

## Chapter 16

TRUEBLUE. These men have no votes. Why should I court them ?

GREYFOX. No votes, but power.

TRUEBLUE. What I over charities ?

GREYFOX. No, over brains; which disturbs the canvass. In a natural state of things the average price of a vote at Paddlebrook is nine-and-sixpence, throwing the fifty-pound tenants, who cost nothing, into the divisor. But these talking men cause an artificial rise of prices.

THE expected important knock at the door came about twelve o'clock, and Esther could hear that there were two visitors. Immediately the parlour door was opened and the shaggy-haired, cravatless image of Felix Holt, which was then just full in the mirror of Esther's mind, was displaced by the highly-contrasted appearance of a personage whose name she guessed before Mr Jermyn had announced it. The perfect morning costume of that day differed much from our present ideal: it was essential that a gentleman's chin should be well propped, that his collar should have a voluminous roll, that his waistcoat should imply much discrimination, and that his buttons should be arranged in a manner which would now expose him to general contempt. And it must not be forgotten that at the distant period when Treby Magna first knew the excitements of an election, there existed many other anomalies now obsolete, besides short-waisted coats and broad stiffeners.

But we have some notions of beauty and fitness which withstand the centuries; and quite irrespective of dates, it would be pronounced that at the age of thirty-four Harold Transome was a striking and handsome man. He was one of those people, as Denner had remarked, to whose presence in the room you could not be indifferent: if you do not hate or dread them, you must find the touch of their hands, nay, their very shadows, agreeable.

Esther felt a pleasure quite new to her as she saw his finely-embrowned face and full bright eyes turned towards her with an air of deference by which gallantry must commend itself to a refined woman who is not absolutely free from vanity. Harold Transome regarded women as slight things, but he was fond of slight things in the intervals of business; and he held it among the chief arts of life to keep these pleasant diversions within such bonds that they should never interfere with the course of his serious ambition. Esther was perfectly aware, as he took a chair near her, that he was under some admiring surprise at her appearance and manner. How could it be otherwise? She believed that in the eyes of a high-bred man no young

lady in Treby could equal her: she felt a glow of delight at the sense that she was being looked at.

'My father expected you,' she said to Mr Jermyn. 'I delivered your letter to him yesterday. He will be down immediately.'

She disentangled her foot from her netting and wound it up.

'I hope you are not going to let us disturb you,' said Harold, noticing her action. 'We come to discuss election affairs, and particularly desire to interest the ladies.'

'I have no interest with any one who is not already on the right side,' said Esther, smiling.

'I am happy to see at least that you wear the Liberal colours.'

'I fear I must confess that it is more from love of blue than from love of Liberalism. Yellow opinions could only have brunettes on their side.' Esther spoke with her usual pretty fluency, but she had no sooner uttered the words than she thought how angry they would have made Felix.

'If my cause is to be recommended by the becomingness of my colours, then I am sure you are acting in my interest by wearing them.'

Esther rose to leave the room.

'Must you really go?' said Harold, preparing to open the door for her.

'Yes; I have an engagement - a lesson at half-past twelve,' said Esther, bowing and floating out like a blue-robed Naiad, but not without a suffused blush as she passed through the doorway.

It was a pity the room was so small, Harold Transome thought: this girl ought to walk in a house where there were halls and corridors. But he had soon dismissed this chance preoccupation with Esther; for before the door was closed again Mr Lyon had entered, and Harold was entirely bent on what had been the object of his visit. The minister, though no elector himself, had considerable influence over Liberal electors, and it was the part of wisdom in a candidate to cement all political adhesion by a little personal regard, if possible. Garstin was a harsh and wiry fellow; he seemed to suggest that sour whey, which some say was the original meaning of Whig in the Scottish, and it might assist the theoretic advantages of Radicalism if it could be associated with a more generous presence. What would conciliate the personal regard of old Mr Lyon became a curious

problem to Harold, now the little man made his appearance. But canvassing makes a gentleman acquainted with many strange animals, together with the ways of catching and taming them; and thus the knowledge of natural history advances amongst the aristocracy and the wealthy commoners of our land.

