

CHAPTER XVI—THE HOME-COMING OF MR. ROWLEY'S VISCOUNT

By eight the next morning Dudgeon and I had made our parting. By that time we had grown to be extremely familiar; and I would very willingly have kept him by me, and even carried him to Amersham Place. But it appeared he was due at the public-house where we had met, on some affairs of my great-uncle the Count, who had an outlying estate in that part of the shire. If Dudgeon had had his way the night before, I should have been arrested on my uncle's land and by my uncle's agent, a culmination of ill-luck.

A little after noon I started, in a hired chaise, by way of Dunstable. The mere mention of the name Amersham Place made every one supple and smiling. It was plainly a great house, and my uncle lived there in style. The fame of it rose as we approached, like a chain of mountains; at Bedford they touched their caps, but in Dunstable they crawled upon their bellies. I thought the landlady would have kissed me; such a flutter of cordiality, such smiles, such affectionate attentions were called forth, and the good lady bustled on my service in such a pother of ringlets and with such a jingling of keys. 'You're probably expected, sir, at the Place? I do trust you may 'ave better accounts of his lordship's 'elth, sir. We understood that his lordship, Mosha de Carwell, was main bad. Ha, sir, we shall all feel his loss, poor, dear, noble gentleman; and I'm sure nobody more polite! They do say, sir, his wealth is enormous, and before the Revolution, quite a prince in his own

country! But I beg your pardon, sir; 'ow I do run on, to be sure; and doubtless all beknown to you already! For you do resemble the family, sir. I should have known you anywheres by the likeness to the dear viscount. Ha, poor gentleman, he must 'ave a 'eavy 'eart these days.'

In the same place I saw out of the inn-windows a man-servant passing in the livery of my house, which you are to think I had never before seen worn, or not that I could remember. I had often enough, indeed, pictured myself advanced to be a Marshal, a Duke of the Empire, a Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour, and some other kickshaws of the kind, with a perfect rout of flunkeys correctly dressed in my own colours. But it is one thing to imagine, and another to see; it would be one thing to have these liveries in a house of my own in Paris—it was quite another to find them flaunting in the heart of hostile England; and I fear I should have made a fool of myself, if the man had not been on the other side of the street, and I at a one-pane window. There was something illusory in this transplantation of the wealth and honours of a family, a thing by its nature so deeply rooted in the soil; something ghostly in this sense of home-coming so far from home.

From Dunstable I rolled away into a crescendo of similar impressions. There are certainly few things to be compared with these castles, or rather country seats, of the English nobility and gentry; nor anything at all to equal the servility of the population that dwells in their neighbourhood. Though I was but driving in a hired chaise, word of my destination seemed to have gone abroad, and the women curtsayed and the

men louted to me by the wayside. As I came near, I began to appreciate the roots of this widespread respect. The look of my uncle's park wall, even from the outside, had something of a princely character; and when I came in view of the house itself, a sort of madness of vicarious vain-glory struck me dumb and kept me staring. It was about the size of the Tuileries. It faced due north; and the last rays of the sun, that was setting like a red-hot shot amidst a tumultuous gathering of snow clouds, were reflected on the endless rows of windows. A portico of Doric columns adorned the front, and would have done honour to a temple. The servant who received me at the door was civil to a fault—I had almost said, to offence; and the hall to which he admitted me through a pair of glass doors was warmed and already partly lighted by a liberal chimney heaped with the roots of beeches.

'Vicomte Anne de St. Yves,' said I, in answer to the man's question; whereupon he bowed before me lower still, and stepping upon one side introduced me to the truly awful presence of the major-domo. I have seen many dignitaries in my time, but none who quite equalled this eminent being; who was good enough to answer to the unassuming name of Dawson. From him I learned that my uncle was extremely low, a doctor in close attendance, Mr. Romaine expected at any moment, and that my cousin, the Vicomte de St. Yves, had been sent for the same morning.

'It was a sudden seizure, then?' I asked.

Well, he would scarcely go as far as that. It was a decline, a fading

away, sir; but he was certainly took bad the day before, had sent for Mr. Romaine, and the major-domo had taken it on himself a little later to send word to the Viscount. 'It seemed to me, my lord,' said he, 'as if this was a time when all the family should be called together.'

I approved him with my lips, but not in my heart. Dawson was plainly in the interests of my cousin.

'And when can I expect to see my great-uncle, the Count?' said I.

In the evening, I was told; in the meantime he would show me to my room, which had been long prepared for me, and I should be expected to dine in about an hour with the doctor, if my lordship had no objections.

My lordship had not the faintest.

'At the same time,' I said, 'I have had an accident: I have unhappily lost my baggage, and am here in what I stand in. I don't know if the doctor be a formalist, but it is quite impossible I should appear at table as I ought.'

He begged me to be under no anxiety. 'We have been long expecting you,' said he. 'All is ready.'

Such I found to be the truth. A great room had been prepared for me; through the mullioned windows the last flicker of the winter sunset

interchanged with the reverberation of a royal fire; the bed was open, a suit of evening clothes was airing before the blaze, and from the far corner a boy came forward with deprecatory smiles. The dream in which I had been moving seemed to have reached its pitch. I might have quitted this house and room only the night before; it was my own place that I had come to; and for the first time in my life I understood the force of the words home and welcome.

