

Chapter 2

A jolly parson of the good old stock, By birth a gentleman, yet homely too, Suiting his phrase to Hodge and Margery Whom he once christened, and has married since. A little lax in doctrine and in life, Not thinking God was captious in such things As what a man might drink on holidays, But holding true religion was to do As you'd be done by - which could never mean That he should preach three sermons in a week.

HAROLD TRANSOME did not choose to spend the whole evening with his mother. It was his habit to compress a great deal of effective conversation into a short space of time, asking rapidly all the questions he wanted to get answered, and diluting no subject with irrelevancies, paraphrase, or repetitions. He volunteered no information about himself and his past life at Smyrna, but answered pleasantly enough, though briefly, whenever his mother asked for any detail. He was evidently ill-satisfied as to his palate, trying red pepper to everything, then asking if there were any relishing sauces in the house, and when Hickes brought various home-filled bottles, trying several, finding them failures, and finally falling back from his plate in despair. Yet he remained good-humoured, saying something to his father now and then for the sake of being kind, and looking on with a pitying shrug as he saw him watch Hickes cutting his food. Mrs Transome thought with some bitterness that Harold showed more feeling for her feeble husband who had never cared in the least about him, than for her, who had given him more than the usual share of mother's love. An hour after dinner, Harold, who had already been turning over the leaves of his mother's account-books, said -

'I shall just cross the park to the parsonage to see my uncle Lingon.'
'Very well. He can answer more questions for you.'

'Yes,' said Harold, quite deaf to the innuendo, and accepting the words as a simple statement of the fact. 'I want to hear all about the game and the North Loamshire Hunt. I'm fond of sport; we had a great deal of it at Smyrna, and it keeps down my fat.'

The Reverend John Lingon became very talkative over his second bottle of port, which was opened on his nephew's arrival. He was not curious about the manners of Smyrna, or about Harold's experience, but he unbosomed himself very freely as to what he himself liked and disliked, which of the farmers he suspected of killing the foxes, what game he had bagged that very morning, what spot he would recommend as a new cover, and the comparative flatness of all existing sport compared with cock-fighting, under which Old England had been prosperous and glorious, while, so far as he could see, it had gained little by the abolition of a practice which sharpened the

faculties of men, gratified the instincts of the fowl, and carried out the designs of heaven in its admirable device of spurs. From these main topics which made his points of departure and return, he rambled easily enough at any new suggestion or query; so that when Harold got home at a late hour, he was conscious of having gathered from amidst the pompous full-toned triviality of his uncle's chat some impressions which were of practical importance. Among the rector's dislikes, it appeared, was Mr Matthew Jermyn.

'A fat-handed, glib-tongued fellow, with a scented cambric handkerchief; one of your educated low-bred fellows; a foundling who got his Latin for nothing at Christ's Hospital; one of your middle-class upstarts who want to rank with gentlemen, and think they'll do it with kid gloves and new furniture.'

But since Harold meant to stand for the county, Mr Lingon was equally emphatic as to the necessity of his not quarrelling with Jermyn till the election was over. Jermyn must be his agent; Harold must wink hard till he found himself safely returned; and even then it might be well to let Jermyn drop gently and raise no scandal. He himself had no quarrel with the fellow: a clergyman should have no quarrels, and he made it a point to be able to take wine with any man he met at table. And as to the estate, and his sister's going too much by Jermyn's advice, he never meddled with business: it was not his duty as a clergyman. That, he considered, was the meaning of Melchisedec and the tithe, a subject into which he had gone to some depth thirty years ago, when he preached the Visitation sermon.