'I am very glad to have secured this opportunity of making your personal acquaintance, Mr Lyon,' said Harold, putting out his hand to the minister when Jermyn had mentioned his name. 'I am to address the electors here, in the Market-Place, to-morrow; and I should have been sorry to do so without first paying my respects privately to my chief friends, as there may be points on which they particularly wish me to explain myself.'

'You speak civilly, sir, and reasonably,' said Mr Lyon, with a vague shortsighted gaze, in which a candidate's appearance evidently went for nothing. 'Pray be seated, gentlemen. It is my habit to stand.'

He placed himself at right angle with his visitors, his worn look of intellectual eagerness, slight frame, and rusty attire, making an odd contrast with their flourishing persons, unblemished costume, and comfortable freedom from excitement. The group was fairly typical of the difference between the men who are animated by ideas and the men who are expected to apply them. Then he drew forth his spectacles, and began to rub them with the thin end of his coat-tail. He was inwardly exercising great self-mastery - suppressing the thought of his personal needs, which Jermyn's presence tended to suggest, in order that he might be equal to the larger duties of this occasion.

'I am aware - Mr Jermyn has told me,' said Harold, 'what good service you have done me already, Mr Lyon. The fact is, a man of intellect like you was especially needed in my case. The race I am running is really against Garstin only, who calls himself a Liberal, though he cares for nothing, and understands nothing, except the interests of the wealthy traders. And you have been able to explain the difference between Liberal and Liberal, which, as you and I know, is something like the difference between fish and fish.'

'Your comparison is not unapt, sir,' said Mr Lyon, still holding his spectacles in his hand, 'at this epoch, when the mind of the nation has been strained on the passing of one measure. Where a great weight has to be moved, we require not so much selected instruments as abundant horse-power. But it is an unavoidable evil of these massive achievements that they encourage a coarse indiscriminatingness obstructive of more nicely-wrought results, and an exaggerated expectation inconsistent with the intricacies of our fallen and struggling condition. I say not that compromise is

unnecessary, but it is an evil attendant on our imperfection; and I would pray every one to mark that, where compromise broadens, intellect and conscience are thrust into narrower room. Wherefore it has been my object to show our people that there are many who have helped to draw the car of Reform, whose ends are but partial, and who forsake not the ungodly principle of selfish alliances, but would only substitute Syria for Egypt - thinking chiefly of their own share in peacocks, gold, and ivory.'

'Just so,' said Harold, who was quick at new languages, and still quicker at translating other men's generalities into his own special and immediate purposes, 'men who will be satisfied if they can only bring in a plutocracy, buy up the land, and stick the old crests on their new gateways. Now the practical point to secure against these false Liberals at present is, that our electors should not divide their votes. As it appears that many who vote for Debarry are likely to split their votes in favour of Garstin, it is of the first consequence that my voters should give me plumpers. If they divide their votes they can't keep out Debarry, and they may help to keep out me. I feel some confidence in asking you to use your influence in this direction, Mr Lyon. We candidates have to praise ourselves more than is graceful; but you are aware that, while I belong by my birth to the classes that have their roots in tradition and all the old loyalties, my experience has lain chiefly among those who make their own career, and depend on the new rather than the old. I have had the advantage of considering national welfare under varied lights: I have wider views than those of a mere cotton lord. On questions connected with religious liberty I would stop short at no measure that was not thorough.'

'I hope not, sir - I hope not,' said Mr Lyon, gravely; finally putting on his spectacles and examining the face of the candidate, whom he was preparing to turn into a catechumen. For the good Rufus, conscious of his political importance as an organ of persuasion, felt it his duty to catechise a little, and also to do his part towards impressing a probable legislator with a sense of his responsibility. But the latter branch of duty somewhat obstructed the catechising, for his mind was so urged by considerations which he held in danger of being overlooked, that the questions and answers bore a very slender proportion to his exposition. It was impossible to leave the question of church-rates without noting the grounds of their injustice, and without a brief enumeration of reasons why Mr Lyon, for his own part, would not present that passive resistance to a legal imposition which had been adopted by the Friends (whose heroism in this regard was nevertheless worthy of all honour).

