BOOK THE SECOND. AMELIUS IN LONDON

CHAPTER 1

Oh, Rufus Dingwell, it is such a rainy day! And the London street which I look out on from my hotel window presents such a dirty and such a miserable view! Do you know, I hardly feel like the same Amelius who promised to write to you when you left the steamer at Queenstown. My spirits are sinking; I begin to feel old. Am I in the right state of mind to tell you what are my first impressions of London? Perhaps I may alter my opinion. At present (this is between ourselves), I don't like London or London people--excepting two ladies, who, in very different ways, have interested and charmed me.

Who are the ladies? I must tell you what I heard about them from Mr. Hethcote, before I present them to you on my own responsibility.

After you left us, I found the last day of the voyage to Liverpool dull enough. Mr. Hethcote did not seem to feel it in the same way: on the contrary, he grew more familiar and confidential in his talk with me. He has some of the English stiffness, you see, and your American pace was a little too fast for him. On our last night on board, we had some more conversation about the Farnabys. You were not interested enough in the subject to attend to what he said about them while you were with us; but if you are to be introduced to the ladies, you must be interested now. Let me first inform you that Mr. and Mrs. Farnaby have no children; and let me add that they have adopted the daughter and orphan child of Mrs. Farnaby's sister. This sister, it seems, died many years ago, surviving her husband for a few months only. To complete the story of the past, death has also taken old Mr. Ronald, the founder of the stationer's business, and his wife, Mrs. Farnaby's mother. Dry facts these--I don't deny it; but there is something more interesting to follow. I have next to tell you how Mr. Hethcote first became acquainted with Mrs. Farnaby. Now, Rufus, we are coming to something romantic at last!

It is some time since Mr. Hethcote ceased to perform his clerical duties, owing to a malady in the throat, which made it painful for him to take his place in the reading-desk or the pulpit. His last curacy attached him to a church at the West-end of London; and here, one Sunday evening, after he

had preached the sermon, a lady in trouble came to him in the vestry for spiritual advice and consolation. She was a regular attendant at the church, and something which he had said in that evening's sermon had deeply affected her. Mr. Hethcote spoke with her afterwards on many occasions at home. He felt a sincere interest in her, but he disliked her husband; and, when he gave up his curacy, he ceased to pay visits to the house. As to what Mrs. Farnaby's troubles were, I can tell you nothing. Mr. Hethcote spoke very gravely and sadly when he told me that the subject of his conversations with her must be kept a secret. "I doubt whether you and Mr. Farnaby will get on well together," he said to me; "but I shall be astonished if you are not favourably impressed by his wife and her niece."

This was all I knew when I presented my letter of introduction to Mr. Farnaby at his place of business.

It was a grand stone building, with great plate-glass windows--all renewed and improved, they told me, since old Mr. Ronald's time. My letter and my card went into an office at the back, and I followed them after a while. A lean, hard, middle-aged man, buttoned up tight in a black frock-coat, received me, holding my written introduction open in his hand. He had a ruddy complexion not commonly seen in Londoners, so far as my experience goes. His iron-gray hair and whiskers (especially the whiskers) were in wonderfully fine order--as carefully oiled and combed as if he had just come out of a barber's shop. I had been in the morning to the Zoological Gardens; his eyes, when he lifted them from the letter to me, reminded me of the eyes of the eagles--glassy and cruel. I have a fault that I can't cure myself of. I like people, or dislike them, at first sight, without knowing, in either case, whether they deserve it or not. In the one moment when our eyes met, I felt the devil in me. In plain English, I hated Mr. Farnaby!

"Good morning, sir," he began, in a loud, harsh, rasping voice. "The letter you bring me takes me by surprise."

"I thought the writer was an old friend of yours," I said.

"An old friend of mine," Mr. Farnaby answered, "whose errors I deplore. When he joined your Community, I looked upon him as a lost man. I am surprised at his writing to me."

It is quite likely I was wrong, knowing nothing of the usages of society in England. I thought this reception of me downright rude. I had laid my hat on a chair; I took it up in my hand again, and delivered a parting shot at the brute with the oily whiskers.

"If I had known what you now tell me," I said, "I should not have troubled you by presenting that letter. Good morning."

This didn't in the least offend him. A curious smile broke out on his face; it widened his eyes, and it twitched up his mouth at one corner. He held out his hand to stop me. I waited, in case he felt bound to make an apology. He did nothing of the sort--he only made a remark.

"You are young and hasty," he said. "I may lament my friend's extravagances, without failing on that account in what is due to an old friendship. You are probably not aware that we have no sympathy in England with Socialists."

I hit him back again. "In that case, sir, a little Socialism in England would do you no harm. We consider it a part of our duty as Christians to feel sympathy with all men who are honest in their convictions--no matter how mistaken (in our opinion) the convictions may be." I rather thought I had him there; and I took up my hat again, to get off with the honours of victory while I had the chance.

