

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE INTERVENING YEARS

Now we may omit a great deal from Godfrey's youthful career. Within a few days he received a letter from his father forwarded to him from the hotel, that was even more unpleasant than the majority of the paternal epistles to which he was accustomed. Mr. Knight, probably from honest conviction and a misreading of the facts of life, was one of those persons who are called Pacifists. Although he never carried out the doctrine in his own small affairs, he believed that nations were enjoined by divine decree to turn the other cheek and indeed every portion of their corporate frame to the smiter, and that by so doing, in some mysterious way, they would attain to profound peace and felicity. Consequently he hated armies, especially as these involved taxation, and loathed the trade of soldiering, which he considered one of licensed murder.

The decision of his son to adopt this career was therefore a bitter blow to him, concerning which he expressed his feelings in the plainest language, ending his epistle by intimating his strong conviction that Godfrey, having taken the sword, was destined to perish by the sword. Also he pointed out to him that he had turned his back upon God Who would certainly remember the affront, being, he remarked, "a jealous God," and lastly that the less they saw of each other in future--here he was referring to himself, not to the Divinity as the context would

seem to imply--the better it would be for both of them.

Further there was a postscript about the disgraceful conduct of the woman, Mrs. Parsons, who, after receiving the shelter of his house for many years, had made a scene and departed, leaving him in the lurch. His injunction was that under no circumstances should he, Godfrey, have anything more to do with this violent and treacherous female who had made him a pretext of quarrel, and, having learned that he had money, doubtless wished to get something out of him.

Godfrey did not answer this letter, nor did his father write to him again for quite a long while.

For the rest, on the appointed Monday he presented himself at Garrick Street, and began his course of tuition under the general direction of the wise Mr. Scoones, "cramming" as it was called. This, indeed, exactly describes the process, for all knowledge was rejected except that which was likely to obtain marks in the course of an examination by hide-bound persons appointed to ascertain who were the individuals best fitted to be appointed to various branches of the Public Service. Anything less calculated to secure the selection of suitable men than such a system cannot well be imagined. However, it was that which certain nebulous authorities had decreed should prevail, and there was an end of it, although in effect it involved, and still involves, the frequent sacrifice of those qualities and characteristics which are essential to a public servant, to others that are quite the reverse.

For instance, to a parrot-like memory and the power of acquiring a superficial acquaintance with much miscellaneous information and remembering the same for, say, six months.

Although he hated the business and thought with longing of his studies, stellar and other, in the Kleindorf observatory, Godfrey was quite clever enough to collect what was needed. In fact, some three months later he passed his examination with ease about half-way up the list, and duly entered Sandhurst.

He found the establishment at Garrick Street just such a place as its owner had described. In it were many charming but idle young men, often with a certain amount of means, who were going up for the Diplomatic Service, the Foreign Office, the Indian Civil, or various branches of the army. Of these a large proportion enjoyed life but did little else, and in due course failed in their competitive encounters with the examiners.

Others were too stupid to succeed, or perhaps their natural talents had another bent, while the remainder, by no means the most brilliant, but with a faculty for passing examinations and without any disturbing originality, worked hard and sailed into their desired haven with considerable facility, being of the stuff of which most successful men are made. For the rest, there was the opportunity, and if they did not avail themselves of it Scoones' was not to blame. It was, and perhaps still remains, a most admirable institution of its sort, one, indeed,

of which the present chronicler has very grateful recollections.

Among the pupils studying there was a young man named Arthur Thorburn, an orphan, with considerable expectations, who lived with an aunt in a fine old house at Queen Anne's Gate. He was a brilliant young man, witty and original, but rash and without perseverance, whom his guardians wished to enter the Diplomatic Service, a career in which, without doubt, had he ever attained to it, he would have achieved a considerable failure. In appearance he was of medium height, round-faced, light-haired, blue-eyed, with a constant and most charming smile, in every way a complete contrast to Godfrey. Perhaps this was the reason of the curious attachment that the two formed for each other, unless, indeed, such strong and strange affinities have their roots in past individual history, which is veiled from mortal eyes. At any rate, it happened that on Godfrey's first day at Scoones' he sat next to Arthur Thorburn in two classes which he attended. Godfrey listened intently and made notes; Arthur caricatured the lecturer, an art for which he had a native gift, and passed the results round the class. Godfrey saw the caricature and sniggered, then when the lectures were over gravely reproved the author, saying that he should not do such things.

