VII. THE EVENTS OF EIGHTEEN DAYS

1. AUGUST THE SEVENTEENTH

The time of day was four o'clock in the afternoon. The place was the lady's study or boudoir, Knapwater House. The person was Miss Aldclyffe sitting there alone, clothed in deep mourning.

The funeral of the old Captain had taken place, and his will had been read. It was very concise, and had been executed about five years previous to his death. It was attested by his solicitors, Messrs. Nyttleton and Tayling, of Lincoln's Inn Fields. The whole of his estate, real and personal, was bequeathed to his daughter Cytherea, for her sole and absolute use, subject only to the payment of a legacy to the rector, their relative, and a few small amounts to the servants.

Miss Aldclyffe had not chosen the easiest chair of her boudoir to sit in, or even a chair of ordinary comfort, but an uncomfortable, high, narrow-backed, oak framed and seated chair, which was allowed to remain in the room only on the ground of being a companion in artistic quaintness to an old coffer beside it, and was never used except to stand in to reach for a book from the highest row of shelves. But she had sat erect in this chair for more than an hour, for the reason that she was utterly unconscious of what her actions and bodily feelings were. The chair had stood nearest her path on entering the room, and she had gone to it in a dream.

She sat in the attitude which denotes unflagging, intense, concentrated thought--as if she were cast in bronze. Her feet were together, her body bent a little forward, and quite unsupported by the back of the chair; her hands on her knees, her eyes fixed intently on the corner of a footstool.

At last she moved and tapped her fingers upon the table at her side. Her pent-up ideas had finally found some channel to advance in. Motions became more and more frequent as she laboured to carry further and further the problem which occupied her brain. She sat back and drew a long breath: she sat sideways and leant her forehead upon her hand. Later still she arose, walked up and down the room--at first abstractedly, with her features as firmly set as ever; but by degrees her brow relaxed, her footsteps became lighter and more leisurely; her head rode gracefully and was no longer bowed. She plumed herself like a swan after exertion.

'Yes,' she said aloud. 'To get him here without letting him know that I have any other object than that of getting a useful man--that's the difficulty--and that I think I can master.'

She rang for the new maid, a placid woman of forty with a few grey hairs.

'Ask Miss Graye if she can come to me.'

Cytherea was not far off, and came in.

'Do you know anything about architects and surveyors?' said Miss Aldclyffe abruptly.

'Know anything?' replied Cytherea, poising herself on her toe to consider the compass of the question.

'Yes--know anything,' said Miss Aldclyffe.

'Owen is an architect and surveyor's draughtsman,' the maiden said, and thought of somebody else who was likewise.

'Yes! that's why I asked you. What are the different kinds of work comprised in an architect's practice? They lay out estates, and superintend the various works done upon them, I should think, among other things?'

'Those are, more properly, a land or building steward's duties--at least I have always imagined so. Country architects include those things in their practice; city architects don't.'

'I know that, child. But a steward's is an indefinite fast and loose profession, it seems to me. Shouldn't you think that a man who had been brought up as an architect would do for a steward?'

Cytherea had doubts whether an architect pure would do.

The chief pleasure connected with asking an opinion lies in not adopting it. Miss Aldclyffe replied decisively--

'Nonsense; of course he would. Your brother Owen makes plans for country buildings--such as cottages, stables, homesteads, and so on?'

'Yes; he does.'

'And superintends the building of them?'

'Yes; he will soon.'

'And he surveys land?'

'O yes.'

'And he knows about hedges and ditches--how wide they ought to be, boundaries, levelling, planting trees to keep away the winds, measuring timber, houses for ninety-nine years, and such things?'

'I have never heard him say that; but I think Mr. Gradfield does those things. Owen, I am afraid, is inexperienced as yet.'

'Yes; your brother is not old enough for such a post yet, of course. And then there are rent-days, the audit and winding up of tradesmen's accounts. I am afraid, Cytherea, you don't know much more about the matter than I do myself.... I am going out just now,' she continued. 'I shall not want you to walk with me to-day. Run away till dinner-time.'

Miss Aldclyffe went out of doors, and down the steps to the lawn: then turning to the left, through a shrubbery, she opened a wicket and passed into a neglected and leafy carriage-drive, leading down the hill. This she followed till she reached the point of its greatest depression, which was also the lowest ground in the whole grove.