I am sincerely ashamed of myself, Rufus, in telling you all this. I ought to have given him back "the soft answer that turneth away wrath"--my conduct was a disgrace to my Community. What evil influence was at work in me? Was it the air of London? or was it a possession of the devil?

He stopped me for the second time--not in the least disconcerted by what I had said to him. His inbred conviction of his own superiority to a young adventurer like me was really something magnificent to witness. He did me justice--the Philistine-Pharisee did me justice! Will you believe it? He made his remarks next on my good points, as if I had been a young bull at a prize cattle show.

"Excuse me for noticing it," he said. "Your manners are perfectly gentlemanlike, and you speak English without any accent. And yet you have been brought up in America. What does it mean?"

I grew worse and worse--I got downright sulky now.

"I suppose it means," I answered, "that some of us, in America, cultivate ourselves as well as our land. We have our books and music, though you seem to think we only have our axes and spades. Englishmen don't claim a monopoly of good manners at Tadmor. We see no difference between an

American gentleman and an English gentleman. And as for speaking English with an accent, the Americans accuse us of doing that."

He smiled again. "How very absurd!" he said, with a superb compassion for the benighted Americans. By this time, I suspect he began to feel that he had had enough of me. He got rid of me with an invitation.

"I shall be glad to receive you at my private residence, and introduce you to my wife and her niece--our adopted daughter. There is the address. We have a few friends to dinner on Saturday next, at seven. Will you give us the pleasure of your company?"

We are all aware that there is a distinction between civility and cordiality; but I myself never knew how wide that distinction might be, until Mr. Farnaby invited me to dinner. If I had not been curious (after what Mr. Hethcote had told me) to see Mrs. Farnaby and her niece, I should certainly have slipped out of the engagement. As it was, I promised to dine with Oily-Whiskers.

He put his hand into mine at parting. It felt as moistly cold as a dead fish. After getting out again into the street, I turned into the first tavern I passed, and ordered a drink. Shall I tell you what else I did? I went into the lavatory, and washed Mr. Farnaby off my hand. (N.B.--If I had behaved in this way at Tadmor, I should have been punished with the lighter penalty--taking my meals by myself, and being forbidden to enter the Common Room for eight and forty hours.) I feel I am getting wickeder and wickeder in London--I have half a mind to join you in Ireland. What does Tom Moore say of his countrymen--he ought to know, I suppose? "For though they love women and golden store: Sir Knight, they love honour and virtue more!" They must have been all Socialists in Tom Moore's time. Just the place for me.

I have been obliged to wait a little. A dense fog has descended on us by way of variety. With a stinking coal fire, with the gas lit and the curtains drawn at half-past eleven in the forenoon, I feel that I am in my own country again at last. Patience, my friend--patience! I am coming to the ladies.

Entering Mr. Farnaby's private residence on the appointed day, I became acquainted with one more of the innumerable insincerities of modern English life. When a man asks you to dine with him at seven o'clock, in other countries, he means what he says. In England, he means half-past seven, and sometimes a quarter to eight. At seven o'clock I was the only person in Mr. Farnaby's drawing-room. At ten minutes past seven, Mr. Farnaby made his appearance. I had a good mind to take his place in the

middle of the hearth-rug, and say, "Farnaby, I am glad to see you." But I looked at his whiskers; and they said to me, as plainly as words could speak, "Better not!"

In five minutes more, Mrs. Farnaby joined us.

I wish I was a practised author--or, no, I would rather, for the moment, be a competent portrait-painter, and send you Mrs. Farnaby's likeness enclosed. How I am to describe her in words, I really don't know. My dear fellow, she almost frightened me. I never before saw such a woman; I never expect to see such a woman again. There was nothing in her figure, or in her way of moving, that produced this impression on me--she is little and fat, and walks with a firm, heavy step, like the step of a man. Her face is what I want to make you see as plainly as I saw it myself: it was her face that startled me.

So far as I can pretend to judge, she must have been pretty, in a healthy way, when she was young. I declare I hardly know whether she is not pretty now. She certainly has no marks or wrinkles; her hair either has no gray in it, or is too light to show the gray. She has preserved her fair complexion; perhaps with art to assist it--I can't say. As for her lips--I am not speaking disrespectfully, I am only describing them truly, when I say that they invite kisses in spite of her. In two words, though she has been married (as I know from what one of the guests told me after dinner) for sixteen years, she would be still an irresistible little woman, but for the one startling drawback of her eyes. Don't mistake me. In themselves, they are large, well-opened blue eyes, and may at one time have been the chief attraction in her face. But now there is an expression of suffering in them--long, unsolaced suffering, as I believe--so despairing and so dreadful, that she really made my heart ache when I looked at her. I will swear to it, that woman lives in some secret hell of her own making, and longs for the release of death; and is so inveterately full of bodily life and strength, that she may carry her burden with her to the utmost verge of life. I am digging the pen into the paper, I feel this so strongly, and I am so wretchedly incompetent to express my feeling. Can you imagine a diseased mind, imprisoned in a healthy body? I don't care what doctors or books may say--it is that, and nothing else. Nothing else will solve the mystery of the smooth face, the fleshy figure, the firm step, the muscular grip of her hand when she gives it to you--and the soul in torment that looks at you all the while out of her eyes. It is useless to tell me that such a contradiction as this cannot exist. I have seen the woman; and she does exist.