Comprehensive talkers are apt to be tiresome when we are not athirst for information, but, to be quite fair, we must admit that superior

reticence is a good deal due to the lack of matter. Speech is often barren; but silence also does not necessarily brood over a full nest. Your still fowl, blinking at you without remark, may all the while be sitting on one addled nest-egg; and when it takes to cackling, will have nothing to announce but that addled delusion.

Harold Transome was not at all a patient man, but in matters of business he was quite awake to his cue, and in this case it was perhaps easier to listen than to answer questions. But Jermyn, who had plenty of work on his hands, took an opportunity of rising, and saying, as he looked at his watch -

'I must really be at the office in five minutes. You will find me there, Mr Transome; you have probably still many things to say to Mr Lyon.'

'I beseech you, sir,' said the minister, changing colour, and by a quick movement laying his hand on Jermyn's arm - 'I beseech you to favour me with an interview on some private business - this evening, if it were possible.'

Mr Lyon, like others who are habitually occupied with impersonal subjects, was liable to this impulsive sort of action. He snatched at the details of life as if they were darting past him - as if they were like the ribbons at his knees, which would never be tied all day if they were not tied on the instant. Through these spasmodic leaps out of his abstractions into real life, it constantly happened that he suddenly took a course which had been the subject of too much doubt with him ever to have been determined on by continuous thought. And if Jermyn had not startled him by threatening to vanish just when he was plunged in politics, he might never have made up his mind to confide in a worldly attorney.

('An odd man,' as Mrs Muscat observed, 'to have such a gift in the pulpit. But there's One knows better than we do -' which, in a lady who rarely felt her judgment at a loss, was a concession that showed much piety.)

Jermyn was surprised at the little man's eagerness. 'By all means,' he answered, quite cordially. 'Could you come to my office at eight o'clock?'

'For several reasons, I must beg you to come to me.'

'O, very good. I'll walk out and see you this evening, if possible. I shall have much pleasure in being of any use to you.' Jermyn felt that in the eyes of Harold he was appearing all the more valuable when his services were thus in request. He went out, and Mr Lyon easily

relapsed into politics, for he had been on the brink of a favourite subject on which he was at issue with his fellow-Liberals.

At that time, when faith in the efficacy of political change was at fever-heat in ardent Reformers, many measures which men are still discussing with little confidence on either side, were then talked about and disposed of like property in near reversion. Crying abuses - 'bloating paupers', 'bloating pluralists', and other corruptions hindering men from being wise and happy - had to be fought against and slain. Such a time is a time of hope. Afterwards, when the corpses of those monsters have been held up to the public wonder and abhorrence, and yet wisdom and happiness do not follow, but rather a more abundant breeding of the foolish and unhappy, comes a time of doubt and despondency. But in the great Reform year hope was mighty: the prospect of reform had even served the voters instead of drink; and in one place, at least, there had been a 'dry election'. And now the speakers at Reform banquets were exuberant in congratulation and promise: Liberal clergymen of the Establishment toasted Liberal Catholic clergymen without any allusion to scarlet, and Catholic clergymen replied with a like tender reserve. Some dwelt on the abolition of all abuses, and on millennial blessedness generally; others, whose imaginations were less suffused with exhalations of the dawn, insisted chiefly on the ballot-box.

Now on this question of the ballot the minister strongly took the negative side. Our pet opinions are usually those which place us in a minority of a minority amongst our own party: - very happily, else those poor opinions, born with no silver spoon in their mouths - how would they get nourished and fed? So it was with Mr Lyon and his objection to the ballot. But he had thrown out a remark on the subject which was not quite clear to his hearer, who interpreted it according to his best calculation of probabilities.

'I have no objection to the ballot,' said Harold, 'but I think that is not the sort of thing we have to work at just now. We shouldn't get it. And other questions are imminent.'

'Then, sir, you would vote for the ballot?' said Mr Lyon, stroking his chin.

