

"EXIT TYRANNUS"

The eventful day had arrived at last, the day which, when first named, had seemed--like all golden dates that promise anything definite--so immeasurably remote. When it was first announced, a fortnight before, that Miss Smedley was really going, the resultant ecstasies had occupied a full week, during which we blindly revelled in the contemplation and discussion of her past tyrannies, crimes, malignities; in recalling to each other this or that insult, dishonour, or physical assault, sullenly endured at a time when deliverance was not even a small star on the horizon; and in mapping out the golden days to come, with special new troubles of their own, no doubt, since this is but a work-a-day world, but at least free from one familiar scourge. The time that remained had been taken up by the planning of practical expressions of the popular sentiment. Under Edward's masterly direction, arrangements had been made

for a flag to be run up over the hen-house at the very moment when the fly, with Miss Smedley's boxes on top and the grim oppressor herself inside, began to move off down the drive. Three brass cannons, set on the brow of the sunk-fence, were to proclaim our deathless sentiments in the ears of the retreating foe: the dogs were to wear ribbons, and later--but this depended on our powers of evasiveness and dissimulation--there might be a small bonfire, with a cracker or two, if the public funds could bear the unwonted strain.

I was awakened by Harold digging me in the ribs, and "She's going

to-day!" was the morning hymn that scattered the clouds of sleep.

Strange to say, it was with no corresponding jubilation of spirits that I slowly realised the momentous fact. Indeed, as I dressed, a dull disagreeable feeling that I could not define grew within me--something like a physical bruise. Harold was evidently feeling it too, for after repeating "She's going to-day!" in a tone more befitting the Litany, he looked hard in my face for direction as to how the situation was to be taken. But I crossly bade him look sharp and say his prayers and not bother me. What could this gloom portend, that on a day of days like the present seemed to hang my heavens with black?

Down at last and out in the sun, we found Edward before us, swinging on a gate, and chanting a farm-yard ditty in which all the beasts appear in due order, jargoning in their several tongues, and every verse begins with the couplet--

"Now, my lads, come with me,
Out in the morning early!"

The fateful exodus of the day had evidently slipped his memory entirely. I touched him on the shoulder. "She's going to-day!" I said. Edward's carol subsided like a water-tap turned off. "So she is!" he replied, and got down at once off the gate: and we returned to the house without another word.

At breakfast Miss Smedley behaved in a most mean and uncalled-for manner. The right divine of governesses to govern wrong includes no right to cry. In thus usurping the prerogative of their victims, they ignore the rules of the ring, and hit below the belt. Charlotte was crying, of course; but that counted for nothing. Charlotte even cried when the pigs' noses were ringed in due season; thereby evoking the cheery contempt of the operators, who asserted they liked it, and doubtless knew. But when the cloud-compeller, her bolts laid aside, resorted to tears, mutinous humanity had a right to feel aggrieved, and placed in a false and difficult position. What would the Romans have done, supposing Hannibal had cried? History has not even considered the possibility. Rules and precedents should be strictly observed on both sides; when they are violated, the other party is justified in feeling injured.

There were no lessons that morning, naturally--another grievance!

The fitness of things required that we should have struggled to the last in a confused medley of moods and tenses, and parted for ever, flushed with hatred, over the dismembered corpse of the multiplication table. But this thing was not to be; and I was free to stroll by myself through the garden, and combat, as best I might, this growing feeling of depression. It was a wrong system altogether, I thought, this going of people one had got used to. Things ought always to continue as they had been. Change there must be, of course; pigs, for instance, came and went with disturbing frequency--

"Fired their ringing shot and passed,
Hotly charged and sank at last,"--

but Nature had ordered it so, and in requital had provided for rapid successors. Did you come to love a pig, and he was taken from you, grief was quickly assuaged in the delight of selection from the new litter. But now, when it was no question of a peerless pig, but only of a governess, Nature seemed helpless, and the future held no litter of oblivion. Things might be better, or they might be worse, but they would never be the same; and the innate conservatism of youth asks neither poverty nor riches, but only immunity from change.

Edward slouched up alongside of me presently, with a hang-dog look on him, as if he had been caught stealing jam. "What a lark it'll be when she's really gone!" he observed, with a swagger obviously assumed.

"Grand fun!" I replied, dolorously; and conversation flagged.

We reached the hen-house, and contemplated the banner of freedom lying ready to flaunt the breezes at the supreme moment.

"Shall you run it up," I asked, "when the fly starts, or--or wait a little till it's out of sight?"

Edward gazed around him dubiously. "We're going to have some rain, I

think," he said; "and--and it's a new flag. It would be a pity to spoil it. P'raps I won't run it up at all."

Harold came round the corner like a bison pursued by Indians. "I've polished up the cannons," he cried, "and they look grand! Mayn't I load 'em now?"

"You leave 'em alone," said Edward, severely, "or you'll be blowing yourself up" (consideration for others was not usually Edward's strong point). "Don't touch the gunpowder till you're told, or you'll get your head smacked."

Harold fell behind, limp, squashed, obedient. "She wants me to write to her," he began, presently. "Says she doesn't mind the spelling, it I'll only write. Fancy her saying that!"

"Oh, shut up, will you?" said Edward, savagely; and once more we were silent, with only our thoughts for sorry company.

"Let's go off to the copse," I suggested timidly, feeling that something had to be done to relieve the tension, "and cut more new bows and arrows."

"She gave me a knife my last birthday," said Edward, moodily, never budging. "It wasn't much of a knife--but I wish I hadn't lost it."

"When my legs used to ache," I said, "she sat up half the night, rubbing stuff on them. I forgot all about that till this morning."

"There's the fly!" cried Harold suddenly. "I can hear it scrunching on the gravel."

Then for the first time we turned and stared one another in the face.

The fly and its contents had finally disappeared through the gate: the rumble of its wheels had died away; and no flag floated defiantly in the sun, no cannons proclaimed the passing of a dynasty. From out the frosted cake of our existence Fate had cut an irreplaceable segment; turn which way we would, the void was present. We sneaked off in different directions, mutually undesirous of company; and it seemed borne in upon me that I ought to go and dig my garden right over, from end to end. It didn't actually want digging; on the other hand, no amount of digging could affect it, for good or for evil; so I worked steadily, strenuously, under the hot sun, stifling thought in action. At the end of an hour or so, I was joined by Edward.

"I've been chopping up wood," he explained, in a guilty sort of way, though nobody had called on him to account for his doings.

"What for?" I inquired, stupidly. "There's piles and piles of it chopped

up already."

"I know," said Edward; "but there's no harm in having a bit over.

You never can tell what may happen. But what have you been doing all this digging for?"

"You said it was going to rain," I explained, hastily; "so I thought I'd get the digging done before it came. Good gardeners always tell you that's the right thing to do."

"It did look like rain at one time," Edward admitted; "but it's passed off now. Very queer weather we're having. I suppose that's why I've felt so funny all day."

"Yes, I suppose it's the weather," I replied. "I've been feeling funny too."

The weather had nothing to do with it, as we well knew. But we would both have died rather than have admitted the real reason.

THE BLUE ROOM

That nature has her moments of sympathy with man has been noted often