The discovery that Harold meant to stand on the Liberal side - nay, that he boldly declared himself a Radical - was rather startling; but to his uncle's good-humour, beatified by the sipping of port-wine, nothing could seem highly objectionable, provided it did not disturb that operation. In the course of half an hour he had brought himself to see that anything really worthy to be called British Toryism had been entirely extinct since the Duke of Wellington and Sir Robert Peel had passed the Catholic Emancipation Bill; that Whiggery, with its rights of man stopping short at ten-pound householders, and its policy of pacifying a wild beast with a bite, was a ridiculous monstrosity; that therefore, since an honest man could not call himself a Tory, which it was, in fact, as impossible to be now as to fight for the old Pretender, and could still less become that execrable monstrosity a Whig, there remained but one course open to him. 'Why, lad, if the world was turned into a swamp, I suppose we should leave off shoes and stockings, and walk about like cranes' - whence it followed plainly enough that, in these hopeless times, nothing was left to men of sense and good family but to retard the national ruin by declaring themselves Radical, and take the inevitable process of changing everything out of the hands of beggarly demagogues and

purse-proud tradesmen. It is true the rector was helped to this chain of reasoning by Harold's remarks; but he soon became quite ardent in asserting the conclusion.

'If the mob can't be turned back, a man of family must try and head the mob, and save a few homes and hearths, and keep the country up on its last legs as long as he can. And you're a man of family, my lad - dash it! You're a Lingon, whatever else you may be, and I'll stand by you. I've no great interest; I'm a poor parson. I've been forced to give up hunting; my pointers and a glass of good wine are the only decencies becoming my station that I can allow myself. But I'll give you my countenance - I'll stick to you as my nephew. There's no need for me to change sides exactly. I was born a Tory, and I shall never be a bishop. But if anybody says you're in the wrong, I shall say, 'My nephew is in the right; he has turned Radical to save his country.' If William Pitt had been living now, he'd have done the same; for what did he say when he was dying? Not 'O save my party!' but 'O save my country, heaven !' That was what they dinned in our ears about Peel and the duke; and now I'll turn it round upon them. They shall be hoist with their own petard. Yes, yes, I'll stand by you.'

Harold did not feel sure that his uncle would thoroughly retain this satisfactory thread of argument in the uninspired hours of the morning; but the old gentleman was sure to take the facts easily in the end, and there was no fear of family coolness or quarrelling on this side. Harold was glad of it. He was not to be turned aside from any course he had chosen; but he disliked all quarrelling as an unpleasant expenditure of energy that could have no good practical result. He was at once active and luxurious; fond of mastery, and good-natured enough to wish that every one about him should like his mastery; not caring greatly to know other people's thoughts, and ready to despise them as blockheads if their thoughts differed from his, and yet solicitous that they should have no colourable reason for slight thoughts about him. The blockheads must be forced to respect him. Hence, in proportion as he foresaw that his equals in the neighbourhood would be indignant with him for his political choice, he cared keenly about making a good figure before them in every other way. His conduct as a landholder was to be judicious, his establishment was to be kept up generously, his imbecile father treated with careful regard, his family relations entirely without scandal. He knew that affairs had been unpleasant in his youth - that there had been ugly lawsuits - and that his scapegrace brother Durfey had helped to lower still farther the depressed condition of the family. All this must be retrieved, now that events had made Harold the head of the Transome name.

Jermyn must be used for the election, and after that, if he must be got rid of, it would be well to shake him loose quietly: his uncle was

probably right on both those points. But Harold's expectation that he should want to get rid of Jermyn was founded on other reasons than his scented handkerchief and his charity-school Latin.

If the lawyer had been presuming on Mrs Transome's ignorance as a woman, and on the stupid rakishness of the original heir, the new heir would prove to him that he had calculated rashly. Otherwise, Harold had no prejudice against him. In his boyhood and youth he had seen Jermyn frequenting Transome Court, but had regarded him with that total indifference with which youngsters are apt to view those who neither deny them pleasures nor give them any. Jermyn used to smile at him, and speak to him affably; but Harold, half proud, half shy, got away from such patronage as soon as possible: he knew Jermyn was a man of business; his father, his uncle, and Sir Maximus Debarry did not regard him as a gentleman and their equal. He had known no evil of the man; but he saw now that if he were really a covetous upstart, there had been a temptation for him in the management of the Transome affairs; and it was clear that the estate was in a bad condition.