"Why not?" asked Arthur, opening his blue eyes. "Heaven intended that stuffy old parrot" (he had drawn this learned man as a dilapidated fowl of that species) "to be caricatured. Observe that his nose is already half a beak. Or perhaps it is a beak developing into a nose; it depends

whether he is on the downward or upward path of evolution."

"Because you made me laugh," replied Godfrey, "whereby I lost at least eighteenpennyworth of information."

"A laugh is worth eighteenpence," suggested Arthur.

"That depends upon how many eighteenpences one possesses. You may have lots, some people are short of them."

"Quite true. I never looked at it in that way before. I am obliged to you for putting it so plainly," said Arthur with his charming smile.

Such was the beginning of the acquaintance of these two, and in some cases might have been its end. But with them it was not so. Arthur conceived a sincere admiration for Godfrey who could speak like this to a stranger, and at Scoones' and as much as possible outside, haunted him like a shadow. Soon it was a regular thing for Godfrey to go to dine at the old Georgian house in Queen Anne's Gate upon Sunday evenings, where he became popular with the rather magnificent early-Victorian aunt who thought that he exercised a good influence upon her nephew. Sometimes, too, Arthur would accompany Godfrey to Hampstead and sit smoking and making furtive caricatures of him and Mrs. Parsons, while he worked and she beamed admiration. The occupation sounds dull, but somehow Arthur did not find it so; he said that it rested his overwrought brain.

"Look here, old fellow," said Godfrey at length, "have you any intention of passing that examination of yours?"

"In the interests of the Diplomatic Service and of the country I think not," replied Arthur reflectively. "I feel that it is a case where true altruism becomes a duty."

"Then what do you mean to do with yourself?"

"Don't know. Live on my money, I suppose, and on that of my respected aunt after her lamented decease which, although I see no signs of it, she tells me she considers imminent."

"I don't wonder, Arthur, with you hanging about the house. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. A man is made to work his way through the world, not to idle."

"Like a beetle boring through wood, not like a butterfly flitting over flowers; that's what you mean, isn't it? Well, butterflies are nicer than beetles, and some of us like flowers better than dead wood. But, I say, old chap, do you mean it?"

"I do, and so does your aunt."

"Let us waive my aunt. Like the poor she is always with us, and I,

alas! am well acquainted with her views, which are those of a past epoch. But I am not obstinate; tell me what to do and I'll do it--anything except enter the Diplomatic Service, to lie abroad for the benefit of my country, in the words of the ancient saying."

"There is no fear of that, for you would never pass the examination," said the practical Godfrey. "You see, you are too clever," he added by way of explanation, "and too much occupied with a dozen things of which examiners take no account, the merits of the various religious systems, for instance."

"So are you," interrupted Arthur.

"I know I am; I love them. I'd like to talk to you about reincarnation and astronomy, of which I know something, and even astrology and the survival of the dead and lots of other things. But I have got to make my way in the world, and I've no time. You think me a heavy bore and an old fogey because I won't go to parties to which lots of those nice fellows ask me. Do you suppose I shouldn't like the parties and all the larks afterwards and the jolly actresses and the rest? Of course I should, for I'm a man like others. But I tell you I haven't time. I've flouted my father, and I'm on my honour, so to speak, to justify myself and get on. So I mean to pass that tomfool examination and to cram down a lot of stuff in order to do so, which is of no more use to me than though I had swallowed so much brown paper. Fool-stuff, pulped by fools to be the food of fools--that's what it is. And now I'm going to shove

some spoonfuls of it down my throat, so light your pipe, and please be quiet."

"One moment more of your precious time," interrupted Arthur. "What is the exact career that you propose to adorn? Something foreign, I think--Indian Civil Service?"

"No, as I have told you a dozen times, Indian Army."