Oh yes! I can fancy you grinning over my letter--I can hear you saying to

yourself, "Where did he pick up his experience, I wonder?" I have no experience--I only have something that serves me instead of it, and I don't know what. The Elder Brother, at Tadmor, used to say it was sympathy. But he is a sentimentalist.

Well, Mr. Farnaby presented me to his wife--and then walked away as if he was sick of us both, and looked out of the window.

For some reason or other, Mrs. Farnaby seemed to be surprised, for the moment, by my personal appearance. Her husband had, very likely, not told her how young I was. She got over her momentary astonishment, and, signing to me to sit by her on the sofa, said the necessary words of welcome--evidently thinking something else all the time. The strange miserable eyes looked over my shoulder, instead of looking at me.

"Mr. Farnaby tells me you have been living in America."

The tone in which she spoke was curiously quiet and monotonous. I have heard such tones, in the Far West, from lonely settlers without a neighbouring soul to speak to. Has Mrs. Farnaby no neighbouring soul to speak to, except at dinner parties?

"You are an Englishman, are you not?" she went on.

I said Yes, and cast about in my mind for something to say to her. She saved me the trouble by making me the victim of a complete series of questions. This, as I afterwards discovered, was her way of finding conversation for strangers. Have you ever met with absent-minded people to whom it is a relief to ask questions mechanically, without feeling the slightest interest in the answers?

She began. "Where did you live in America?"

"At Tadmor, in the State of Illinois."

"What sort of place is Tadmor?"

I described the place as well as I could, under the circumstances.

"What made you go to Tadmor?"

It was impossible to reply to this, without speaking of the Community. Feeling that the subject was not in the least likely to interest her, I spoke as

briefly as I could. To my astonishment, I evidently began to interest her from that moment. The series of questions went on--but now she not only listened, she was eager for the answers.

"Are there any women among you?"

"Nearly as many women as men."

Another change! Over the weary misery of her eyes there flashed a bright look of interest which completely transformed them. Her articulation even quickened when she put her next question.

"Are any of the women friendless creatures, who came to you from England?"

"Yes, some of them."

I thought of Mellicent as I spoke. Was this new interest that I had so innocently aroused, an interest in Mellicent? Her next question only added to my perplexity. Her next question proved that my guess had completely failed to hit the mark.

"Are there any young women among them?"

Mr. Farnaby, standing with his back to us thus far, suddenly turned and looked at her, when she inquired if there were "young" women among us.

"Oh yes," I said. "Mere girls."

She pressed so near to me that her knees touched mine. "How old?" she asked eagerly.

Mr. Farnaby left the window, walked close up to the sofa, and deliberately interrupted us.

"Nasty muggy weather, isn't it?" he said. "I suppose the climate of America--"

Mrs. Farnaby deliberately interrupted her husband. "How old?" she repeated, in a louder tone.

I was bound, of course, to answer the lady of the house. "Some girls from eighteen to twenty. And some younger."

"How much younger?"

"Oh, from sixteen to seventeen."

She grew more and more excited; she positively laid her hand on my arm in her eagerness to secure my attention all to herself. "American girls or English?" she resumed, her fat, firm fingers closing on me with a tremulous grasp.

"Shall you be in town in November?" said Mr. Farnaby, purposely interrupting us again. "If you would like to see the Lord Mayor's Show--"

Mrs. Farnaby impatiently shook me by the arm. "American girls or English?" she reiterated, more obstinately than ever.

Mr. Farnaby gave her one look. If he could have put her on the blazing fire and have burnt her up in an instant by an effort of will, I believe he would have made the effort. He saw that I was observing him, and turned quickly from his wife to me. His ruddy face was pale with suppressed rage. My early arrival had given Mrs. Farnaby an opportunity of speaking to me, which he had not anticipated in inviting me to dinner. "Come and see my pictures," he said.

His wife still held me fast. Whether he liked it or not, I had again no choice but to answer her. "Some American girls, and some English," I said.

Her eyes opened wider and wider in unutterable expectation. She suddenly advanced her face so close to mine, that I felt her hot breath on my cheeks as the next words burst their way through her lips.

"Born in England?"

"No. Born at Tadmor."