When Mr Jermyn was ushered into the breakfast-room the next morning, Harold found him surprisingly little altered by the fifteen years. He was grey, but still remarkably handsome; fat, but tall enough to bear that trial to man's dignity. There was as strong a suggestion of toilette about him as if he had been five-and-twenty instead of nearly sixty. He chose always to dress in black, and was especially addicted to black satin waistcoats, which carried out the general sleekness of his appearance; and this, together with his white, fat, but beautifully-shaped hands, which he was in the habit of rubbing gently on his entrance into a room, gave him very much the air of a lady's physician. Harold remembered with some amusement his uncle's dislike of those conspicuous hands; but as his own were soft and dimpled, and as he too was given to the innocent practice of rubbing those members, his suspicions were not yet deepened.

'I congratulate you, Mrs Transome,' said Jermyn, with a soft and deferential smile, 'all the more,' he added, turning towards Harold, 'now I have the pleasure of actually seeing your son. I am glad to perceive that an Eastern climate has not been unfavourable to him.'

'No,' said Harold, shaking Jermyn's hand carelessly, and speaking with more than his usual rapid brusqueness, 'the question is, whether the English climate will agree with me. It's deuced shifting and damp: and as for the food, it would be the finest thing in the world for this country if the southern cooks would change their religion, get persecuted, and fly to England, as the old silk-weavers did.'

'There are plenty of foreign cooks for those who are rich enough to pay for them, I suppose,' said Mrs Transome, 'but they are unpleasant people to have about one's house.'

'Gad! I don't think so,' said Harold.

'The old servants are sure to quarrel with them.'

'That's no concern of mine. The old servants will have to put up with my man Dominic, who will show them how to cook and do everything else, in a way that will rather astonish them.'

'Old people are not so easily taught to change all their ways, Harold.'

'Well, they can give up and watch the young ones,' said Harold, thinking only at that moment of old Mrs Hickes and Dominic. But his mother was not thinking of them only.

'You have a valuable servant, it seems,' said Jermyn, who understood Mrs Transome better than her son did, and wished to smoothen the current of their dialogue.

'O! one of those wonderful southern fellows that make one's life easy. He's of no country in particular. I don't know whether he's most of a Jew, a Greek, an Italian, or a Spaniard. He speaks five or six languages, one as well as another. He's cook, valet, major-domo, and secretary all in one; and what's more, he's an affectionate fellow - I can trust to his attachment. That's a sort of human specimen that doesn't grow here in England, I fancy. I should have been badly off if I could not have brought Dominic.'

They sat down to breakfast with such slight talk as this going on. Each of the party was preoccupied and uneasy. Harold's mind was busy constructing probabilities about what he should discover of Jermyn's mismanagement or dubious application of funds, and the sort of self-command he must in the worst case exercise in order to use the man as long as he wanted him. Jermyn was closely observing Harold with an unpleasant sense that there was an expression of acuteness and determination about him which would make him formidable. He would certainly have preferred at that moment that there had been no second heir of the Transome name to come back upon him from the East. Mrs Transome was not observing the two men; rather, her hands were cold, and her whole person shaken by their presence; she seemed to hear and see what they said and did with preternatural acuteness, and yet she was also seeing and hearing what had been said and done many years before, and feeling a dim terror about the future. There were piteous sensibilities in this faded woman, who thirty-four years ago, in the splendour of her bloom, had

been imperious to one of these men, and had rapturously pressed the other as an infant to her bosom, and now knew that she was of little consequence to either of them.

'Well, what are the prospects about the election?' said Harold, as the breakfast was advancing. 'There are two Whigs and one Conservative likely to be in the field, I know. What is your opinion of the chances?'