"The army has points--possibly in the future it might give a man an opportunity of departing from the world in a fashion that is generally, if in error, considered to be decent. India, too, has still more points, for there anyone with intelligence might study the beginnings of civilisation, which, perhaps, are also its end. My friend, I, too, will enter the Indian Army, that is if I can pass the examination. Provide me at once with the necessary books and, Mrs. Parsons, be good-hearted enough to bring some of your excellent coffee, brewed double strong. Do not imagine, young man, who ought, by the way, to have been born fifty years earlier and married my aunt, that you are the only one who can face and conquer facts, even those advanced by that most accursed of empty-headed bores, the man or the maniac called Euclid."

So the pair of them studied together, and by dint of private tuition in the evening, for at Scoones' where his talent for caricature was too much for him, Arthur would do little or nothing, Godfrey dragged his

friend through the examination, the last but one in the list. Even then a miracle intervened to save him. Arthur's Euclid was hopeless. He hated the whole business of squares and angles and parallelograms with such intensity that it made him mentally and morally sick. To his, as to some other minds, it was utter nonsense devised by a semi-lunatic for the bewilderment of mankind, and adopted by other lunatics as an appropriate form of torture of the young.

At length, in despair, Godfrey, knowing that Arthur had an excellent memory, only the night before the examination, made him learn a couple of propositions selected out of the books which were to be studied, quite at hazard, with injunctions that no matter what other propositions were set he should write out these two, pretending that he had mistaken the question. This Arthur did with perfect accuracy, and by the greatest of good luck one of the two propositions was actually that which he was asked to set down, while the other was allowed to pass as an error.

So he bumped through somehow, and in the end the Indian Army gained a most excellent officer. It is true that there were difficulties when he explained to his aunt and his trustees that in some inexplicable manner he had passed for Sandhurst instead of into the Diplomatic Service. But when he demonstrated to them that this was his great and final effort and that nothing on earth would induce him to face another examination, even to be made a king, they thought it best to accept the accomplished fact.

"After all, you have passed something," said his aunt, "which is more than anyone ever expected you would do, and the army is respectable, for, as I have told you, my grandfather was killed at Waterloo."

"Yes," replied Arthur, "you have told me, my dear Aunt, very often. He broke his neck by jumping off his horse when riding towards or from the battlefield, did he not? and now I propose to follow his honoured example, on the battlefield, if possible, or if not, in steeplechasing."

So the pair of them went to Sandhurst together, and together in due course were gazetted to a certain regiment of Indian cavalry, the only difference being that Godfrey passed out top and Arthur passed out bottom, although, in fact, he was much the cleverer of the two. Of the interval between these two examinations there is nothing that need be reported, for their lives and the things that happened to them were as those of hundreds of other young men. Only through all they remained the fastest of friends, so much so that by the influence of General Cubitte, as has been said, they managed to be gazetted to the same regiment.

During those two years Godfrey never saw his father, and communicated with him but rarely. His winter vacations were spent at Mrs. Parsons' house in Hampstead, working for the most part, since he was absolutely determined to justify himself and get on in the profession which he had chosen. In the summer he and Arthur went walking tours, and once, with

some other young men, visited the Continent to study various battlefields, and improve their minds. At least Godfrey studied the battlefields, while Arthur gave most of his attention to the younger part of the female population of France and Italy. At Easter again they went to Scotland, where Arthur had some property settled on him--for he was a young man well supplied with this world's goods--and fished for salmon and trout. Altogether, for Godfrey, it was a profitable and happy two years. At Sandhurst and elsewhere everyone thought well of him, while old General Cubitte became his devoted friend and could not say enough in his praise.

"Damn it! Sir," he exclaimed once, "do you mean to tell me that you never overdraw your allowance? It is not natural; almost wrong indeed. I wonder what your secret vices are? Well, so long as you keep them secret, you ought to be a big man one day and end up in a very different position to George Cubitte--called a General--who never saw a shot fired in his life. There'll be lots of them flying about before you're old, my boy, and doubtless you'll get your share of gunpowder--or nitro-glycerine--if you go on as you have begun. If I weren't afraid of making you cocky, I'd tell you what they say about you down at that Sandhurst shop, where I have an old pal or two."