The trees here were so interlaced, and hung their branches so near the ground, that a whole summer's day was scarcely long enough to change the air pervading the spot from its normal state of coolness to even a temporary warmth. The unvarying freshness was helped by the nearness of the ground to the level of the springs, and by the presence of a deep, sluggish stream close by, equally well shaded by bushes and a high wall. Following the road, which now ran along at the margin of the stream, she came to an opening in the wall, on the other side of the water, revealing a large rectangular nook from which the stream proceeded, covered with froth, and accompanied by a dull roar. Two more steps, and she was opposite the nook, in full view of the cascade forming its further boundary. Over the top could be seen the bright outer sky in the form of a crescent, caused by the curve of a bridge across the rapids, and the trees above.

Beautiful as was the scene she did not look in that direction. The same standing-ground afforded another prospect, straight in the front, less sombre than the water on the right or the trees all around. The avenue and grove which flanked it abruptly terminated a few yards ahead, where the ground began to rise, and on the remote edge of the greensward thus laid open, stood all that remained of the original manor-house, to which the dark margin-line of the trees in the avenue formed an adequate and well-fitting frame. It was the picture thus presented that was now interesting Miss Aldclyffe--not artistically or historically, but practically--as regarded its fitness for adaptation to modern requirements.

In front, detached from everything else, rose the most ancient portion of the structure--an old arched gateway, flanked by the bases of two small towers, and nearly covered with creepers, which had clambered over the eaves of the sinking roof, and up the gable to the crest of the Aldclyffe family perched on the apex. Behind this, at a distance of ten or twenty yards, came the only portion of the main building that still existed--an Elizabethan fragment, consisting of as much as could be contained under three gables and a cross roof behind. Against the wall could be seen ragged lines indicating the form of other destroyed gables which had once joined it there. The mullioned and transomed windows, containing five or six lights, were mostly bricked up to the extent of two or three, and the remaining portion fitted with cottage window-frames carelessly inserted, to suit the purpose to which the

old place was now applied, it being partitioned out into small rooms downstairs to form cottages for two labourers and their families; the upper portion was arranged as a storehouse for divers kinds of roots and fruit.

The owner of the picturesque spot, after her survey from this point, went up to the walls and walked into the old court, where the paving-stones were pushed sideways and upwards by the thrust of the grasses between them. Two or three little children, with their fingers in their mouths, came out to look at her, and then ran in to tell their mothers in loud tones of secrecy that Miss Aldclyffe was coming. Miss Aldclyffe, however, did not come in. She concluded her survey of the exterior by making a complete circuit of the building; then turned into a nook a short distance off where round and square timber, a saw-pit, planks, grindstones, heaps of building stone and brick, explained that the spot was the centre of operations for the building work done on the estate.

She paused, and looked around. A man who had seen her from the window of the workshops behind, came out and respectfully lifted his hat to her. It was the first time she had been seen walking outside the house since her father's death.

'Strooden, could the Old House be made a decent residence of, without much trouble?' she inquired.

The mechanic considered, and spoke as each consideration completed itself.

'You don't forget, ma'am, that two-thirds of the place is already pulled down, or gone to ruin?'

'Yes; I know.'

'And that what's left may almost as well be, ma'am.'

'Why may it?'

''Twas so cut up inside when they made it into cottages, that the whole carcase is full of cracks.'

'Still by pulling down the inserted partitions, and adding a little outside, it could be made to answer the purpose of an ordinary six or eight-roomed house?'

'Yes, ma'am.'

'About what would it cost?' was the question which had invariably come next in every communication of this kind to which the superintending workman had been a party during his whole experience. To his surprise, Miss Aldclyffe did not put it. The man thought her object in altering an

old house must have been an unusually absorbing one not to prompt what was so instinctive in owners as hardly to require any prompting at all.

'Thank you: that's sufficient, Strooden,' she said. 'You will understand that it is not unlikely some alteration may be made here in a short time, with reference to the management of the affairs.'

Strooden said 'Yes,' in a complex voice, and looked uneasy.

'During the life of Captain Aldclyffe, with you as the foreman of works, and he himself as his own steward, everything worked well. But now it may be necessary to have a steward, whose management will encroach further upon things which have hitherto been left in your hands than did your late master's. What I mean is, that he will directly and in detail superintend all.'

