF LAW AND NATURAL RIGHTS



LYNBOROUGH sat on the terrace which ran along the front of the Castle and looked down, over Nab Grange, to the sea. With him were Leonard Stabb and Roger Wilbraham. The latter was a rather short, slight man of dark complexion; although a light weight he was very wiry and a fine boxer. His intellectual gifts corresponded well with his physical equipment; an acute ready mind was apt to deal with everyday problems and pressing necessities; it had little turn either for speculation or for fancy. He had dreams neither about the past, like Stabb, nor about present things, like Lynborough. His was, in a word, the practical spirit, and Lynborough could not have chosen a better right-hand man.

They were all smoking; a silence had rested long over the party. At last Lynborough spoke.

“There’s always,” he said, “something seductive in looking at a house when you know nothing about the people who live in it.”

“But I know a good deal about them,” Wilbraham interposed with a laugh. “Coltson’s been pumping all the village, and I’ve had the benefit of it.” Coltson was Lynborough’s own man, an old soldier who had been with him nearly fifteen years and had accompanied him on all his travels and excursions.

Lynborough paid no heed; he was not the man to be put off his reflections by intrusive facts.

“The blank wall of a strange house is like the old green curtain at the theatre. It may rise for you any moment and show you—what? Now what is there at Nab Grange?”

“A lot of country bumpkins, I expect,” growled Stabb.

“No, no,” Wilbraham protested. “I’ll tell you, if you like——”

“What’s there?” Lynborough pursued. “I don’t know. You don’t know—no, you don’t, Roger, and you probably wouldn’t even if you were inside. But I like not knowing—I don’t want to know. We won’t visit at the Grange, I think. We will just idealise it, Cromlech.” He cast his queer elusive smile at his friend.

“Bosh!” said Stabb. “There’s sure to be a woman there—and I’ll be bound she’ll call on you!”

“She’ll call on me? Why?”

“Because you’re a lord,” said Stabb, scorning any more personal form of flattery.

“That fortuitous circumstance should, in my judgment, rather afford me protection.”

“If you come to that, she’s somebody herself.” Wilbraham’s knowledge would bubble out, for all the want of encouragement.

"Everybody's somebody," murmured Lynborough—"and it is a very odd arrangement. Can't be regarded as permanent, eh, Cromlech? Immortality by merit seems a better idea. And by merit I mean originality. Well—I sha'n't know the Grange, but I like to look at it. The way I picture her——"

"Picture whom?" asked Stabb.

"Why, the Lady of the Grange, to be sure——"

"Tut, tut, who's thinking of the woman?—If there is a woman at all."

"I am thinking of the woman, Cromlech, and I've a perfect right to think of her. At least, if not of that woman, of a woman—whose like I've never met."

"She must be of an unusual type," opined Stabb with a reflective smile.

"She is, Cromlech. Shall I describe her?"

"I expect you must."

"Yes, at this moment—with the evening just this colour—and the Grange down there—and the sea, Cromlech, so remarkably large, I'm afraid I must. She is, of course, tall and slender; she has, of course, a rippling laugh; her eyes are, of course, deep and dreamy, yet lighting to a sparkle when one challenges. All this may be presupposed. It's her tint, Cromlech, her colour—that's what's in my mind to-night; that, you will find, is her most distinguishing, her most wonderful characteristic."

"That's just what the Vicar told Coltson! At least he said that the Marchesa had a most extraordinary complexion." Wilbraham had got something out at last.

"Roger, you bring me back to earth. You substitute the Vicar's impression for my imagination. Is that kind?"

"It seems such a funny coincidence."

"Supposing it to be a mere coincidence—no doubt! But I've always known that I had to meet that complexion somewhere. If here—so much the better!"

"I have a great doubt about that," said Leonard Stabb.

"I can get it over, Cromlech! At least consider that."

"But you're not going to know her!" laughed Wilbraham.

"I shall probably see her as we walk down to bathe by Beach Path."

A deferential voice spoke from behind his chair. "I beg your pardon, my lord, but Beach Path is closed." Coltson had brought Lynborough his cigar-case and laid it down on a table by him as he communicated this intelligence.

"Closed, Coltson?"

"Yes, my lord. There's a padlock on the gate, and a—er—barricade of furze. And the gardeners tell me they were warned off yesterday."

"My gardeners warned off Beach Path?"

"Yes, my lord."

"By whose orders?"

"Her Excellency's, my lord."