She dropped my arm. The light died out of her eyes in an instant. In some inconceivable way, I had utterly destroyed some secret expectation that she had fixed on me. She actually left me on the sofa, and took a chair on the opposite side of the fireplace. Mr. Farnaby, turning paler and paler, stepped up to her as she changed her place. I rose to look at the pictures on the wall nearest to me. You remarked the extraordinary keenness of my sense of hearing, while we were fellow passengers on the steamship. When he stooped over her, and whispered in her ear, I heard him--though nearly the whole breadth of the room was between us. "You hell-cat!"--that was what

Mr. Farnaby said to his wife.

The clock on the mantelpiece struck the half-hour after seven. In quick succession, the guests at the dinner now entered the room.

I was so staggered by the extraordinary scene of married life which I had just witnessed, that the guests produced only a very faint impression upon me. My mind was absorbed in trying to find the true meaning of what I had seen and heard. Was Mrs. Farnaby a little mad? I dismissed that idea as soon as it occurred to me; nothing that I had observed in her justified it. The truer conclusion appeared to be, that she was deeply interested in some absent (and possibly lost) young creature; whose age, judging by actions and tones which had sufficiently revealed that part of the secret to me, could not be more than sixteen or seventeen years. How long had she cherished the hope of seeing the girl, or hearing of her? It must have been, anyhow, a hope very deeply rooted, for she had been perfectly incapable of controlling herself when I had accidentally roused it. As for her husband, there could be no doubt that the subject was not merely distasteful to him, but so absolutely infuriating that he could not even keep his temper, in the presence of a third person invited to his house. Had he injured the girl in any way? Was he responsible for her disappearance? Did his wife know it, or only suspect it? Who was the girl? What was the secret of Mrs. Farnaby's extraordinary interest in her--Mrs. Farnaby, whose marriage was childless; whose interest one would have thought should be naturally concentrated on her adopted daughter, her sister's orphan child? In conjectures such as these, I completely lost myself. Let me hear what your ingenuity can make of the puzzle; and let me return to Mr. Farnaby's dinner, waiting on Mr. Farnaby's table.

The servant threw open the drawing-room door, and the most honoured guest present led Mrs. Farnaby to the dining-room. I roused myself to some observation of what was going on about me. No ladies had been invited; and the men were all of a certain age. I looked in vain for the charming niece. Was she not well enough to appear at the dinner-party? I ventured on putting the question to Mr. Farnaby.

"You will find her at the tea-table, when we return to the drawing-room. Girls are out of place at dinner-parties." So he answered me--not very graciously.

As I stepped out on the landing, I looked up; I don't know why, unless I was the unconscious object of magnetic attraction. Anyhow, I had my reward. A bright young face peeped over the balusters of the upper staircase, and

modestly withdrew itself again in a violent hurry. Everybody but Mr. Farnaby and myself had disappeared in the dining-room. Was she having a peep at the young Socialist?

Another interruption to my letter, caused by another change in the weather. The fog has vanished; the waiter is turning off the gas, and letting in the drab-coloured daylight. I ask him if it is still raining. He smiles, and rubs his hands, and says, "It looks like clearing up soon, sir." This man's head is gray; he has been all his life a waiter in London--and he can still see the cheerful side of things. What native strength of mind cast away on a vocation that is unworthy of it!

Well--and now about the Farnaby dinner. I feel a tightness in the lower part of my waistcoat, Rufus, when I think of the dinner; there was such a quantity of it, and Mr. Farnaby was so tyrannically resolute in forcing his luxuries down the throats of his guests. His eye was on me, if I let my plate go away before it was empty--his eye said "I have paid for this magnificent dinner, and I mean to see you eat it." Our printed list of the dishes, as they succeeded each other, also informed us of the varieties of wine which it was imperatively necessary to drink with each dish. I got into difficulties early in the proceedings. The taste of sherry, for instance, is absolutely nauseous to me; and Rhine wine turns into vinegar ten minutes after it has passed my lips. I asked for the wine that I could drink, out of its turn. You should have seen Mr. Farnaby's face, when I violated the rules of his dinner-table! It was the one amusing incident of the feast--the one thing that alleviated the dreary and mysterious spectacle of Mrs. Farnaby. There she sat, with her mind hundreds of miles away from everything that was going on about her, entangling the two guests, on her right hand and on her left, in a network of vacant questions, just as she had entangled me. I discovered that one of these gentlemen was a barrister and the other a ship-owner, by the answers which Mrs. Farnaby absently extracted from them on the subject of their respective vocations in life. And while she questioned incessantly, she ate incessantly. Her vigorous body insisted on being fed. She would have emptied her wineglass (I suspect) as readily as she plied her knife and fork--but I discovered that a certain system of restraint was established in the matter of wine. At intervals, Mr. Farnaby just looked at the butler--and the butler and his bottle, on those occasions, deliberately passed her by. Not the slightest visible change was produced in her by the eating and drinking; she was equal to any demands that any dinner could make on her. There was no flush in her face, no change in her spirits, when she rose, in obedience to English custom, and retired to the drawing-room.

Left together over their wine, the men began to talk politics.

