

Chapter 31

'In the copia of the factious language the word Tory was entertained, ... and being a vocal clever-sounding word, readily pronounced, it kept its hold, and took possession of the foul mouths of the faction.... The Loyalists began to cheer up and to take heart of grace, and in the working of this crisis, according to the common laws of scolding, they considered which way to make payment for so much of Tory as they had been treated with, to clear scores.... Immediately the train took, and ran like wildfire and became general. And so the account of Tory was balanced, and soon began to run up a sharp score on the other side.' - NORTH'S Examen, p. 321.

AT last the great epoch of the election for North Loamshire had arrived. The roads approaching Treby were early traversed by a large number of vehicles, horsemen, and also foot-passengers, than were ever seen there at the annual fair. Treby was the polling-place for many voters whose faces were quite strange in the town; and if there were some strangers who did not come to poll, though they had business not unconnected with the election, they were not liable to be regarded with suspicion or especial curiosity. It was understood that no division of a county had ever been more thoroughly canvassed, and that there would be a hard run between Garstin and Transome. Mr Johnson's head-quarters were at Duffield; but it was a maxim which he repeated after the great Putty, that a capable agent makes himself omnipresent; and quite apart from the express between him and Jermyn, Mr John Johnson's presence in the universe had potent effects on this December day at Treby Magna.

A slight drizzling rain which was observed by some Tories who looked out of their bedroom windows before six o'clock, made them hope that, after all, the day might pass off better than alarmists had expected. The rain was felt to be somehow on the side of quiet and Conservatism; but soon the breaking of the clouds and the mild gleams of a December sun brought back previous apprehensions. As there were already precedents for riot at a Reformed election, and as the Trebian district had had its confidence in the natural course of things somewhat shaken by a landed proprietor with an old name offering himself as a Radical candidate, the election had been looked forward to by many with a vague sense that it would be an occasion something like a fighting match, when bad characters would probably assemble, and there might be struggles and alarms for respectable men, which would make it expedient for them to take a little neat brandy as a precaution beforehand and a restorative afterwards. The tenants on the Transome estate were comparatively fearless: poor Mr Goffe, of Rabbit's End, considered that 'one thing was as mauling as another', and that an election was no worse than the sheep-rot, while Mr Dibbs, taking the more cheerful view of a prosperous man,

reflected that if the Radicals were dangerous, it was safer to be on their side. It was the voters for Debarry and Garstin who considered that they alone had the right to regard themselves as targets for evil-minded men; and Mr Crowder, if he could have got his ideas countenanced, would have recommended a muster of farm-servants with defensive pitchforks on the side of church and king. But the bolder men were rather gratified by the prospect of being groaned at, so that they might face about and groan in return.

Mr Crow, the high constable of Treby, inwardly rehearsed a brief address to a riotous crowd in case it should be wanted, having been warned by the rector that it was a primary duty on these occasions to keep a watch against provocation as well as violence. The rector, with a brother magistrate who was on the spot, had thought it desirable to swear in some special constables, but the presence of loyal men not absolutely required for the polling was not looked at in the light of a provocation. The benefit clubs from various quarters made a show, some with the orange-coloured ribbons and streamers of the true Tory candidate, some with the mazarine of the Whig. The orange-coloured bands played 'Auld Langsyne', and a louder mazarine band came across them with 'O whistle and I will come to thee, my lad' - probably as the tune the most symbolical of Liberalism which their repertory would furnish. There was not a single club bearing the Radical blue: the Sproxton Club members wore the mazarine, and Mr Chubb wore so much of it that he looked (at a sufficient distance) like a very large gentianella. It was generally understood that 'these brave fellows', representing the fine institution of benefit clubs, and holding aloft the motto, 'Let brotherly love continue', were a civil force calculated to encourage voters of sound opinions and keep up their spirits. But a considerable number of unadorned heavy navvies, colliers, and stone-pit men, who used their freedom as British subjects to be present in Treby on this great occasion, looked like a possibly uncivil force whose politics were dubious until it was clearly seen for whom they cheered and for whom they groaned.

Thus the way up to the polling-booths was variously lined, and those who walked it, to whatever side they belonged, had the advantage of hearing from the opposite side what were the most marked defects or excesses in their personal appearance; for the Trebians of that day held, without being aware that they had Cicero's authority for it, that the bodily blemishes of an opponent were a legitimate ground for ridicule; but if the voter frustrated wit by being handsome, he was groaned at and satirised according to a formula, in which the adjective was Tory, Whig, or Radical, as the case might be, and the substantive blank to be filled up after the taste of the speaker.

