

## CHAPTER VII

This unexpected rebuff from Mr. Labouchere rankled for many days in Andrew's mind. Had he been proposing for the great statesman's hand he could not have felt it more. Perhaps he did not make sufficient allowance for Mr. Labouchere; it is always so easy to advise.

But to rage at a man (or woman) is the proof that we can adore them; it is only his loved ones who infuriate a Scotchman.

There were moments when Andrew said to himself that he had nothing more to live for.

Then he would upbraid himself for having gone about it too hurriedly, and in bitter self-contempt strike his hand on the railings, as he rushed by.

Work is the sovereign remedy for this unhealthy state of mind, and fortunately Andrew had a great deal to do.

Gradually the wound healed, and he began to take an interest in Lord Randolph Churchill.

Every day the Flying Scotchman shoots its refuse of clever young men upon London who are too ambitious to do anything.

Andrew was not one of these.

Seeking to carry off one of the greatest prizes in his profession, he had aimed too high for a beginner.

When he realised this he apprenticed himself, so to speak, to the president, determined to acquire a practical knowledge of his art in all its branches. Though a very young man, he had still much to learn. It was only in his leisure moments that he gave way to dreams over a magnum opus .

But when he did set about it, which must be before his period of probation closed, he had made up his mind to be thorough.

The months thus passed quietly but not unprofitably in assisting the president, acquainting himself with the favourite resorts of interesting persons and composing his thesis.

At intervals the monotony was relieved by more strictly society work. On these occasions he played a part not dissimilar to that of a junior counsel.

The president found him invaluable in his raid on the gentlemen with umbrellas who read newspapers in the streets.

It was Andrew--though he never got the credit of it--who put his senior in possession of the necessary particulars about the comic writers whose subject is teetotalism and spinsters.

He was unwearied, indeed, in his efforts with regard to the comic journals generally, and the first man of any note that he disposed of was "Punch's" favourite artist on Scotch matters. This was in an alley off Fleet Street.

Andrew took a new interest in the House of Lords, and had a magnificent scheme for ending it in half an hour.

As the members could never be got together in any number, this fell through.

Lord Brabourne will remember the young man in a straw hat, with his neck covered up, who attended the House so regularly when it was announced that he was to speak. That was Andrew.

It was he who excitedly asked the Black Rod to point out Lord Sherbrooke, when it was intimated that this peer was preparing a volume of poems for the press.

In a month's time Andrew knew the likeliest places to meet these and other noble lords alone.

The publishing offices of "England," the only Conservative newspaper, had a fascination for him.

He got to know Mr. Ashmead Bartlett's hours of calling, until the sight of him on the pavement was accepted as a token that the proprietor was inside.

They generally reached the House of Commons about the same time.

Here Andrew's interest was discriminated among quite a number of members. Mr. Bradlaugh, Mr. Sexton, and Mr. Marjoribanks, the respected member for Berwickshire, were perhaps his favourites; but the one he dwelt with most pride on was Lord Randolph Churchill.

One night he gloated so long over Sir George Trevelyan leaning over Westminster Bridge that in the end he missed him.

When Andrew made up his mind to have a man he got to like him. This was his danger.

With press tickets, which he got very cheap, he often looked in at the theatres to acquaint himself with the faces and figures of the constant frequenters.

He drew capital pencil sketches of the leading critics in his note-book.

The gentleman next him that night at "Manteaux Noirs" would not have laughed so heartily if he had known why Andrew listened for his address to the cabman.

The young Scotchman resented people's merriment over nothing; sometimes he took the Underground Railway just to catch clerks at "Tit-Bits."

One afternoon he saw some way in front of him in Piccadilly a man with a young head on old shoulders.

Andrew recognized him by the swing of his stick; he could have identified his plaid among a hundred thousand morning coats. It was John Stuart Blackie, his favourite professor.

Since the young man graduated, his old preceptor had resigned his chair, and was now devoting his time to writing sonnets to himself in the Scotch newspapers.

Andrew could not bear to think of it, and quickened his pace to catch him up. But Blackie was in great form, humming "Scots wha hae." With head thrown back, staff revolving and chest inflated, he sang himself into a martial ecstasy, and, drumming cheerily on the doors with his fist, strutted along like a band of bagpipers with a clan behind him, until he had played himself out of Andrew's sight.

Far be it from our intention to maintain that Andrew was invariably successful. That is not given to any man.

Sometimes his hands slipped.

Had he learned the piano in his younger days this might not have happened. But if he had been a pianist the president would probably have wiped him out--and very rightly. There can be no doubt about male pianists.

Nor was the fault always Andrew's. When the society was founded, many far-seeing men had got wind of it, and had themselves elected honorary members before the committee realised what they were after.

This was a sore subject with the president; he shunned discussing it, and thus Andrew had frequently to discontinue cases after he was well on with them.

In this way much time was lost.

Andrew was privately thanked by the committee for one suggestion, which, for all he knows, may yet be carried out. The president had a wide interest in the press, and on one occasion he remarked to Andrew:

"Think of the snobs and the prigs who would be saved if the 'Saturday Review' and the 'Spectator' could be induced to cease publication!"

Andrew thought it out, and then produced his scheme.

The battle of the clans on the North Inch of Perth had always seemed to him a master-stroke of diplomacy.

"Why," he said to the president, "not set the 'Saturday's' staff against the 'Spectator's.' If about equally matched, they might exterminate each other."

So his days of probation passed, and the time drew nigh for Andrew to show what stuff was in him.