

Complete Story.

A Far-away Memory.

CLIVE R. FENN.

I.

When the London season is at its height the town usually wears a far more brilliant and animated appearance than at other periods of the year. There is that frisson of gaiety, of brilliancy. And this is natural enough for, apart from the ever recurrent features of the first few weeks of the English summer, the parks and gardens of the Metropolis in their summer dress, and the pleasant sunshine which idealises the prospect and transforms this work-a-day Capital into a veritable city of dreams, it is in May and June that foreign royalties and wealthy scions of the Trans-Atlantic race visit London.

It was a summer which was more than ordinarily important; a great celebration was under weigh. A monarch whose reign had never been eclipsed for grandeur in the world was being feted by her people. The streets were thronged; in the evenings all vehicular traffic had to be stopped in order that the public might walk about in peace and admire the decorations, the illuminated stars and devices in front of the buildings; royal carriages dashed by in the earlier part of the day bearing foreign royalties and attaches, and Indian princes in white and gold head-gear.

London seemed for once to have really risen to a sense of its own importance, its own magnificence. Even the poets who like to dream in the green solitude of Saint James's Park, where the noise of the traffic comes subdued, and where the meditative cow stands looking thoughtfully out from the Spring Gardens entrance at the green expanse and at the passers-by, even they were for the nonce forced to recognise that something unusual was afoot.

In office, in the busy, tumultuous world of politics, there was but little time for dreams, and yet that afternoon in June as Stuart Rockhampton walked out of the House of Commons and crossed Old Palace Yard, lighting a cigar, where policemen saluted him and where several civilians raised their hats, and as he proceeded to where his brougham was waiting, something compelled him to look back into the summer of ten years ago.

What was it which dragged him out of that rather self-centred view of the world, which forced him to look for a moment away from that decade of laborious days, of days in a library or in his place in Parliament or on an electrifying platform?

It was as though a voice ordered him to turn round figuratively and re-examine that past.

"You must look back," it said. "It is important that you should. It is June again and the Academy is open and the opera is in full swing, while lilac gardens are scented, and the world is passing happy—just as it was when ten years ago you allowed yourself to dream."

And as he reached his brougham he for the moment forgot his main points in the debate that night, and the thread of discourse he was to give on Richelieu as the tragedy writer and litterateur; instead of the present, the figures, the landscapes, the hopes, the ideals of that other time were thrust into his view.

Certainly it was not the old musician who was playing "When Other Lips" on a dyspeptic flute near a public house which had caused that harking back. It was not the secure of the statues, the garden, the grey piles of Westminster, or the carriages passing in which sat pretty women which had opened the old doorway of which he had imagined the key was lost.

Then how was it? He had lighted his cigar and had made up his mind to walk instead of driving home where work awaited him. So he merely told the footman that he should not require the carriage.

"At seven as usual," he said.

"Yes, sir," said the servant. Then he strolled past the Beaucouff field statue towards Victoria street, reflecting that though he had got on, though he had not opened his books in vain, yet maybe that was only because wealth had come, because unlike

others who had striven, alas! in vain, he had not been called away. There would have been that same life and bustle and turmoil, the crowd in shops, the shouting, the far away cries, whether he had lived or died. And in the midst of that souvenir there came back recollections of an old garden, of Paris, of early struggles, and of a young girl whose features he remembered as well as though he had studied her photograph every day since that time.

"If Adrienne had only thought differently," he said, and he said it with a sigh.

II.

Involuntarily he found himself going back there into that old time, stealing odd moments for a fresh glimpse of those distant days since the passing of which he had seen so much, lived so much and so ardently, rushing forward to a great position, holding a high place in the national council chamber.

He had thought that it was all buried, that he would never dream again; yet it seemed as though some softening sentiment, as fairy-like as a mist from the sea, had come in to change his resolution, to urge him to find something more in that bygone than a mere nucleus of regret, a forcing-house of melancholy.

Every thing had been represented there; he saw farmhouses, old country sides, country roads with primroses and bluebells bordering the land on either side, and old tunes came back, tunes which were out of the fashion now.

Or in his place in the house there came back some old chance triviality out of the old days, and he would make a pencil mark on his papers in the interest and excitement of the moment. But it was a time surely to forget those things when the nation was en fete, when the cavalry was riding through the streets amid the blare of trumpets, when a great queen was being acclaimed.

If he had sat down in the railway carriage of life fave to face with a regret, if he had never married though he was forty, if he would never see youngsters of his own, yet the world nevertheless had been tolerably kind.

It was in his old student days that he had first seen Adrienne, at a time when he was emerging from his chrysalis state, when the few friends whom he could boast predicted a great future.

"But," they said, "you must get known."

A few articles in the press, an historical disquisition had brought him under the notice of a wealthy amateur, a writer on kindred subjects. Lord Pymont had expressed a wish to meet him. "He is a thinker," he had said.

So it had happened that at a soiree of a learned society, a friend, Aynton, a Glasgow man, had come up to Stuart Rockhampton who in moments of disenchantment had imagined that he would never be able to make his name, that he would be smothered in the pressure, and said:

"Stuart, old fellow, I have something which may be useful to you, and which I am sure will be useful to the other man too."