'Then--I shall not be wanted, ma'am?' he faltered.

'O yes; if you like to stay on as foreman in the yard and workshops only. I should be sorry to lose you. However, you had better consider. I will send for you in a few days.'

Leaving him to suspense, and all the ills that came in its train--distracted application to his duties, and an undefined number of sleepless nights and untasted dinners, Miss Aldclyffe looked at her watch and returned to the House. She was about to keep an appointment

with her solicitor, Mr. Nyttleton, who had been to Budmouth, and was coming to Knapwater on his way back to London.

2. AUGUST THE TWENTIETH

On the Saturday subsequent to Mr. Nyttleton's visit to Knapwater House, the subjoined advertisement appeared in the Field and the Builder newspapers:--

'LAND STEWARD.

'A gentleman of integrity and professional skill is required immediately for the MANAGEMENT of an ESTATE, containing about 1000 acres, upon which agricultural improvements and the erection of buildings are contemplated. He must be a man of superior education, unmarried, and not more than thirty years of age. Considerable preference will be shown for one who possesses an artistic as well as a practical knowledge of planning and laying out. The remuneration will consist of a salary of 220 pounds, with the old manor-house as a residence--Address Messrs. Nyttleton and Tayling, solicitors, Lincoln's Inn Fields.'

A copy of each paper was sent to Miss Aldclyffe on the day of publication. The same evening she told Cytherea that she was advertising for a steward, who would live at the old manor-house, showing her the

papers containing the announcement.

What was the drift of that remark? thought the maiden; or was it merely made to her in confidential intercourse, as other arrangements were told her daily. Yet it seemed to have more meaning than common. She remembered the conversation about architects and surveyors, and her brother Owen. Miss Aldclyffe knew that his situation was precarious, that he was well educated and practical, and was applying himself heart and soul to the details of the profession and all connected with it. Miss Aldclyffe might be ready to take him if he could compete successfully with others who would reply. She hazarded a question:

'Would it be desirable for Owen to answer it?'

'Not at all,' said Miss Aldclyffe peremptorily.

A flat answer of this kind had ceased to alarm Cytherea. Miss Aldclyffe's blunt mood was not her worst. Cytherea thought of another man, whose name, in spite of resolves, tears, renunciations and injured pride, lingered in her ears like an old familiar strain. That man was qualified for a stewardship under a king.

'Would it be of any use if Edward Springrove were to answer it?' she said, resolutely enunciating the name.

'None whatever,' replied Miss Aldclyffe, again in the same decided tone.

'You are very unkind to speak in that way.'

'Now don't pout like a goosie, as you are. I don't want men like either of them, for, of course, I must look to the good of the estate rather than to that of any individual. The man I want must have been more specially educated. I have told you that we are going to London next week; it is mostly on this account.'

Cytherea found that she had mistaken the drift of Miss Aldclyffe's peculiar explicitness on the subject of advertising, and wrote to tell her brother that if he saw the notice it would be useless to reply.

3. AUGUST THE TWENTY-FIFTH

Five days after the above-mentioned dialogue took place they went to London, and, with scarcely a minute's pause, to the solicitors' offices in Lincoln's Inn Fields.

They alighted opposite one of the characteristic entrances about the place--a gate which was never, and could never be, closed, flanked by lamp-standards carrying no lamp. Rust was the only active agent to be seen there at this time of the day and year. The palings along the front were rusted away at their base to the thinness of wires, and the successive coats of paint, with which they were overlaid in bygone days, had been completely undermined by the same insidious canker, which

lifted off the paint in flakes, leaving the raw surface of the iron on palings, standards, and gate hinges, of a staring blood-red.

But once inside the railings the picture changed. The court and offices were a complete contrast to the grand ruin of the outwork which enclosed them. Well-painted respectability extended over, within, and around the doorstep; and in the carefully swept yard not a particle of dust was visible.

Mr. Nyttleton, who had just come up from Margate, where he was staying with his family, was standing at the top of his own staircase as the pair ascended. He politely took them inside.

'Is there a comfortable room in which this young lady can sit during our interview?' said Miss Aldclyffe.

It was rather a favourite habit of hers to make much of Cytherea when they were out, and snub her for it afterwards when they got home.

'Certainly--Mr. Tayling's.' Cytherea was shown into an inner room.