"That's the Marchesa—Marchesa di San Servolo," Wilbraham supplied.

"Yes, that's the name, sir," said Coltson respectfully.

"What about her complexion now, Ambrose?" chuckled Stabb.

"The Marchesa di San Servolo? Is that right, Coltson?"

"Perfectly correct, my lord. Italian, I understand, my lord."

“Excellent, excellent! She has closed my Beach Path? I think I have reflected enough for to-night. I’ll go in and write a letter.” He rose, smiled upon Stabb, who himself was grinning broadly, and walked through an open window into the house.

“Now you may see something happen,” said Leonard Stabb.

“What’s the matter? Is it a public path?” asked Wilbraham.

With a shrug Stabb denied all knowledge—and, probably, all interest. Coltson, who had lingered behind his master, undertook to reply.

“Not exactly public, as I understand, sir. But the Castle has always used it. Green—that’s the head gardener—tells me so, at least.”

“By legal right, do you mean?” Wilbraham had been called to the Bar, although he had never practised. No situation gives rise to greater confidence on legal problems.

“I don’t think you’ll find that his lordship will trouble much about that, sir,” was Coltson’s answer, as he picked up the cigar-case again and hurried into the library with it.

“What does the man mean by that?” asked Wilbraham scornfully. “It’s a purely legal question—Lynborough must trouble about it.” He rose and addressed Stabb somewhat as though that gentleman were the Court. “Not a public right of way? We don’t argue that? Then it’s a case of dominant and servient tenement—a right of way by user as of right, or by a lost grant. That—or nothing!”

“I daresay,” muttered Stabb very absently.

“Then what does Coltson mean——?”

“Coltson knows Ambrose—you don’t. Ambrose will never go to law—but he’ll go to bathe.”

“But she’ll go to law if he goes to bathe!” cried the lawyer.

Stabb blinked lazily, and seemed to loom enormous over his cigar. “I daresay—if she’s got a good case,” said he. “Do you know, Wilbraham, I don’t much care whether she does or not? But in regard to her complexion——”

“What the devil does her complexion matter?” shouted Wilbraham.

“The human side of a thing always matters,” observed Leonard Stabb. “For instance—pray sit down, Wilbraham—standing up and talking loud prove nothing, if people would only believe it—the permanence of hierarchical systems may be historically observed to bear a direct relation to the emoluments.”

“Would you mind telling me your opinion on two points, Stabb? We can go on with that argument of yours afterwards.”

“Say on, Wilbraham.”

“Is Lynborough in his right senses?”

“The point is doubtful.”

“Are you in yours?”

Stabb reflected. “I am sane—but very highly specialised,” was his conclusion.

Wilbraham wrinkled his brow. “All the same, right of way or no right of way is purely a legal question,” he persisted.

“I think you’re highly specialised too,” said Stabb. “But you’d better keep quiet and see it through, you know. There may be some fun—it will serve to amuse the Archdeacon when you write.” Wilbraham’s father was a highly-esteemed dignitary of the order mentioned.

Lynborough came out again, smoking a cigar. His manner was noticeably more alert: his brow was unclouded, his whole mien tranquil and placid.

"I've put it all right," he observed. "I've written her a civil letter. Will you men bathe to-morrow?"

They both assented to the proposition.

"Very well. We'll start at eight. We may as well walk. By Beach Path it's only about half-a-mile."

"But the path's stopped, Ambrose," Stabb objected.

"I've asked her to have the obstruction removed before eight o'clock," Lynborough explained.

"If it isn't?" asked Roger Wilbraham.

"We have hands," answered Lynborough, looking at his own very small ones.

"Wilbraham wants to know why you don't go to law, Ambrose."

Lord Lynborough never shrank from explaining his views and convictions.

"The law disgusts me. So does my experience of it. You remember the beer, Cromlech? Nobody ever acted more wisely or from better motives. And if I made money—as I did, till the customers left off coming—why not? I was unobtrusively doing good. Then Juanita's affair! I acted as a gentleman is bound to act. Result—a year's imprisonment! I lay stress on these personal experiences, but not too great stress. The law, Roger, always considers what you have had and what you now have—never what you ought to have. Take that path! It happens to be a fact that my grandfather, and my father, and I have always used that path. That's important by law, I daresay——"

"Certainly, Lord Lynborough."