I listened at the outset, expecting to get some information. Our readings in modern history at Tadmor had informed us of the dominant political position of the middle classes in England, since the time of the first Reform Bill. Mr. Farnaby's guests represented the respectable mediocrity of social position, the professional and commercial average of the nation. They all talked glibly enough--I and an old gentleman who sat next to me being the only listeners. I had spent the morning lazily in the smoking-room of the hotel, reading the day's newspapers. And what did I hear now, when the politicians set in for their discussion? I heard the leading articles of the day's newspapers translated into bald chat, and coolly addressed by one man to another, as if they were his own individual views on public affairs! This absurd imposture positively went the round of the table, received and respected by everybody with a stolid solemnity of make-believe which it was downright shameful to see. Not a man present said, "I saw that today in the Times or the Telegraph." Not a man present had an opinion of his own; or, if he had an opinion, ventured to express it; or, if he knew nothing of the subject, was honest enough to say so. One enormous Sham, and everybody in a conspiracy to take it for the real thing: that is an accurate description of the state of political feeling among the representative men at Mr. Farnaby's dinner. I am not judging rashly by one example only; I have been taken to clubs and public festivals, only to hear over and over again what I heard in Mr. Farnaby's dining-room. Does it need any great foresight to see that such a state of things as this cannot last much longer, in a country which has not done with reforming itself yet? The time is coming, in England, when the people who have opinions of their own will be heard, and when Parliament will be forced to open the door to them.

This is a nice outbreak of republican freedom! What does my long-suffering friend think of it--waiting all the time to be presented to Mr. Farnaby's niece? Everything in its place, Rufus. The niece followed the politics, at the time; and she shall follow them now.

You shall hear first what my next neighbour said of her--a quaint old fellow, a retired doctor, if I remember correctly. He seemed to be as weary of the second-hand newspaper talk as I was; he quite sparkled and cheered up when I introduced the subject of Miss Regina. Have I mentioned her name yet? If not, here it is for you in full:--Miss Regina Mildmay.

"I call her the brown girl," said the old gentleman. "Brown hair, brown eyes, and a brown skin. No, not a brunette; not dark enough for that--a warm, delicate brown; wait till you see it! Takes after her father, I should tell you. He was a fine-looking man in his time; foreign blood in his veins, by his

mother's side. Miss Regina gets her queer name by being christened after his mother. Never mind her name; she's a charming person. Let's drink her health."

We drank her health. Remembering that he had called her "the brown girl," I said I supposed she was still quite young.

"Better than young," the doctor answered; "in the prime of life. I call her a girl, by habit. Wait till you see her!"

"Has she a good figure, sir?"

"Ha! you're like the Turks, are you? A nice-looking woman doesn't content you--you must have her well-made too. We can accommodate you, sir; we are slim and tall, with a swing of our hips, and we walk like a goddess. Wait and see how her head is put on her shoulders--I say no more. Proud? Not she! A simple, unaffected, kind-hearted creature. Always the same; I never saw her out of temper in my life; I never heard her speak ill of anybody. The man who gets her will be a man to be envied, I can tell you!"

"Is she engaged to be married?"

"No. She has had plenty of offers; but she doesn't seem to care for anything of that sort--so far. Devotes herself to Mrs. Farnaby, and keeps up her school-friendships. A splendid creature, with the vital thermometer at temperate heart--a calm, meditative, equable person. Pass me the olives. Only think! the man who discovered olives is unknown; no statue of him erected in any part of the civilized earth. I know few more remarkable instances of human ingratitude."

I risked a bold question--but not on the subject of olives. "Isn't Miss Regina's life rather a dull one in this house?"

The doctor cautiously lowered his voice. "It would be dull enough to some women. Regina's early life has been a hard one. Her mother was Mr. Ronald's eldest daughter. The old brute never forgave her for marrying against his wishes. Mrs. Ronald did all she could, secretly, to help the young wife in disgrace. But old Ronald had sole command of the money, and kept it to himself. From Regina's earliest childhood there was always distress at home. Her father harassed by creditors, trying one scheme after another, and failing in all; her mother and herself, half starved--with their very bedclothes sometimes at the pawnbrokers. I attended them in their illnesses, and though they hid their wretchedness from everybody else

(proud as Lucifer, both of them!), they couldn't hide it from me. Fancy the change to this house! I don't say that living here in clover is enough for such a person as Regina; I only say it has its influence. She is one of those young women, sir, who delight in sacrificing themselves to others--she is devoted, for instance, to Mrs. Farnaby. I only hope Mrs. Farnaby is worthy of it! Not that it matters to Regina. What she does, she does out of her own sweetness of disposition. She brightens this household, I can tell you! Farnaby did a wise thing, in his own domestic interests, when he adopted her as his daughter. She thinks she can never be grateful enough to him--the good creature!--though she has repaid him a hundredfold. He'll find that out, one of these days, when a husband takes her away. Don't suppose that I want to disparage our host--he's an old friend of mine; but he's a little too apt to take the good things that fall to his lot as if they were nothing but a just recognition of his own merits. I have told him that to his face, often enough to have a right to say it of him when he doesn't hear me. Do you smoke? I wish they would drop their politics, and take to tobacco. I say Farnaby! I want a cigar."