Social definitions are all made relatively: an absolute datum is only imagined. The small gentry about Knapwater seemed unpractised to Miss Aldclyffe, Miss Aldclyffe herself seemed unpractised to Mr. Nyttleton's experienced old eyes.

'Now then,' the lady said, when she was alone with the lawyer; 'what is the result of our advertisement?'

It was late summer; the estate-agency, building, engineering, and surveying worlds were dull. There were forty-five replies to the advertisement.

Mr. Nyttleton spread them one by one before Miss Aldclyffe. 'You will probably like to read some of them yourself, madam?' he said.

'Yes, certainly,' said she.

'I will not trouble you with those which are from persons manifestly unfit at first sight,' he continued; and began selecting from the heap twos and threes which he had marked, collecting others into his hand.

'The man we want lies among these, if my judgment doesn't deceive me, and from them it would be advisable to select a certain number to be communicated with.'

'I should like to see every one--only just to glance them over--exactly as they came,' she said suasively.

He looked as if he thought this a waste of his time, but dismissing his sentiment unfolded each singly and laid it before her. As he laid them out, it struck him that she studied them quite as rapidly as he could

spread them. He slyly glanced up from the outer corner of his eye to hers, and noticed that all she did was look at the name at the bottom of the letter, and then put the enclosure aside without further ceremony. He thought this an odd way of inquiring into the merits of forty-five men who at considerable trouble gave in detail reasons why they believed themselves well qualified for a certain post. She came to the final one, and put it down with the rest.

Then the lady said that in her opinion it would be best to get as many replies as they possibly could before selecting--'to give us a wider choice. What do you think, Mr. Nyttleton?'

It seemed to him, he said, that a greater number than those they already had would scarcely be necessary, and if they waited for more, there would be this disadvantage attending it, that some of those they now could command would possibly not be available.

'Never mind, we will run that risk,' said Miss Aldclyffe. 'Let the advertisement be inserted once more, and then we will certainly settle the matter.'

Mr. Nyttleton bowed, and seemed to think Miss Aldclyffe, for a single woman, and one who till so very recently had never concerned herself with business of any kind, a very meddlesome client. But she was rich, and handsome still. 'She's a new broom in estate-management as yet,' he thought. 'She will soon get tired of this,' and he parted from her

without a sentiment which could mar his habitual blandness.

The two ladies then proceeded westward. Dismissing the cab in Waterloo Place, they went along Pall Mall on foot, where in place of the usual well-dressed clubbists--rubicund with alcohol--were to be seen, in linen pinafores, flocks of house-painters pallid from white lead. When they had reached the Green Park, Cytherea proposed that they should sit down awhile under the young elms at the brow of the hill. This they did--the growl of Piccadilly on their left hand--the monastic seclusion of the Palace on their right: before them, the clock tower of the Houses of Parliament, standing forth with a metallic lustre against a livid Lambeth sky.

Miss Aldclyffe still carried in her hand a copy of the newspaper, and while Cytherea had been interesting herself in the picture around, glanced again at the advertisement.

She heaved a slight sigh, and began to fold it up again. In the action her eye caught sight of two consecutive advertisements on the cover, one relating to some lecture on Art, and addressed to members of the Institute of Architects. The other emanated from the same source, but was addressed to the public, and stated that the exhibition of drawings at the Institute's rooms would close at the end of that week.

Her eye lighted up. She sent Cytherea back to the hotel in a cab, then turned round by Piccadilly into Bond Street, and proceeded to the rooms

of the Institute. The secretary was sitting in the lobby. After making her payment, and looking at a few of the drawings on the walls, in the company of three gentlemen, the only other visitors to the exhibition, she turned back and asked if she might be allowed to see a list of the members. She was a little connected with the architectural world, she said, with a smile, and was interested in some of the names.

'Here it is, madam,' he replied, politely handing her a pamphlet containing the names.

Miss Aldclyffe turned the leaves till she came to the letter M. The name she hoped to find there was there, with the address appended, as was the case with all the rest.

The address was at some chambers in a street not far from Charing Cross. 'Chambers,' as a residence, had always been assumed by the lady to imply the condition of a bachelor. She murmured two words, 'There still.'

Another request had yet to be made, but it was of a more noticeable kind than the first, and might compromise the secrecy with which she wished to act throughout this episode. Her object was to get one of the envelopes lying on the secretary's table, stamped with the die of the Institute; and in order to get it she was about to ask if she might write a note.