Shortly after this came the final examination, through which, as has been said, Godfrey sailed out top, an easy first indeed--a position to which his thorough knowledge of French and general aptitude for foreign languages, together with his powers of work and application, really

entitled him. All his friends were delighted, especially Arthur, who looked on him as a kind of *lusus naturæ*, and from his humble position at the bottom of the tree, gazed admiringly at Godfrey perched upon its topmost bough. The old Pasteur, too, with whom Godfrey kept up an almost weekly correspondence, continuing his astronomical studies by letter, was enraptured and covered him with compliments, as did his instructors at the College.

All of this would have been enough to turn the heads of many young men, but as it happened Godfrey was by nature modest, with enough intelligence to appreciate the abysmal depths of his own ignorance by the light of the little lamp of knowledge with which he had furnished himself on his journey into their blackness. This intense modesty always remained a leading characteristic of his, which endeared him to many, although it was not one that helped him forward in life. It is the bold, self-confident man, who knows how to make the most of his small gifts, who travels fastest and farthest in this world of ours.

When, however, actually he received quite an affectionate and pleased letter from his father, he did, for a while, feel a little proud. The letter enclosed a cutting from the local paper recording his success, and digging up for the benefit of its readers an account of his adventure on the Alps. Also, it mentioned prominently that he was the son of the Rev. Mr. Knight, the incumbent of Monk's Abbey, and had received his education in that gentleman's establishment; so prominently, indeed, that even the unsuspecting Godfrey could not help

wondering if his father had ever seen that paragraph before it appeared in print. The letter ended with this passage:

"We have not met for a long while, owing to causes to which I will not allude, and I suppose that shortly you will be going to India. If you care to come here I should like to see you before you leave England. This is natural, as after all you are my only child and I am growing old. Once you have departed to that far country who knows whether we shall ever meet again in this world?"

Godfrey, a generous-hearted and forgiving person, was much touched when he read these words, and wrote at once to say that if it were convenient, he would come down to Monk's Abbey at the beginning of the following week and spend some of his leave there. So, in due course, he went.

As it happened, at about the same time Destiny had arranged that another character in this history was returning to that quiet Essex village, namely Isobel Blake.

Isobel went to Mexico with her uncle and there had a most interesting time. She studied Aztec history with her usual thoroughness; so well, indeed, that she became a recognised authority on the subject. She climbed Popocatepetl, the mysterious "Sleeping Woman" that overhangs the ancient town, and looked into its crater. Greatly daring, she even visited Yucatan and saw some of the pre-Aztec remains. For this

adventure she paid with an attack of fever which never quite left her system. Indeed, that fever had a peculiar effect upon her, which may have been physical or something else. Isobel's fault, or rather characteristic, as the reader may have gathered, was that she built too much upon the material side of things. What she saw, what she knew, what her body told her, what the recorded experience of the world taught--these were real; all the rest, to her, was phantasy or imagination. She kept her feet upon the solid ground of fact, and left all else to dreamers; or, as she would have expressed it, to the victims of superstition inherited or acquired.

Well, something happened to her at the crisis of that fever, which was sharp, and took her on her return from Yucatan, at a horrible port called Frontera, where there were palm trees and zopilotes--a kind of vile American vulture--which sat silently on the verandah outside her door in the dreadful little hotel built upon piles in the mud of the great river, and mosquitoes by the ten million, and sleepy-eyed, crushed-looking Indians, and horrible halfbreeds, and everything else which suggests an earthly hell, except the glorious sunshine.

Of a sudden, when she was at her worst, all the materiality--if there be such a word--which circumstances and innate tendency had woven about her as a garment, seemed to melt away, and she became aware of something vast in which she floated like an insect in the atmosphere--some surrounding sea which she could neither measure nor travel.

She knew that she was not merely Isobel Blake, but a part of the universe in its largest sense, and that the universe expressed itself in miniature within her soul. She knew that ever since it had been, she was, and that while it existed she would endure. This imagination or inspiration, whichever it may have been, went no further than that, and afterwards she set it down to delirium, or to the exaltation that often accompanies fever. Still, it left a mark upon her, opening a new door in her heart, so to speak.