This broad hint produced an adjournment to the smoking-room, the doctor leading the way. I began to wonder how much longer my introduction to Miss Regina was to be delayed. It was not to come until I had seen a new side of my host's character, and had found myself promoted to a place of my own in Mr. Farnaby's estimation.

As we rose from table one of the guests spoke to me of a visit that he had recently paid to the part of Buckinghamshire which I come from. "I was shown a remarkably picturesque old house on the heath," he said. "They told me it had been inhabited for centuries by the family of the Goldenhearts. Are you in any way related to them?" I answered that I was very nearly related, having been born in the house--and there, as I suppose, the matter ended. Being the youngest man of the party, I waited, of course, until the rest of the gentlemen had passed out to the smoking-room. Mr. Farnaby and I were left together. To my astonishment, he put his arm cordially into mine, and led me out of the dining-room with the genial familiarity of an old friend!

"I'll give you such a cigar," he said, "as you can't buy for money in all London. You have enjoyed yourself, I hope? Now we know what wine you like, you won't have to ask the butler for it next time. Drop in any day, and take pot-luck with us." He came to a standstill in the hall; his brassy rasping voice assumed a new tone--a sort of parody of respect. "Have you been to your family place," he asked, "since your return to England?"

He had evidently heard the few words exchanged between his friend and myself. It seemed odd that he should take any interest in a place belonging to people who were strangers to him. However, his question was easily answered. I had only to inform him that my father had sold the house when he left England.

"Oh dear, I'm sorry to hear that!" he said. "Those old family places ought to be kept up. The greatness of England, sir, strikes its roots in the old families of England. They may be rich, or they may be poor--that don't matter. An old family is an old family; it's sad to see their hearths and homes sold to wealthy manufacturers who don't know who their own grandfathers were. Would you allow me to ask what is the family motto of the Goldenhearts?"

Shall I own the truth? The bottles circulated freely at Mr. Farnaby's table--I began to wonder whether he was quite sober. I said I was sorry to disappoint him, but I really did not know what my family motto was.

He was unaffectedly shocked. "I think I saw a ring on your finger," he said, as soon as he recovered himself. He lifted my left hand in his own cold-fishy paw. The one ring I wear is of plain gold; it belonged to my father and it has his initials inscribed on the signet.

"Good gracious, you haven't got your coat-of-arms on your seal!" cried Mr. Farnaby. "My dear sir, I am old enough to be your father, and I must take the freedom of remonstrating with you. Your coat-of-arms and your motto are no doubt at the Heralds' Office--why don't you apply for them? Shall I go there for you? I will do it with pleasure. You shouldn't be careless about these things--you shouldn't indeed."

I listened in speechless astonishment. Was he ironically expressing his contempt for old families? We got into the smoking-room at last; and my friend the doctor enlightened me privately in a corner. Every word Mr. Farnaby had said had been spoken in earnest. This man, who owes his rise from the lowest social position entirely to himself--who, judging by his own experience, has every reason to despise the poor pride of ancestry--actually feels a sincerely servile admiration for the accident of birth! "Oh, poor human nature!" as Somebody says. How cordially I agree with Somebody!

We went up to the drawing-room; and I was introduced to "the brown girl" at last. What impression did she produce on me?

Do you know, Rufus, there is some perverse reluctance in me to go on with this inordinately long letter just when I have arrived at the most interesting

part of it. I can't account for my own state of mind; I only know that it is so. The difficulty of describing the young lady doesn't perplex me like the difficulty of describing Mrs. Farnaby. I can see her now, as vividly as if she was present in the room. I even remember (and this is astonishing in a man) the dress that she wore. And yet I shrink from writing about her, as if there was something wrong in it. Do me a kindness, good friend, and let me send off all these sheets of paper, the idle work of an idle morning, just as they are. When I write next, I promise to be ashamed of my own capricious state of mind, and to paint the portrait of Miss Regina at full length.

In the mean while, don't run away with the idea that she has made a disagreeable impression upon me. Good heavens! it is far from that. You have had the old doctor's opinion of her. Very well. Multiply this opinion by ten--and you have mine.

[NOTE:--A strange indorsement appears on this letter, dated several months after the period at which it was received:--"Ah, poor Amelius! He had better have gone back to Miss Mellicent, and put up with the little drawback of her age. What a bright, lovable fellow he was! Goodbye to Goldenheart!"

These lines are not signed. They are known, however, to be in the handwriting of Rufus Dingwell.]