Mr Jermyn had a copious supply of words, which often led him into periphrase, but he cultivated a hesitating stammer, which, with a handsome impassiveness of face, except when he was smiling at a woman, or when the latent savageness of his nature was thoroughly roused, he had found useful in many relations, especially in business. No one could have found out that he was not at his ease. 'My opinion,' he replied, 'is in a state of balance at present. This division of the county, you are aware, contains one manufacturing town of the first magnitude, and several smaller ones. The manufacturing interest is widely dispersed. So far - a - there is a presumption - a - in favour of the two Liberal candidates. Still with a careful canvass of the agricultural districts, such as those we have round us at Treby Magna, I think - a - the auguries - a - would not be unfavourable to the return of a Conservative. A fourth candidate of good position, who should coalesce with Mr Debarry. - a -'

Here Mr Jermyn hesitated for the third time, and Harold broke in.

'That will not be my line of action, so we need not discuss it. If I put up it will be as a Radical; and I fancy, in any county that would return Whigs there would be plenty of voters to be combed off by a Radical who offered himself with good pretensions.'

There was the slightest possible quiver discernible across Jermyn's face. Otherwise he sat as he had done before, with his eyes fixed abstractedly on the frill of a ham before him, and his hand trifling with his fork. He did not answer immediately, but when he did, he looked round steadily at Harold.

'I'm delighted to perceive that you have kept yourself so thoroughly acquainted with English politics.'

'O, of course,' said Harold, impatiently. 'I'm aware how things have been going on in England. I always meant to come back ultimately. I suppose I know the state of Europe as well as if I'd been stationary at Little Treby for the last fifteen years. If a man goes to the East, people seem to think he gets turned into something like the one-eyed calender in the Arabian Nights.'

'Yet I should think there are some things which people who have been stationary at Little Treby could tell you, Harold,' said Mrs Transome. 'It did not signify about your holding Radical opinions at Smyrna; but you seem not to imagine how your putting up as a Radical will affect your position here, and the position of your family. No one will visit you. And then - the sort of people who will support you ! You really have no idea what an impression it conveys when you say you are a Radical. There are none of our equals who will not feel that you have disgraced yourself. 'Pooh!' said Harold, rising and walking along the room.

But Mrs Transome went on with growing anger in her voice - 'It seems to me that a man owes something to his birth and station, and has no right to take up this notion or the other, just as it suits his fancy; still less to work at the overthrow of his class. That was what everyone said of Lord Grey, and my family at least is as good as Lord Grey's. You have wealth now, and might distinguish yourself in the county; and if you had been true to your colours as a gentleman, you would have had all the greater opportunity because the times are so bad. The Debarrys and Lord Wyvem would have set all the more store by you. For my part, I can't conceive what good you propose to yourself. I only entreat you to think again before you take any decided step.'

'Mother,' said Harold, not angrily or with any raising of his voice, but in a quick, impatient manner, as if the scene must be got through as quickly as possible; 'it is natural that you should think in this way. Women, very properly, don't change their views, but keep to the notions in which they have been brought up. It doesn't signify what they think - they are not called upon to judge or to act. You must really leave me to take my own course in these matters, which properly belong to men. Beyond that, I will gratify any wish you choose to mention. You shall have a new carriage and a pair of bays all to yourself; you shall have the house done up in first-rate style, and I am not thinking of marrying. But let us understand that there shall be no further collision between us on subjects in which I must be master of my own actions.'

'And you will put the crown to the mortifications of my life, Harold. I don't know who would be a mother if she could foresee what a slight thing she will be to her son when she is old.'

Mrs Transome here walked out of the room by the nearest way - the glass door open towards the terrace. Mr Jermyn had risen too, and his hands were on the back of his chair. He looked quite impassive: it was not the first time he had seen Mrs Transome angry; but now, for the first time, he thought the outburst of her temper would be useful for him. She, poor woman, knew quite well that she had been unwise, and that she had been making herself disagreeable to Harold to no

purpose. But half the sorrows of women would be averted if they could repress the speech they know to be useless; nay, the speech they have resolved not to utter. Harold continued his walking a moment longer, and then said to Jermyn -

'You smoke?'

