

### **CHAPTER III. - THE ARCADIA MIXTURE.**

Darkness comes, and with it the porter to light our stair gas. He vanishes into his box. Already the inn is so quiet that the tap of a pipe on a window-sill startles all the sparrows in the quadrangle. The men on my stair emerged from their holes. Scrymgeour, in a dressing-gown, pushes open the door of the boudoir on the first floor, and climbs lazily. The sentimental face and the clay with a crack in it are Marriot's. Gilray, who has been rehearsing his part in the new original comedy from the Icelandic, ceases muttering and feels his way along his dark lobby. Jimmy pins a notice on his door, "Called away on business," and crosses to me. Soon we are all in the old room again, Jimmy on the hearth-rug, Marriot in the cane chair; the curtains are pinned together with a pen-nib, and the five of us are smoking the Arcadia Mixture.

Pettigrew will be welcomed if he comes, but he is a married man, and we seldom see him nowadays. Others will be regarded as intruders. If they are smoking common tobaccos, they must either be allowed to try ours or requested to withdraw. One need only put his head in at my door to realize that tobaccos are of two kinds, the Arcadia and others. No one who smokes the Arcadia would ever attempt to describe its delights, for his pipe would be certain to go out. When he was at school, Jimmy Moggridge smoked a cane chair, and he has since said that from cane to ordinary mixtures was not so noticeable as the change from ordinary mixtures to the Arcadia. I ask no one to believe this, for the confirmed smoker in Arcadia detests arguing with anybody about anything. Were I anxious to prove Jimmy's statement, I would merely give you the only address at which the Arcadia is to be had. But that I will not do. It would be as rash as proposing a man with whom I am unacquainted for my club. You may not be worthy to smoke the Arcadia Mixture.

Even though I became attached to you, I might not like to take the responsibility of introducing you to the Arcadia. This mixture has an extraordinary effect upon character, and probably you want to remain as you are. Before I discovered the Arcadia, and communicated it to the other five--including Pettigrew--we had all distinct individualities, but now, except in appearance--and the Arcadia even tells on that--we are as like as holly leaves. We have the same habits, the same ways of looking at things, the same satisfaction in each other. No doubt we are not yet

absolutely alike, indeed I intend to prove this, but in given circumstances we would probably do the same thing, and, furthermore, it would be what other people would not do. Thus when we are together we are only to be distinguished by our pipes; but any one of us in the company of persons who smoke other tobaccos would be considered highly original. He would be a pigtail in Europe.

If you meet in company a man who has ideas and is not shy, yet refuses absolutely to be drawn into talk, you may set him down as one of us. Among the first effects of the Arcadia is to put an end to jabber. Gilray had at one time the reputation of being such a brilliant talker that Arcadians locked their doors on him, but now he is a man that can be invited anywhere. The Arcadia is entirely responsible for the change. Perhaps I myself am the most silent of our company, and hostesses usually think me shy. They ask ladies to draw me out, and when the ladies find me as hopeless as a sulky drawer, they call me stupid. The charge may be true, but I do not resent it, for I smoke the Arcadia Mixture, and am consequently indifferent to abuse.

I willingly gibbet myself to show how reticent the Arcadia makes us. It happens that I have a connection with Nottingham, and whenever a man mentions Nottingham to me, with a certain gleam in his eye, I know that he wants to discuss the lace trade. But it is a curious fact that the aggressive talker constantly mixes up Nottingham and Northampton. "Oh, you know Nottingham," he says, interestedly; "and how do you like Labouchere for a member?" Do you think I put him right? Do you imagine me thirsting to tell that Mr. Labouchere is the Christian member for Northampton? Do you suppose me swift to explain that Mr. Broadhurst is one of the Nottingham members, and that the "Nottingham lambs" are notorious in the history of political elections? Do you fancy me explaining that he is quite right in saying that Nottingham has a large market-place? Do you see me drawn into half an hour's talk about Robin Hood? That is not my way. I merely reply that we like Mr. Labouchere pretty well. It may be said that I gain nothing by this; that the talker will be as curious about Northampton as he would have been about Nottingham, and that Bradlaugh and Labouchere and boots will serve his turn quite as well as Broadhurst and lace and Robin Hood. But that is not so. Beginning on Northampton in the most confident manner, it suddenly flashes across him that he has mistaken Northampton for Nottingham. "How foolish of me!" he says. I maintain a severe silence. He