For the rest, the life in Mexico City was gay, especially in the position which she filled as the niece of the British Minister, who was often called upon to act as hostess, as her aunt was delicate and her cousin was younger than herself and not apt at the business. There were Diaz and the foreign Diplomatic Ministers; also the leading Mexicans to be entertained, for which purpose she learned Spanish. Then there were English travellers, distinguished, some of them, and German nobles, generally in the Diplomatic Service of their country, whom by some peculiar feminine instinct of her own, she suspected of being spies and generally persons of evil intentions. Also there was the British colony, among whom were some very nice people that she made her friends, the strange, adventurous pioneers of our Empire who are to be bound in every part of the world, and in a sense its cream.

Lastly, there were the American tourists and business men, many of whom she thought amusing. One of these, a millionaire who had to do with a

"beef trust," though what that might be she never quite understood, proposed to her. He was a nice young fellow enough, of a real old American family whose ancestors were supposed to have come over in the Mayflower, and possessed of a remarkable vein of original humour; also he was much in love. But Isobel would have none of it, and said so in such plain, unmistakable language that the millionaire straightway left Mexico City in his private railway car, disconsolately to pursue his beef speculations in other lands.

On the day that he departed Isobel received a note from him which ran:

"I have lost you, and since I am too sore-hearted to stay in this antique country and conclude the business that brought me here, I reckon that I have also lost 250,000 dollars. That sum, however, I would gladly have given for the honour and joy of your friendship, and as much more added. So I think it well spent, especially as it never figured in my accounts. Good-bye. God bless you and whoever it may be with whom you are in love, for that there is someone I am quite sure, also that he must be a good fellow."

From which it will be seen that this millionaire was a very nice young man. So, at least, thought Isobel, though he did write about her being in love with someone, which was the rankest nonsense. In love, indeed! Why, she had never met a man for whom she could possibly entertain any feelings of that sort, no, not even if he had been able to make a queen of her, or to endow her with all the cash resources of all the beef

trusts in the world. Men in that aspect were repellent and hateful to her; the possibility of such a union with any one of them was poisonous, even unnatural to her, soul and body.

Once, it is true, there had been a certain boy--but he had passed out of her life--oh! years ago, and, what is more, had affronted her by refusing to answer a letter which she had written to him, just, as she imagined--though of course this was only a guess--because of his ridiculous and unwarrantable jealousy and the atrocious pride that was his failing. Also she had read in the papers of a very brave act which he had done on the Alps, one which filled her with a pride that was not atrocious, but quite natural where an old playmate was concerned, and had noticed that it was a young lady whom he had rescued. That, of course, explained everything, and if her first supposition should be incorrect, would quite account for her having received no answer to her letter.

It was true, however, that she had heard no more of this young lady, though scraps of gossip concerning Godfrey did occasionally reach her. For instance, she knew that he had quarrelled with his father because he would not enter the Church and was going into the army, a career which she much preferred, especially as she did not believe in the Church and could not imagine what Godfrey would look like in a black coat and a white tie.

By the way, she wondered what he did look like now. She had an old

faded photograph of him as a lanky youth, but after all this time he could not in the least resemble that. Well, probably he had grown as plain and uninteresting--as she was herself. It was wonderful that the American young man could have seen anything in her, but then, no doubt he went on in the same kind of way with half the girls he met.

Thus reflected Isobel, and a little while later paid a last visit to the museum, which interested her more than any place in Mexico, perhaps because its exhibits strengthened her theories as to comparative religion, and shook off her feet the dust of what her American admirer had called that "antique land." It was with a positive pang that from the deck of the steamship outside Vera Cruz she looked her last on the snows of the glorious peak of Orizaba, but soon these faded away into the skyline and with them her life in Mexico.

Returning to England via the West Indies in the company of her uncle who was coming home on leave before taking up an appointment as Minister to one of the South American republics, she was greeted on the platform at Waterloo by her father. Sir John Blake had by this time forgotten their previous disagreements, or, at any rate, determined to ignore them, and Isobel, who was now in her way a finished woman of the world, though she did not forget, had come to a like conclusion. So their meeting was cordial enough, and for a while, not a very long while, they continued to live together in outward amity, with a tacit

understanding that they should follow their respective paths,  
unmolested by each other.