Some of the more timid had chosen to go through this ordeal as early as possible in the morning. One of the earliest was Mr Timothy Rose,

the gentleman-farmer from Leek Malton. He had left home with some foreboding, having swathed his more vital parts in layers of flannel, and put on two greatcoats as a soft kind of armour. But reflecting with some trepidation that there were no resources for protecting his head, he once more wavered in his intention to vote; he once more observed to Mrs Rose that these were hard times when a man of independent property was expected to vote 'willy-nilly;' but finally, coerced by the sense that he should be looked ill on 'in these times' if he did not stand by the gentlemen round about, he set out in his gig, taking with him a powerful waggoner, whom he ordered to keep him in sight as he went to the polling-booth. It was hardly more than nine o'clock when Mr Rose, having thus come up to the level of his times, cheered himself with a little cherry-brandy at the Marquis, drove away in a much more courageous spirit, and got down at Mr Nolan's, just outside the town. The retired Londoner, he considered, was a man of experience, who would estimate properly the judicious course he had taken, and could make it known to others. Mr Nolan was superintending the removal of some shrubs in his garden.

'Well, Mr Nolan,' said Rose, twinkling a self-complacent look over the red prominence of his cheeks, 'have you been to give your vote yet?'

'No; all in good time. I shall go presently.'

'Well, I wouldn't lose an hour, I wouldn't. I said to myself, if I've got to do gentlemen a favour, I'll do it at once. You see, I've got no landlord, Nolan - I'm in that position o' life that I can be independent.'

'Just so, my dear sir,' said the wiry-faced Nolan, pinching his underlip between his thumb and finger, and giving one of those wonderful universal shrugs, by which he seemed to be recalling all his garments from a tendency to disperse themselves. 'Come in and see Mrs Nolan?'

'No, no, thankye. Mrs Rose expects me back. But, as I was saying, I'm an independent man, and I consider it's not my part to show favour to one more than another, but to make things as even as I can. If I'd been a tenant to anybody, well, in course I must have voted for my landlord - that stands to sense. But I wish everybody well; and if one's returned to parliament more than another, nobody can say

it's my doing; for when you can vote for two, you can make things even. So I gave one to Debarry and one to Transome; and I wish Garstin no ill, but I can't help the odd number, and he hangs on to Debarry, they say.'

'God bless me, sir,' said Mr Nolan, coughing down a laugh, 'don't you perceive that you might as well have stayed at home, and not voted at

all, unless you would rather send a Radical to parliament than a sober Whig?'

'Well, I'm sorry you should have anything to say against what I've done, Nolan,' said Mr Rose, rather crestfallen, though sustained by inward warmth. 'I thought you'd agree with me, as you're a sensible man. But the most an independent man can do is to try and please all; and if he hasn't the luck - here's wishing I may do it another time,' added Mr Rose, apparently confounding a toast with a salutation, for he put out his hand for a passing shake, and then stepped into his gig again.

At the time that Mr Timothy Rose left the town, the crowd in King Street and in the market-place, where the polling-booths stood, was fluctuating. Voters as yet were scanty, and brave fellows who had come from any distance this morning, or who had sat up late drinking the night before, required some reinforcement of their strength and spirits. Every public-house in Treby, not excepting the venerable and sombre Cross-Keys, was lively with changing and numerous company. Not, of course, that there was any treating: treating necessarily had stopped, from moral scruples, when once 'the writs were out'; but there was drinking, which did equally well under any name.

Poor Tommy Trounsem, breakfasting here on Falstaff's proportion of bread, and something which, for gentility's sake, I will call sack, was more than usually victorious over the ills of life, and felt himself one of the heroes of the day. He had an immense light-blue cockade in his hat, and an amount of silver in a dirty little canvas bag which astonished himself. For some reason, at first inscrutable to him, he had been paid for his bill-sticking with great liberality at Mr Jermyn's office, in spite of his having been the victim of a trick by which he had once lost his own bills and pasted up Debarry's; but he soon saw that this was simply a recognition of his merit as 'an old family kept out of its rights', and also of his peculiar share in an occasion when the family was to get into parliament. Under these circumstances, it was due from him that he should show himself prominently where business was going forward, and give additional value by his presence to every vote for Transome. With this view he got a half-pint bottle filled with his peculiar kind of 'sack', and hastened back to the market-place, feeling good-natured and patronising towards all political parties, and only so far partial as his family bound him to be.