'No, I always defer to the ladies. Mrs Jermyn is peculiarly sensitive on such matters, and doesn't like tobacco.'

Harold, who, underneath all the tendencies which had made him a Liberal, had intense personal pride, thought, 'Confound the fellow - with his Mrs Jermyn! Does he think we are on a footing for me to know anything about his wife?'

'Well, I took my hookah before breakfast,' he said aloud; 'so, if you like, we'll go into the library. My father never gets up till mid-day, I find.'

'Sit down, sit down,' said Harold, as they entered the handsome, spacious library. But he himself continued to stand before a map of the county which he had opened from a series of rollers occupying a compartment among the bookshelves. 'The first question, Mr Jermyn, now you know my intentions, is, whether you will undertake to be my agent in this election, and help me through? There's no time to be lost, and I don't want to lose my chance, as I may not have another for seven years. I understand,' he went on, flashing a look straight at Jermyn, 'that you have not taken any conspicuous course in politics; and I know that Labron is agent for the Debarrys.'

'O - a - my dear sir - a man necessarily has his political convictions, but of what use is it for a professional man - a - of some education, to talk of them in a little country town? There really is no comprehension of public questions in such places. Party feeling, indeed, was quite asleep here before the agitation about the Catholic Relief Bill. It is true that I concurred with our incumbent in getting up a petition against the Reform Bill, but I did not state my reasons. The weak points in that Bill are - a - too palpable, and I fancy you and I should not differ much on that head. The fact is, when I knew that you were to come back to us, I kept myself in reserve, though I was much pressed by the friends of Sir James Clement, the Ministerial candidate, who is - '

'However, you will act for me - that's settled?' said Harold.

'Certainly,' said Jermyn, inwardly irritated by Harold's rapid manner of cutting him short.

'Which of the Liberal candidates, as they call themselves, has the better chance, eh?'

'I was going to observe that Sir James Clement has not so good a chance as Mr Garstin, supposing that a third Liberal candidate presents himself. There are two senses in which a politician can be liberal' - here Mr Jermyn smiled - 'Sir James Clement is a poor baronet, hoping for an appointment, and can't be expected to be liberal in that wider sense which commands majorities.'

'I wish this man were not so much of a talker,' thought Harold; 'he'll bore me. We shall see,' he said aloud, 'what can be done in the way of combination. I'll come down to your office after one o'clock, if it will suit you?'

'Perfectly.'

'Ah, and you'll have all the lists and papers and necessary information ready for me there. I must get up a dinner for the tenants, and we can invite whom we like besides the tenants. Just now, I'm going over one of the farms on hand with the bailiff. By the way, that's a desperately bad business, having three farms unlet - how comes that about, eh?'

'That is precisely what I wanted to say a few words about to you. You have observed already how strongly Mrs Transome takes certain things to heart. You can imagine that she has been severely tried in many ways. Mr Transome's want of health; Mr Durfey's habits - a -'

'Yes, yes.'

'She is a woman for whom I naturally entertain the highest respect, and she has had hardly any gratification for many years, except the sense of having affairs to a certain extent in her own hands. She objects to changes; she will not have a new style of tenants; she likes the old stock of farmers who milk their own cows, and send their younger daughters out to service: all this makes it difficult to do the best with the estate. I am aware things are not as they ought to be, for, in point of fact, an improved agricultural management is a matter in which I take considerable interest, and the farm which I myself hold on the estate you will see, I think, to be in a superior condition. But Mrs Transome is a woman of strong feeling, and I would urge you, my dear sir, to make the changes which you have, but which I had not, the right to insist on, as little painful to her as possible.'

'I shall know what to do, sir, never fear,' said Harold, much offended.