"What is it?" he asked.

"Lord Pymont, you see the old man over the way with a blue ribbon round his neck—wishes to be introduced to you."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, my dear fellow, I mean it. He read your article and wants to have a talk."

And Stuart allowed himself to be conducted towards the "old gentleman with the blue ribbon round his neck," en route his friend saying: "He will do much for you, my dear fellow, if you once get into the swing."

Lord Pymont proved to be a man of large ideas. He talked long with Stuart, and assured him politely that he (Pymont) was only a beginner in that branch of political knowledge which Stuart had dealt with so admirably.

"I wish, Mr. Rockhampton," he said at parting, "that we could finish our talk under less crowded conditions. You could assist me too with several points of something I am about just now. Have you any spare time? Could you come and see me?"

"I should be pleased," said Stuart, "but—"

"Ah, you will come! I'm sure that you will. Let's see, to-day is Tuesday. Come on Thursday, will you, and lunch with us at a quarter to one?"

III.

In those days, when he was still in the ante-room of fortune waiting for the door to be opened and for his name to be called, he lived in a quarter of the town held in but low estimation by those who lead.

It was south of the Thames in a dim region of docks, of lodging houses and quaint and narrow streets in which the railway company thought it had a right to lay lines, for goods trucks escaped out of neighbouring yards were to be met in the thoroughfares parleying with milk carts, resembling in proportion elephants footing it among a drove of asses.

He lived there because it was cheap and not too far away. He could see Vauxhall Bridge and a quaint panorama of old buildings and towers, and the since dismantled Convict Prison at Millbank and Doulton's Pottery Works from the window of his sitting-room, a room littered with papers and books.

The cab which he took outside his chambers on the following Thursday took him into quite a different district. It did not seem to be the same capital.

Lord Pymont lived in Park Lane; his was a magnificent house, the windows of which overlooked the Park. It was about twenty minutes to one when he went up the steps and rang the bell.

In the old style drawing-room, white and gold with pastoral frescoes, into which he was shown, he was soon joined by his host who wore a scarlet geranium in his grey frock coat. He came forward eagerly.

"I am very glad to see you," he said cordially, "very glad indeed."

They had fallen into a conversation on general subjects, and the old nobleman pointed out one or two pictures of interest in the room. The sound of summer came through the window and a puff of hot air from a winter garden at the other end of the apartment brought with it the scent of many flowering plants. And the Baron began to speak of the old days, of what had been in that past into the mysteries of which they were both peering. The old arms on the walls, the pictures of Lancret and Watteau, with their azure and white effects out of Arcadia, the few ancient volumes which his host showed him after they had entered a side library, gave Rockhampton much to think about, much which would remain in the memory. They were living in a later age—an age however when thought was active and all comprehending, and though he stood outside the charmed circle yet there was in that glimpse back, something so thrilling, there was something so important in looking at objects which had been owned by people who understood the world and life, who had glanced out of palace

windows and taken it all in, that he felt appeased.

The Baron was turning over a volume three hundred years old in which the learned monk Alvarius had recorded his impressions, when the door opened and a footman appeared.

"His Lordship is served," he said.

Lord Pymont took his guest's arm and they walked through a suite of apartments to the dining-room which was a magnificent chamber.

There were two people in the room when they entered besides the footmen, and he heard as in a dream the Baron saying:

"You have not met my daughter. I will make the introduction. Adrienne, this is Mr Stuart Rockhampton, a student of history, and a great politician if I mistake not. Mr Rockhampton, my daughter, Miss Morningtower."

There was also an old lady in black present, who was introduced, but he scarcely heard her name or her remark:

"You must have studied much."

He had only eyes for the young girl who was tall and seemed to blend the extreme grace of a Frenchwoman with Saxon fairness and Danish blue eyes.

It was rather a silent repast at first; then Adrienne let drop an observation about a horse, and said something about an invitation which she wished to accept.

"But you will be at Baden then with me," said her father.

"Oh, of course, I forgot," she replied.

IV.

Looking back at that time, Stuart found excuses for his aspirations. Adrienne had seemed to him to represent all that was most beautiful in the world. To look back was as sad as re-examining a mind's eye picture of a country road, of a park in summer, of a quaint old countryside. It was a thought which came back at all times on odd Saturday afternoons, and it always brought with it the semi-mocking reminder that though he had found success he had not found happiness.

After lunch, and after a chat with her father about the book on which he was engaged, he had left, though not before seeing her again when he was leaving; she was crossing the hall dressed for a drive. She came up and said:

"Are you going so soon?"

"Yes, I think your father has told me all that he wished."

"Oh! But you are surely coming again?"

"I hope so."

"But don't only hope. Come."

"Thank you so much," he said.

That was the final all, and it was not much.

But the footman was holding the door open, and Madame Ernestine was waiting to accompany her charge on that drive.

"Well, good-bye again," she said pleasantly, holding out her gloved hand. "Don't let father lament too much over Queen Marie Antoinette in his work."

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