CHAPTER 2

I particularly want you to come and lunch with us, dearest Cecilia, the day after tomorrow. Don't say to yourself, "The Farnaby's house is dull, and Regina is too slow for me," and don't think about the long drive for the horses, from your place to London. This letter has an interest of its own, my dear--I have got something new for you. What do you think of a young man, who is clever and handsome and agreeable--and, wonder of wonders, quite unlike any other young Englishman you ever saw in your life? You are to meet him at luncheon; and you are to get used to his strange name beforehand. For which purpose I enclose his card.

He made his first appearance at our house, at dinner yesterday evening.

When he was presented to me at the tea-table, he was not to be put off with a bow--he insisted on shaking hands. "Where I have been," he explained, "we help a first introduction with a little cordiality." He looked into his tea-cup, after he said that, with the air of a man who could say something more, if he had a little encouragement. Of course, I encouraged him. "I suppose shaking hands is much the same form in America that bowing is in England?" I said, as suggestively as I could.

He looked up directly, and shook his head. "We have too many forms in this country," he said. "The virtue of hospitality, for instance, seems to have become a form in England. In America, when a new acquaintance says, 'Come and see me,' he means it. When he says it here, in nine cases out of ten he looks unaffectedly astonished if you are fool enough to take him at his word. I hate insincerity, Miss Regina--and now I have returned to my own country, I find insincerity one of the established institutions of English Society. 'Can we do anything for you?' Ask them to do something for you--and you will see what it means. 'Thank you for such a pleasant evening!' Get into the carriage with them when they go home--and you will find that it means, 'What a bore!' 'Ah, Mr. So-and-so, allow me to congratulate you on your new appointment.' Mr. So-and-so passes out of hearing--and you discover what the congratulations mean. 'Corrupt old brute! he has got the price of his vote at the last division.' 'Oh, Mr. Blank, what a charming book you have written!' Mr. Blank passes out of hearing--and you ask what his book is about. 'To tell you the truth, I haven't read it. Hush! he's received at Court; one must say these things.' The other day a friend took me to a grand dinner at the Lord Mayor's. I accompanied him first to his club; many distinguished guests met there before going to the dinner. Heavens, how

they spoke of the Lord Mayor! One of them didn't know his name, and didn't want to know it; another wasn't certain whether he was a tallow-chandler or a button-maker; a third, who had met with him somewhere, described him as a damned ass; a fourth said, 'Oh, don't be hard on him; he's only a vulgar old Cockney, without an h in his whole composition.' A chorus of general agreement followed, as the dinner-hour approached: 'What a bore!' I whispered to my friend, 'Why do they go?' He answered, 'You see, one must do this sort of thing.' And when we got to the Mansion House, they did that sort of thing with a vengeance! When the speech-making set in, these very men who had been all expressing their profound contempt for the Lord Mayor behind his back, now flattered him to his face in such a shamelessly servile way, with such a meanly complete insensibility to their own baseness, that I did really and literally turn sick. I slipped out into the fresh air, and fumigated myself, after the company I had kept, with a cigar. No, no! it's useless to excuse these things (I could quote dozens of other instances that have come under my own observation) by saying that they are trifles. When trifles make themselves habits of yours or of mine, they become a part of your character or mine. We have an inveterately false and vicious system of society in England. If you want to trace one of the causes, look back to the little organized insincerities of English life."

Of course you understand, Cecilia, that this was not all said at one burst, as I have written it here. Some of it came out in the way of answers to my inquiries, and some of it was spoken in the intervals of laughing, talking, and tea-drinking. But I want to show you how very different this young man is from the young men whom we are in the habit of meeting, and so I huddle his talk together in one sample, as Papa Farnaby would call it.

My dear, he is decidedly handsome (I mean our delightful Amelius); his face has a bright, eager look, indescribably refreshing as a contrast to the stolid composure of the ordinary young Englishman. His smile is charming; he moves as gracefully--with as little self-consciousness--as my Italian greyhound. He has been brought up among the strangest people in America; and (would you believe it?) he is actually a Socialist. Don't be alarmed. He shocked us all dreadfully by declaring that his Socialism was entirely learnt out of the New Testament. I have looked at the New Testament, since he mentioned some of his principles to me; and, do you know, I declare it is true!

Oh, I forgot--the young Socialist plays and sings! When we asked him to go to the piano, he got up and began directly. "I don't do it well enough," he said, "to want a great deal of pressing." He sang old English songs, with great taste and sweetness. One of the gentlemen of our party, evidently

disliking him, spoke rather rudely, I thought. "A Socialist who sings and plays," he said, "is a harmless Socialist indeed. I begin to feel that my balance is safe at my banker's, and that London won't be set on fire with petroleum this time." He got his answer, I can tell you. "Why should we set London on fire? London takes a regular percentage of your income from you, sir, whether you like it or not, on sound Socialist principles. You are the man who has got the money, and Socialism says:--You must and shall help the man who has got none. That is exactly what your own Poor Law says to you, every time the collector leaves the paper at your house." Wasn't it clever?--and it was doubly severe, because it was good-humouredly said.