'Certainly, if the point came up. I have too much respect for the freedom of the voter to oppose anything which offers a chance of making that freedom more complete.'

Mr Lyon looked at the speaker with a pitying smile and a subdued 'h'm - m - m', which Harold took for a sign of satisfaction. He was soon undeceived.

'You grieve me, sir; you grieve me much. And I pray you to reconsider this question, for it will take you to the root, as I think, of political morality. I engage to show to any impartial mind, duly furnished with the principles of public and private rectitude, that the ballot would be pernicious, and that if it were not pernicious it would still be futile. I will show, first, that it would be futile as a preservative from bribery and illegitimate influence; and, secondly, that it would be in the worst kind pernicious, as shutting the door against those influences whereby the soul of a man and the character of a citizen are duly educated for their great functions. Be not alarmed if I detain you, sir. It is well worth the while.'

'Confound this old man,' thought Harold. 'I'll never make a canvassing call on a preacher again, unless he has lost his voice from a cold.' He was going to excuse himself as prudently as he could, by deferring the subject till the morrow, and inviting Mr Lyon to come to him in the committee-room before the time appointed for his public speech; but he was relieved by the opening of the door. Lyddy put in her head to say -

'If you please! sir, here's Mr Holt wants to know if he may come in and speak to the gentleman. He begs your pardon, but you're to say 'no' if you don't like him to come.'

'Nay, show him in at once, Lyddy. A young man,' Mr Lyon went on, speaking to Harold, 'whom a representative ought to know - no voter, but a man of ideas and study.'

'He is thoroughly welcome,' said Harold, truthfully enough, though he felt little interest in the voteless man of ideas except as a diversion from the subject of the ballot. He had been standing for the last minute or two, feeling less of a victim in that attitude, and more able to calculate on means of escape.

'Mr Holt, sir,' said the minister, as Felix entered, 'is a young friend of mine, whose opinions on some points I hope to see altered, but who has a zeal for public justice which I trust he will never lose.'

'I am glad to see Mr Holt,' said Harold, bowing. He perceived from the way in which Felix bowed to him and turned to the most distant spot in the room, that the candidate's shake of the hand would not be welcome here. 'A formidable fellow,' he thought, 'capable of mounting a cart in the market-place to-morrow and cross-examining me, if I say anything that doesn't please him.'

'Mr Lyon,' said Felix, 'I have taken a liberty with you in asking to see Mr Transome when he is engaged with you. But I have to speak to him on a matter which I shouldn't care to make public at present, and it is

one on which I am sure you will back me. I heard that Mr Transome was here, so I ventured to come. I hope you will both excuse me, as my business refers to some electioneering measures which are being taken by Mr Transome's agents.' 'Pray go on,' said Harold, expecting something unpleasant.

'I'm not going to speak against treating voters,' said Felix; 'I suppose buttered ale, and grease of that sort to make the wheels go, belong to the necessary humbug of representation. But I wish to ask you, Mr Transome, whether it is with your knowledge that agents of yours are bribing rough fellows who are no voters - the colliers and navvies at Sproxton - with the chance of extra drunkenness, that they may make a posse on your side at the nomination and polling?'

'Certainly not,' said Harold. 'You are aware, my dear sir, that a candidate is very much at the mercy of his agents as to the means by which he is returned, especially when many years' absence has made him a stranger to the men actually conducting business. But are you sure of your facts?'

'As sure as my senses can make me,' said Felix, who then briefly described what had happened on Sunday. 'I believed that you were ignorant of all this, Mr Transome,' he ended, 'and that was why I thought some good might be done by speaking to you. If not, I should be tempted to expose the whole affair as a disgrace to the Radical party. I'm a Radical myself, and mean to work all my life long against privilege, monopoly, and oppression. But I would rather be a livery-servant proud of my master's title, than I would seem to make common cause with scoundrels who turn the best hopes of men into by-words for cant and dishonesty.'