But the secretary's back chanced to be turned, and he now went towards

one of the men at the other end of the room, who had called him to ask some question relating to an etching on the wall. Quick as thought, Miss Aldclyffe stood before the table, slipped her hand behind her, took one of the envelopes and put it in her pocket.

She sauntered round the rooms for two or three minutes longer, then withdrew and returned to her hotel.

Here she cut the Knapwater advertisement from the paper, put it into the envelope she had stolen, embossed with the society's stamp, and directed it in a round clerkly hand to the address she had seen in the list of members' names submitted to her:--

AENEAS MANSTON, ESQ.,
WYKEHAM CHAMBERS,
SPRING GARDENS.

This ended her first day's work in London.

4. FROM AUGUST THE TWENTY-SIXTH TO SEPTEMBER THE FIRST

The two Cythereas continued at the Westminster Hotel, Miss Aldclyffe informing her companion that business would detain them in London another week. The days passed as slowly and quietly as days can pass in a city at that time of the year, the shuttered windows about the squares and terraces confronting their eyes like the white and sightless orbs of

blind men. On Thursday Mr. Nyttleton called, bringing the whole number of replies to the advertisement. Cytherea was present at the interview, by Miss Aldclyffe's request--either from whim or design.

Ten additional letters were the result of the second week's insertion, making fifty-five in all. Miss Aldclyffe looked them over as before. One was signed--

AENEAS MANSTON, 133, TURNGATE STREET,
LIVERPOOL.

'Now, then, Mr. Nyttleton, will you make a selection, and I will add one or two,' Miss Aldclyffe said.

Mr. Nyttleton scanned the whole heap of letters, testimonials, and references, sorting them into two heaps. Manston's missive, after a mere glance, was thrown amongst the summarily rejected ones.

Miss Aldclyffe read, or pretended to read after the lawyer. When he had finished, five lay in the group he had selected. 'Would you like to add to the number?' he said, turning to the lady.

'No,' she said carelessly. 'Well, two or three additional ones rather took my fancy,' she added, searching for some in the larger collection.

She drew out three. One was Manston's.

'These eight, then, shall be communicated with,' said the lawyer, taking up the eight letters and placing them by themselves.

They stood up. 'If I myself, Miss Aldclyffe, were only concerned personally,' he said, in an off-hand way, and holding up a letter singly, 'I should choose this man unhesitatingly. He writes honestly, is not afraid to name what he does not consider himself well acquainted with--a rare thing to find in answers to advertisements; he is well recommended, and possesses some qualities rarely found in combination. Oddly enough, he is not really a steward. He was bred a farmer, studied building affairs, served on an estate for some time, then went with an architect, and is now well qualified as architect, estate agent, and surveyor. That man is sure to have a fine head for a manor like yours.' He tapped the letter as he spoke. 'Yes, I should choose him without hesitation--speaking personally.'

'And I think,' she said artificially, 'I should choose this one as a matter of mere personal whim, which, of course, can't be given way to when practical questions have to be considered.'

Cytherea, after looking out of the window, and then at the newspapers, had become interested in the proceedings between the clever Miss Aldclyffe and the keen old lawyer, which reminded her of a game at cards. She looked inquiringly at the two letters--one in Miss Aldclyffe's hand, the other in Mr. Nyttleton's.

'What is the name of your man?' said Miss Aldclyffe.

'His name--' said the lawyer, looking down the page; 'what is his name?--it is Edward Springrove.'

Miss Aldclyffe glanced towards Cytherea, who was getting red and pale by turns. She looked imploringly at Miss Aldclyffe.

'The name of my man,' said Miss Aldclyffe, looking at her letter in turn; 'is, I think--yes--AEneas Manston.'

5. SEPTEMBER THE THIRD

The next morning but one was appointed for the interviews, which were to be at the lawyer's offices. Mr. Nyttleton and Mr. Tayling were both in town for the day, and the candidates were admitted one by one into a private room. In the window recess was seated Miss Aldclyffe, wearing her veil down.

The lawyer had, in his letters to the selected number, timed each candidate at an interval of ten or fifteen minutes from those preceding and following. They were shown in as they arrived, and had short conversations with Mr. Nyttleton--terse, and to the point. Miss Aldclyffe neither moved nor spoke during this proceeding; it might have been supposed that she was quite unmindful of it, had it not been

for what was revealed by a keen penetration of the veil covering her countenance--the rays from two bright black eyes, directed towards the lawyer and his interlocutor.