"Just what would be important by law!" commented Lynborough. "And I have made use of the fact in my letter to the Marchesa. But in my own mind I stand on reason and natural right. Is it reasonable that I, living half-a-mile from my bathing, should have to walk two

miles to get to it? Plainly not. Isn't it the natural right of the owner of Scarsmoor to have that path open through Nab Grange? Plainly yes. That, Roger, although, as I say, not the shape in which I have put the matter before the Marchesa—because she, being a woman, would be unappreciative of pure reason—is really the way in which the question presents itself to my mind—and, I'm sure, to Cromlech's?"

"Not the least in the world to mine," said Stabb. "However, Ambrose, the young man thinks us both mad."

"You do, Roger?" His smile persuaded to an affirmative reply.

"I'm afraid so, Lord Lynborough."

"No 'Lord', if you love me! Why do you think me mad? Cromlech, of course, is mad, so we needn't bother about him."

"You're not—not practical," stammered Roger.

"Oh, I don't know, really I don't know. You'll see that I shall get that path open. And in the end I did get that public-house closed. And Juanita's husband had to leave the country, owing to the heat of local feeling—aroused entirely by me. Juanita stayed behind and, after due formalities, married again most happily. I'm not altogether inclined to call myself unpractical. Roger!" He turned quickly to his secretary. "Your father's what they call a High Churchman, isn't he?"

"Yes—and so am I," said Roger.

"He has his Church. He puts that above the State, doesn't he? He wouldn't obey the State against the Church? He wouldn't do what the Church said was wrong because the State said it was right?"

"How could he? Of course he wouldn't," answered Roger.

"Well, I have my Church—inside here." He touched his breast. "I stand where your father does. Why am I more mad than the Archdeacon, Roger?"

"But there's all the difference!"

"Of course there is," said Stabb. "All the difference that there is between being able to do it and not being able to do it—and I know of none so profound."

"There's no difference at all," declared Lynborough. "Therefore—as a good son, no less than as a good friend—you will come and bathe with me to-morrow?"

"Oh, I'll come and bathe, by all means, Lynborough."

"By all means! Well said, young man. By all means, that is, which are becoming in opposing a lady. What precisely those may be we will consider when we see the strength of her opposition."

"That doesn't sound so very unpractical, after all," Stabb suggested to Roger.

Lynborough took his stand before Stabb, hands in pockets, smiling down at the bulk of his friend.

"O Cromlech, Haunter of Tombs," he said, "Cromlech, Lover of Men long Dead, there is a possible—indeed a probable—chance—there is a divine hope—that Life may breathe here on this coast, that the blood may run quick, that the world may move, that our old friend Fortune may smile, and trick, and juggle, and favour us once more. This, Cromlech, to a man who had determined to reform, who came home to assume—what was it? Oh yes—responsibilities!—this is most extraordinary luck. Never shall it be said that Ambrose Caverly, being harnessed and carrying a bow, turned himself back in the day of battle!"

He swayed himself to and fro on his heels, and broke into merry laughter.

"She'll get the letter to-night, Cromlech. I've sent Coltson down with it—he proceeds decorously by the highroad and the main approach. But she'll get it. Cromlech, will she read it with a beating

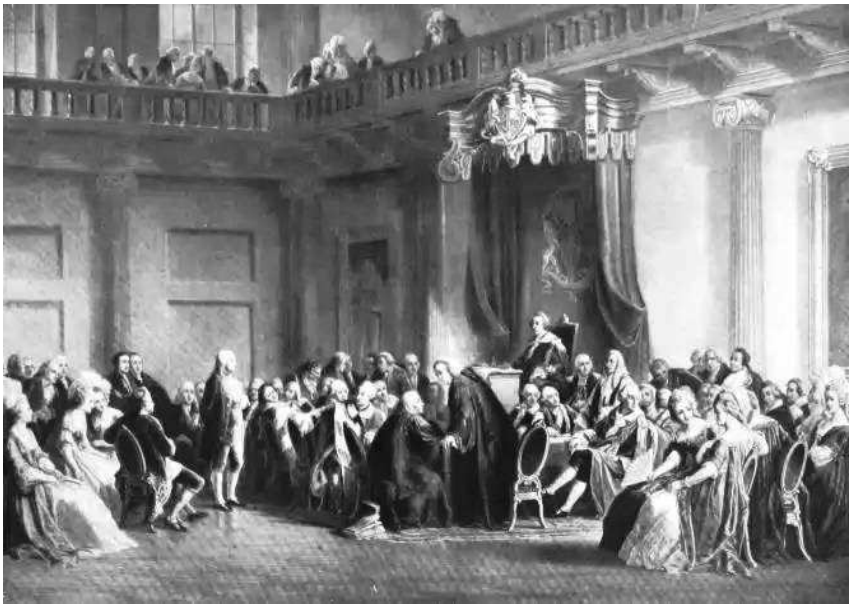
heart? Will she read it with a flushing cheek? And if so, Cromlech what, I ask you, will be the particular shade of that particular flush?"