'Your energetic protest is needless here, sir,' said Harold, offended at what sounded like a threat, and was certainly premature enough to be in bad taste. In fact, this error of behaviour in Felix proceeded from a repulsion which was mutual. It was a constant source of irritation to him that the public men on his side were, on the whole, not conspicuously better than the public men on the other side; that the spirit of innovation, which with him was a part of religion, was in many of its mouthpieces no more of a religion than the faith in rotten boroughs; and he was thus predisposed to distrust Harold Transome. Harold, in his turn, disliked impracticable notions of loftiness and purity - disliked all enthusiasm; and he thought he saw a very troublesome, vigorous incorporation of that nonsense in Felix. But it would be foolish to exasperate him in any way.

'If you choose to accompany me to Jermyn's office,' he went on, 'the matter shall be inquired into in your presence. I think you will agree with me, Mr Lyon, that this will be the most satisfactory course?'



'Doubtless,' said the minister, who liked the candidate very well, and believed that he would be amenable to argument; 'and I would caution my young friend against a too great hastiness of words and action. David's cause against Saul was a righteous one; nevertheless not all who clave unto David were righteous men.'

'The more was the pity, sir,' said Felix. 'Especially if he winked at their malpractices.'

Mr Lyon smiled, shook his head, and stroked his favourite's arm deprecatingly.

'It is rather too much for any man to keep the consciences of all his party,' said Harold. 'If you had lived in the East, as I have, you would be more tolerant. More tolerant, for example, of an active industrious selfishness, such as we have here, though it may not always be quite scrupulous: you would see how much better it is than an idle selfishness. I have heard it said, a bridge is a good thing - worth helping to make, though half the men who worked at it were rogues.'

'O yes I ' said Felix, scornfully, 'give me a handful of generalities and analogies, and I'll undertake to justify Burke and Hare, and prove them benefactors of their species. I'll tolerate no nuisances but such as I can't help; and the question now is, not whether we can do away with all the nuisances in the world, but with a particular nuisance under our noses.'

'Then we had better cut the matter short, as I propose, by going at once to Jermyn's,' said Harold. 'In that case, I must bid you good-morning, Mr Lyon.'

'I would fain,' said the minister, looking uneasy - 'I would fain have had a further opportunity of considering that question of the ballot with you. The reasons against it need not be urged lengthily; they only require complete enumeration to prevent any seeming hiatus, where an opposing fallacy might thrust itself in.'

'Never fear, sir,' said Harold, shaking Mr Lyon's hand cordially, 'there will be opportunities. Shall I not see you in the committee-room to-morrow?'

'I think not,' said Mr Lyon, rubbing his brow, with a sad remembrance of his personal anxieties. 'But I will send you, if you will permit me, a brief writing, on which you can meditate at your leisure.'

'I shall be delighted. Good-bye.'

Harold and Felix went out together; and the minister, going up to his dull study, asked himself whether, under the pressure of conflicting experience, he had faithfully discharged the duties of the past interview?

If a cynical sprite were present, riding on one of the motes in that dusty room, he may have made himself merry at the illusions of the little minister who brought so much conscience to bear on the production of so slight an effect. I confess to smiling myself, being sceptical as to the effect of ardent appeals and nice distinctions on gentlemen who are got up, both inside and out, as candidates in the style of the period; but I never smiled at Mr Lyon's trustful energy without falling to penitence and veneration immediately after. For what we call illusions are often, in truth, a wider vision of past and present realities - a willing movement of a man's soul with the larger sweep of the world's forces - a movement towards a more assured end than the chances of a single life. We see human heroism broken into units and say, this unit did little - might as well not have been. But in this way we might break up a great army into units; in this way we might break the sunlight into fragments, and think that this and the other might be cheaply parted with. Let us rather raise a monument to the soldiers whose brave hearts only kept the ranks unbroken, and met death - a monument to the faithful who were not famous, and who are precious as the continuity of the sunbeams is precious, though some of them fall unseen and on barrenness.

At present, looking back on that day at Treby, it seems to me that the sadder illusion lay with Harold Transome, who was trusting in his own skill to shape the success of his own morrows, ignorant of what many yesterdays had determined for him beforehand.