Springrove came fifth; Manston seventh. When the examination of all was ended, and the last man had retired, Nyttleton, again as at the former time, blandly asked his client which of the eight she personally preferred. 'I still think the fifth we spoke to, Springrove, the man whose letter I pounced upon at first, to be by far the best qualified, in short, most suitable generally.'

'I am sorry to say that I differ from you; I lean to my first notion still--that Mr.--Mr. Manston is most desirable in tone and bearing, and even specifically; I think he would suit me best in the long-run.'

Mr. Nyttleton looked out of the window at the whitened wall of the court.

'Of course, madam, your opinion may be perfectly sound and reliable; a sort of instinct, I know, often leads ladies by a short cut to conclusions truer than those come to by men after laborious round-about calculations, based on long experience. I must say I shouldn't recommend him.'

'Why, pray?'

'Well, let us look first at his letter of answer to the advertisement. He didn't reply till the last insertion; that's one thing. His letter is bold and frank in tone, so bold and frank that the second thought after reading it is that not honesty, but unscrupulousness of conscience dictated it. It is written in an indifferent mood, as if he felt that he was humbugging us in his statement that he was the right man for such an office, that he tried hard to get it only as a matter of form which required that he should neglect no opportunity that came in his way.'

'You may be right, Mr. Nyttleton, but I don't quite see the grounds of your reasoning.'

'He has been, as you perceive, almost entirely used to the office duties of a city architect, the experience we don't want. You want a man whose acquaintance with rural landed properties is more practical and closer--somebody who, if he has not filled exactly such an office before, has lived a country life, knows the ins and outs of country tenancies, building, farming, and so on.'

'He's by far the most intellectual looking of them all.'

'Yes; he may be--your opinion, Miss Aldclyffe, is worth more than mine in that matter. And more than you say, he is a man of parts--his brain power would soon enable him to master details and fit him for the post, I don't much doubt that. But to speak clearly' (here his words started off at a jog-trot) 'I wouldn't run the risk of placing the management

of an estate of mine in his hands on any account whatever. There, that's flat and plain, madam.'

'But, definitely,' she said, with a show of impatience, 'what is your reason?'

'He is a voluptuary with activity; which is a very bad form of man--as bad as it is rare.'

'Oh. Thank you for your explicit statement, Mr. Nyttleton,' said Miss Aldclyffe, starting a little and flushing with displeasure.

Mr. Nyttleton nodded slightly, as a sort of neutral motion, simply signifying a receipt of the information, good or bad.

'And I really think it is hardly worth while to trouble you further in this,' continued the lady. 'He's quite good enough for a little insignificant place like mine at Knapwater; and I know that I could not get on with one of the others for a single month. We'll try him.'

'Certainly, Miss Aldclyffe,' said the lawyer. And Mr. Manston was written to, to the effect that he was the successful competitor.

'Did you see how unmistakably her temper was getting the better of her, that minute you were in the room?' said Nyttleton to Tayling, when their client had left the house. Nyttleton was a man who surveyed everybody's

character in a sunless and shadowless northern light. A culpable slyness, which marked him as a boy, had been moulded by Time, the Improver, into honourable circumspection.

We frequently find that the quality which, conjoined with the simplicity of the child, is vice, is virtue when it pervades the knowledge of the man.

'She was as near as damn-it to boiling over when I added up her man,' continued Nyttleton. 'His handsome face is his qualification in her eyes. They have met before; I saw that.'

'He didn't seem conscious of it,' said the junior.

'He didn't. That was rather puzzling to me. But still, if ever a woman's face spoke out plainly that she was in love with a man, hers did that she was with him. Poor old maid, she's almost old enough to be his mother. If that Manston's a schemer he'll marry her, as sure as I am Nyttleton. Let's hope he's honest, however.'

'I don't think she's in love with him,' said Tayling. He had seen but little of the pair, and yet he could not reconcile what he had noticed in Miss Aldclyffe's behaviour with the idea that it was the bearing of a woman towards her lover.

'Well, your experience of the fiery phenomenon is more recent than

mine,' rejoined Nyttleton carelessly. 'And you may remember the nature of it best.'