Between ourselves, Cecilia, I think he is struck with me. When I walked about the room, his bright eyes followed me everywhere. And, when I took a chair by somebody else, not feeling it quite right to keep him all to myself, he invariably contrived to find a seat on the other side of me. His voice, too, had a certain tone, addressed to me, and to no other person in the room. Judge for yourself when you come here; but don't jump to conclusions, if you please. Oh no--I am not going to fall in love with him! It isn't in me to fall in love with anybody. Do you remember what the last man whom I refused said of me? "She has a machine on the left side of her that pumps blood through her body, but she has no heart." I pity the woman who marries that man!

One thing more, my dear. This curious Amelius seems to notice trifles which escape men in general, just as we do. Towards the close of the evening, poor Mamma Farnaby fell into one of her vacant states; half asleep and half awake on the sofa in the back drawing-room. "Your aunt interests me," he whispered. "She must have suffered some terrible sorrow, at some past time in her life." Fancy a man seeing that! He dropped some hints, which showed that he was puzzling his brains to discover how I got on with her, and whether I was in her confidence or not: he even went the length of asking what sort of life I led with the uncle and aunt who have adopted me. My dear, it was done so delicately, with such irresistible sympathy and such a charming air of respect, that I was quite startled when I remembered, in the wakeful hours of the night, how freely I had spoken to him. Not that I have betrayed any secrets; for, as you know, I am as ignorant as everybody else of what the early troubles of my poor dear aunt may have been. But I did tell him how I came into the house a helpless little orphan girl; and how generously these two good relatives adopted me; and how happy it made me to find that I could really do something to cheer their sad childless lives. "I wish I was half as good as you are," he said. "I can't understand how you became fond of Mrs. Farnaby. Perhaps it began in sympathy and compassion?" Just think of that, from a young Englishman! He went on

confessing his perplexities, as if we had known one another from childhood. "I am a little surprised to see Mrs. Farnaby present at parties of this sort; I should have thought she would have stayed in her own room." "That's just what she objects to do," I answered; "She says people will report that her husband is ashamed of her, or that she is not fit to be seen in society, if she doesn't appear at the parties--and she is determined not to be misrepresented in that way." Can you understand my talking to him with so little reserve? It is a specimen, Cecilia, of the odd manner in which my impulses carry me away, in this man's company. He is so nice and gentle--and yet so manly. I shall be curious to see if you can resist him, with your superior firmness and knowledge of the world.

But the strangest incident of all I have not told you yet--feeling some hesitation about the best way of describing it, so as to interest you in what has deeply interested me. I must tell it as plainly as I can, and leave it to speak for itself.

Who do you think has invited Amelius Goldenheart to luncheon? Not Papa Farnaby, who only invites him to dinner. Not I, it is needless to say. Who is it, then? Mamma Farnaby herself. He has actually so interested her that she has been thinking of him, and dreaming of him, in his absence!

I heard her last night, poor thing, talking and grinding her teeth in her sleep; and I went into her room to try if I could quiet her, in the usual way, by putting my cool hand on her forehead, and pressing it gently. (The old doctor says it's magnetism, which is ridiculous.) Well, it didn't succeed this time; she went on muttering, and making that dreadful sound with her teeth. Occasionally a word was spoken clearly enough to be intelligible. I could make no connected sense of what I heard; but I could positively discover this--that she was dreaming of our guest from America!

I said nothing about it, of course, when I went upstairs with her cup of tea this morning. What do you think was the first thing she asked for? Pen, ink, and paper. Her next request was that I would write Mr. Goldenheart's address on an envelope. "Are you going to write to him?" I asked. "Yes," she said, "I want to speak to him, while John is out of the way at business," "Secrets?" I said, turning it off with a laugh. She answered, speaking gravely and earnestly. "Yes; secrets." The letter was written, and sent to his hotel, inviting him to lunch with us on the first day when he was disengaged. He has replied, appointing the day after tomorrow. By way of trying to penetrate the mystery, I inquired if she wished me to appear at the luncheon. She considered with herself, before she answered that. "I want him to be amused, and put in a good humour," she said, "before I speak to him. You

must lunch with us--and ask Cecilia." She stopped, and considered once more. "Mind one thing," she went on. "Your uncle is to know nothing about it. If you tell him, I will never speak to you again."

Is this not extraordinary? Whatever her dream may have been, it has evidently produced a strong impression on her. I firmly believe she means to take him away with her to her own room, when the luncheon is over. Dearest Cecilia, you must help me to stop this! I have never been trusted with her secrets; they may, for all I know, be innocent secrets enough, poor soul! But it is surely in the highest degree undesirable that she should take into her confidence a young man who is only an acquaintance of ours: she will either make herself ridiculous, or do something worse. If Mr. Farnaby finds it out, I really tremble for what may happen.

For the sake of old friendship, don't leave me to face this difficulty by myself. A line, only one line, dearest, to say that you will not fail me.