But a disposition to concentrate at that extremity of Ring Street which issued in the market-place was not universal among the increasing crowd. Some of them seemed attracted towards another nucleus at the other extremity of King Street, near the Seven Stars. This was Garsdn's chief house, where his committee sat, and it was also a point which must necessarily be passed by many voters entering the town

on the eastern side. It seemed natural that the mazarine colours should be visible here, and that Pack, the tall 'shepherd' of the Sproxton men, should be seen moving to and fro where there would be a frequent opportunity of cheering the voters for a gentleman who had the chief share in the Sproxton mines. But the side lanes and entries out of Ring Street were numerous enough to relieve any pressure if there was need to make way. The lanes had a distinguished reputation. Two of them had odours of brewing; one had a side entrance to Mr Tiliot's wine and spirit vaults; up another Mr Muscat's cheeses were frequently being unloaded; and even some of the entries had those cheerful suggestions of plentiful provision which were among the characteristics of Treby.

Between ten and eleven the voters came in more rapid succession, and the whole scene became spirited. Cheers, sarcasms, and oaths, which seemed to have a flavour of wit for many hearers, were beginning to be reinforced by more practical demonstrations, dubiously jocose. There was a disposition in the crowd to close and hem in the way for voters, either going or coming, until they had paid some kind of toll. It was difficult to see who set the example in the transition from words to deeds. Some thought it was due to Jacob Cuff, a Tory charity-man, who was a well-known ornament of the pothouse, and gave his mind much leisure for amusing devices; but questions of origination in stirring periods are notoriously hard to settle. It is by no means necessary in human things that there should be only one beginner. This, however, is certain - that Mr Chubb, who wished it to be noticed that he voted for Garstin solely, was one of the first to get rather more notice than he wished, and that he had his hat knocked off and crushed in the interest of Debarry by Tories opposed to coalition. On the other hand, some said it was at the same time that Mr Pink, the saddler, being stopped on his way and made to declare that he was going to vote for Debarry, got himself well chalked as to his coat, and pushed up an entry, where he remained the prisoner of terror combined with the want of any back outlet, and never gave his vote that day.

The second Tory joke was performed with much gusto. The majority of the Transome tenants came in a body from the Ram Inn, with Mr Banks the bailiff leading them. Poor Goffe was the last of them, and his worn melancholy look and forward-leaning gait gave the jocose Cuff the notion that the farmer was not what he called 'compus'. Mr Goffe was cut off from his companions and hemmed in; asked, by voices with hot breath close to his ear, how many horses he had, how many cows, how many fat pigs; then jostled from one to another, who made trumpets with their hands and deafened him by telling him to vote for Debarry. In this way the melancholy Goffe was hustled on till he was at the polling-booth - filled with confused alarms, the immediate alarm being that of having to go back in still worse fashion

than he had come. Arriving in this way after the other tenants had left, he astonished all hearers who knew him for a tenant of the Transomes by saying 'Debarry', and was jostled back trembling amid shouts of laughter.

By stages of this kind the fun grew faster, and was in danger of getting rather serious. The Tories began to feel that their jokes were returned by others of a heavier sort, and that the main strength of the crowd was not on the side of sound opinion, but might come to be on the side of sound cudgelling and kicking. The navvies and pitmen in dishabille seemed to be multiplying, and to be clearly not belonging to the party of Order. The shops were freely resorted to for various forms of playful missiles and weapons; and news came to the magistrates, watching from the large window of the Marquis, that a gentleman coming in on horseback at the other end of the street to vote for Garstin had had his horse turned round and frightened into a head-long gallop out of it again.

Mr Crow and his subordinates, and all the special constables, felt that it was necessary to make some energetic effort, or else every voter would be intimidated and the poll must be adjourned. The rector determined to get on horseback and go amidst the crowd with the constables; and he sent a message to Mr Lingon, who was at the Ram, calling on him to do the same. 'Sporting Jack' was sure the good fellows meant no harm, but he was courageous enough to face any bodily dangers, and rode out in his brown leggings and coloured bandanna, speaking persuasively.

It was nearly twelve o'clock when this sally was made: the constables and magistrates tried the most pacific measures, and they seemed to succeed. There was a rapid thinning of the crowd: the most boisterous disappeared, or seemed to do so by becoming quiet; missiles ceased to fly, and a sufficient way was cleared for voters along King Street. The magistrates returned to their quarters, and the constables took convenient posts of observation. Mr Wace, who was one of Debarry's committee, had suggested to the rector that it might be wise to send for the military from Duffield, with orders that they should station themselves at Hathercote, three miles off: there was so much property in the town that it would be better to make it secure against risks. But the rector felt that this was not the part of a moderate and wise magistrate, unless the signs of riot recurred. He was a brave man, and fond of thinking that his own authority sufficed for the maintenance of the general good in Treby.