'You will pardon, I hope, a perhaps undue freedom of suggestion from a man of my age, who has been so long in a close connection with the

family affairs - a - I have never considered that connection simply in the light of a business - a -'

'Damn him, I'll soon let him know that I do,' thought Harold. But in proportion as he found Jermyn's manners annoying, he felt the necessity of controlling himself. He despised all persons who defeated their own projects by the indulgence of momentary impulses.

'I understand, I understand,' he said aloud. 'You've had more awkward business on your hands than usually falls to the share of the family lawyer. We shall set everything right by degrees. But now as to the canvassing. I've made arrangements with a first-rate man in London, who understands these matters thoroughly - a solicitor of course - he has carried no end of men into parliament. I'll engage him to meet us at Duffield - say when?'

The conversation after this was driven carefully clear of all angles, and ended with determined amicableness. When Harold, in his ride an hour or two afterwards, encountered his uncle shouldering a gun, and followed by one black and one liver-spotted pointer, his muscular person with its red eagle face set off by a velveteen jacket and leather leggings, Mr Lingon's first question was -

'Well, lad, how have you got on with Jermyn?'

'O, I don't think I shall like the fellow. He's a sort of amateur gentleman. But I must make use of him. I expect whatever I get out of him will only be something short of fair pay for what he has got out of us. But I shall see.'

'Ay, ay, use his gun to bring down your game, and after that beat the thief with the butt-end. That's wisdom and justice and pleasure all in one - talking between ourselves, as uncle and nephew. But I say, Harold, I was going to tell you, now I come to think of it, this is rather a nasty business, your calling yourself a Radical. I've been turning it over in after-dinner speeches, but it looks awkward - it's not what people are used to - it wants a good deal of Latin to make it go down. I shall be worried about it at the sessions, and I can think of nothing neat enough to carry about in my pocket by way of answer.'

'Nonsense, uncle; I remember what a good speechifier you always were: you'll never be at a loss. You only want a few more evenings to think of it.'

'But you'll not be attacking the church and the institutions of the country - you'll not be going to those lengths; you'll keep up the bulwarks, and so on, eh?'

'No, I shan't attack the church - only the incomes of the bishops, perhaps, to make them eke out the incomes of the poor clergy.'

'Well, well, I have no objection to that. Nobody likes our bishop: he's all Greek and greediness; too proud to dine with his own father. You may pepper the bishops a little. But you'll respect the constitution handed down, etc. - and you'll rally round the throne - and the king, God bless him, and the usual toasts, eh?'

'Of course, of course. I am a Radical only in rooting out abuses.'

'That's the word I wanted, my lad!' said the vicar, slapping Harold's knee. 'That's a spool to wind a speech on. Abuses is the very word; and if anybody shows himself offended, he'll put the cap on for himself.'

'I remove the rotten timbers,' said Harold, inwardly amused, 'and substitute fresh oak, that's all.'

'Well done, my boy ! By George, you'll be a speaker. But, I say, Harold, I hope you've got a little Latin left. This young Debarry is a tremendous fellow at the classics, and walks on stilts to any length. He's one of the new Conservatives. Old Sir Maximus doesn't understand him at all.'

'That won't do at the hustings,' said Harold. 'He'll get knocked off his stilts pretty quickly there.'

'Bless me ! it's astonishing how well you're up in the affairs of the country, my boy. But rub up a few quotations - 'Quod turpe bonis decebat Crispinum' - and that sort of thing - just to show Debarry what you could do if you liked. But you want to ride on?' 'Yes; I have an appointment at Treby. Good-bye.'

'He's a cleverish chap,' muttered the vicar, as Harold rode away. 'When he's had plenty of English exercise, and brought out his knuckle a bit, he'll be a Lingon again as he used to be. I must go and see how Arabella takes his being a Radical. It's a little awkward; but a clergyman must keep peace in a family. Confound it ! I'm not bound to love Toryism better than my own flesh and blood, and the manor I shoot over. That's a heathenish, Brutus-like sort of thing, as if Providence couldn't take care of the country without my quarrelling with my own sister's son!'