"Oh, the sweetness of the game!" said he.

Over Nab Grange the stars seemed to twinkle roguishly.

CHAPTER IV

THE MESSAGE OF A PADLOCK



"Lord Lynborough presents his compliments to her Excellency the Marchesa di San Servolo. Lord Lynborough has learnt, with surprise and regret, that his servants have within the last two days been warned off Beach Path, and that a padlock and other obstacles have been placed on the gate leading to the path, by her Excellency's orders. Lord Lynborough and his predecessors have enjoyed the use of this path by themselves, their agents, and servants, for many years back—certainly for fifty, as Lord Lynborough knows from his father and from old servants, and Lord Lynborough is not disposed to acquiesce in any obstruction being raised to his continued use of it. He must therefore request her Excellency to have the kindness to order that the padlock and other obstacles shall be removed, and he will be obliged by this being done before eight

o'clock to-morrow morning—at which time Lord Lynborough intends to proceed by Beach Path to the sea in order to bathe. Scarsmoor Castle; 13th June."

THE reception of this letter proved an agreeable incident of an otherwise rather dull Sunday evening at Nab Grange. The Marchesa had been bored; the Colonel was sulky. Miss Gilletson had forbidden cards; her conscience would not allow herself, nor her feelings of envy permit other people, to play on the Sabbath. Lady Norah and Violet Dufaure were somewhat at cross-purposes, each preferring to talk to Stillford and endeavouring, under a false show of amity, to foist Captain Irons on to the other.

"Listen to this!" cried the Marchesa vivaciously. She read it out. "He doesn't beat about the bush, does he? I'm to surrender before eight o'clock to-morrow morning!"

"Sounds rather a peremptory sort of a chap!" observed Colonel Wenman.

"I," remarked Lady Norah, "shouldn't so much as answer him, Helena."

"I shall certainly answer him and tell him that he'll trespass on my property at his peril," said the Marchesa haughtily. "Isn't that the right way to put it, Mr Stillford?"

"If it would be a trespass, that might be one way to put it," was Stillford's professionally cautious advice. "But as I ventured to tell you when you determined to put on the padlock, the rights in the matter are not quite as clear as we could wish."

"When I bought this place, I bought a private estate—a private estate, Mr Stillford—for myself—not a short cut for Lord Lynborough! Am I to put up a notice for him, 'This Way to the Bathing Machines'?"

"I wouldn't stand it for a moment." Captain Irons sounded bellicose.

Violet Dufaure was amicably inclined.

“You might give him leave to walk through. It would be a bore for him to go round by the road every time.”

“Certainly I might give him leave if he asked for it,” retorted the Marchesa rather sharply. “But he doesn’t. He orders me to open my gate—and tells me he means to bathe! As if I cared whether he bathed or not! What is it to me, I ask you, Violet, whether the man bathes or not?”

“I beg your pardon, Marchesa, but aren’t you getting a little off the point?” Stillford intervened deferentially.

“No, I’m not. I never get off the point, Mr Stillford. Do I, Colonel Wenman?”

“I’ve never known you to do it in my life, Marchesa.” There was, in fact, as Lynborough had ventured to anticipate, a flush on the Marchesa’s cheek, and the Colonel knew his place.

“There, Mr Stillford!” she cried triumphantly. Then she swept—the expression is really applicable—across the room to her writing-table. “I shall be courteous, but quite decisive,” she announced over her shoulder as she sat down.

Stillford stood by the fire, smiling doubtfully. Evidently it was no use trying to stop the Marchesa; she had insisted on locking the gate, and she would persist in keeping it locked till she was forced, by process of law or otherwise, to open it again. But if the Lords of Scarsmoor Castle really had used it without interruption for fifty years (as Lord Lynborough asserted)—well, the Marchesa’s rights were at least in a precarious position.

The Marchesa came back with her letter in her hand. “ ‘The Marchesa di San Servolo,’ ” she read out to an admiring audience, “ ‘presents her compliments to Lord Lynborough. The Marchesa has no intention of removing the padlock and other obstacles which have been placed on the gate to prevent trespassing—either by