is annoyed. My experience of talkers tells me that nothing annoys them so much as a blunder of this kind. From the coldly polite way in which I have taken the talker's remarks, he discovers the value I put upon them, and after that, if he has a neighbor on the other side, he leaves me alone.

Enough has been said to show that the Arcadian's golden rule is to be careful about what he says. This does not mean that he is to say nothing. As society is at present constituted you are bound to make an occasional remark. But you need not make it rashly. It has been said somewhere that it would be well for talkative persons to count twenty, or to go over the alphabet, before they let fall the observation that trembles on their lips. The non-talker has no taste for such an unintellectual exercise. At the same time he must not hesitate too long, for, of course, it is to his advantage to introduce the subject. He ought to think out a topic of which his neighbor will not be able to make very much. To begin on the fall of snow, or the number of tons of turkeys consumed on Christmas Day, as stated in the Daily Telegraph, is to deserve your fate. If you are at a dinner-party of men only, take your host aside, and in a few well-considered sentences find out from him what kind of men you are to sit between during dinner. Perhaps one of them is an African traveller. A knowledge of this prevents your playing into his hands, by remarking that the papers are full of the relief of Emin Pasha. These private inquiries will also save you from talking about Mr. Chamberlain to a neighbor who turns out to be the son of a Birmingham elector. Allow that man his chance, and he will not only give you the Birmingham gossip, but what individual electors said about Mr. Chamberlain to the banker or the tailor, and what the grocer did the moment the poll was declared, with particulars about the antiquity of Birmingham and the fishing to be had in the neighborhood. What you ought to do is to talk about Emin Pasha to this man, and to the traveller about Mr. Chamberlain, taking care, of course, to speak in a low voice. In that way you may have comparative peace. Everything, however, depends on the calibre of your neighbors. If they agree to look upon you as an honorable antagonist, and so to fight fair, the victory will be to him who deserves it; that is to say, to the craftier man of the two. But talkers, as a rule, do not fight fair. They consider silent men their prey. It will thus be seen that I distinguish between talkers, admitting that some of them are worse than others. The lowest in the social scale is he who stabs you in the back, as it were, instead of crossing swords. If one of the gentlemen introduced to you is of that type, he will not be ashamed to say, "Speaking of Emin

Pasha, I wonder if Mr. Chamberlain is interested in the relief expedition. I don't know if I told you that my father----" and there he is, fairly on horseback. It is seldom of any use to tempt him into other channels. Better turn to your traveller and let him describe the different routes to Egyptian Equatorial Provinces, with his own views thereon. Allow him even to draw a map of Africa with a fork on the table-cloth. A talker of this kind is too full of his subject to insist upon answering questions, so that he does not trouble you much. It is his own dinner that is spoiled rather than yours. Treat in the same way as the Chamberlain talker the man who sits down beside you and begins, "Remarkable man, Mr. Gladstone."

There was a ventilator in my room, which sometimes said "Crik-crik!" reminding us that no one had spoken for an hour. Occasionally, however, we had lapses of speech, when Gilray might tell over again--though not quite as I mean to tell it--the story of his first pipeful of the Arcadia, or Scrymgeour, the travelled man, would give us the list of famous places in Europe where he had smoked. But, as a rule, none of us paid much attention to what the others said, and after the last pipe the room emptied--unless Marriot insisted on staying behind to bore me with his scruples--by first one and then another putting his pipe into his pocket and walking silently out of the room.