‘This will be all as you would want, sir?’ said Mr. Dawson. ‘This ’ere boy, Rowley, we place entirely at your disposition. ’E’s not exactly a trained vallet, but Mossho Powl, the Viscount’s gentleman, ’ave give him the benefick of a few lessons, and it is ’oped that he may give sitisfection. Hanythink that you may require, if you will be so good as to mention the same to Rowley, I will make it my business myself, sir, to see you sitisfied.’

So saying, the eminent and already detested Mr. Dawson took his departure, and I was left alone with Rowley. A man who may be said to have wakened to consciousness in the prison of the Abbaye, among those ever graceful and ever tragic figures of the brave and fair, awaiting the hour of the guillotine and denuded of every comfort, I had never known the luxuries or the amenities of my rank in life. To be attended on by servants I had only been accustomed to in inns. My toilet had long been military, to a moment, at the note of a bugle, too often at a ditch-side. And it need not be wondered at if I looked on my new valet with a certain diffidence. But I remembered that if he was my first experience of a

valet, I was his first trial as a master. Cheered by which consideration, I demanded my bath in a style of good assurance. There was a bathroom contiguous; in an incredibly short space of time the hot water was ready; and soon after, arrayed in a shawl dressing-gown, and in a luxury of contentment and comfort, I was reclined in an easy-chair before the mirror, while Rowley, with a mixture of pride and anxiety which I could well understand, laid out his razors.

‘Hey, Rowley?’ I asked, not quite resigned to go under fire with such an inexperienced commander. ‘It’s all right, is it? You feel pretty sure of your weapons?’

‘Yes, my lord,’ he replied. ‘It’s all right, I assure your lordship.’

‘I beg your pardon, Mr. Rowley, ‘but for the sake of shortness, would you mind not belording me in private?’ said I. ‘It will do very well if you call me Mr. Anne. It is the way of my country, as I dare say you know.’

Mr. Rowley looked blank.

‘But you’re just as much a Viscount as Mr. Powl’s, are you not?’ he said.

‘As Mr. Powl’s Viscount?’ said I, laughing. ‘Oh, keep your mind easy, Mr. Rowley’s is every bit as good. Only, you see, as I am of the younger line, I bear my Christian name along with the title. Alain is the Viscount; I am the Viscount Anne. And in giving me the name of Mr.

Anne, I assure you you will be quite regular.'

'Yes, Mr. Anne,' said the docile youth. 'But about the shaving, sir, you need be under no alarm. Mr. Powl says I 'ave excellent dispositions.'

'Mr. Powl?' said I. 'That doesn't seem to me very like a French name.'

'No, sir, indeed, my lord,' said he, with a burst of confidence. 'No, indeed, Mr. Anne, and it do not surely. I should say now, it was more like Mr. Pole.'

'And Mr. Powl is the Viscount's man?'

'Yes, Mr. Anne,' said he. 'He 'ave a hard billet, he do. The Viscount is a very particular gentleman. I don't think as you'll be, Mr. Anne?' he added, with a confidential smile in the mirror.

He was about sixteen, well set up, with a pleasant, merry, freckled face, and a pair of dancing eyes. There was an air at once deprecatory and insinuating about the rascal that I thought I recognised. There came to me from my own boyhood memories of certain passionate admirations long passed away, and the objects of them long ago discredited or dead. I remembered how anxious I had been to serve those fleeting heroes, how readily I told myself I would have died for them, how much greater and handsomer than life they had appeared. And looking in the mirror, it seemed to me that I read the face of Rowley, like an echo or a ghost, by

the light of my own youth. I have always contended (somewhat against the opinion of my friends) that I am first of all an economist; and the last thing that I would care to throw away is that very valuable piece of property—a boy's hero-worship.

'Why,' said I, 'you shave like an angel, Mr. Rowley!'

'Thank you, my lord,' says he. 'Mr. Powl had no fear of me. You may be sure, sir, I should never 'ave had this berth if I 'adn't 'ave been up to Dick. We been expecting of you this month back. My eye! I never see such preparations. Every day the fires has been kep' up, the bed made, and all! As soon as it was known you were coming, sir, I got the appointment; and I've been up and down since then like a Jack-in-the-box. A wheel couldn't sound in the avenue but what I was at the window! I've had a many disappointments; but to-night, as soon as you stepped out of the shay, I knew it was my—it was you. Oh, you had been expected! Why, when I go down to supper, I'll be the 'ero of the servants' 'all: the 'ole of the staff is that curious!'

'Well,' said I, 'I hope you may be able to give a fair account of me—sober, steady, industrious, good-tempered, and with a first-rate character from my last place?'

He laughed an embarrassed laugh. 'Your hair curls beautiful,' he said, by way of changing the subject. 'The Viscount's the boy for curls, though; and the richness of it is, Mr. Powl tells me his don't curl no

more than that much twine—by nature. Gettin' old, the Viscount is. He 'ave gone the pace, 'aven't 'e, sir?'

'The fact is,' said I, 'that I know very little about him. Our family has been much divided, and I have been a soldier from a child.'

'A soldier, Mr. Anne, sir?' cried Rowley, with a sudden feverish animation. 'Was you ever wounded?'

It is contrary to my principles to discourage admiration for myself; and, slipping back the shoulder of the dressing-gown, I silently exhibited the scar which I had received in Edinburgh Castle. He looked at it with awe.

'Ah, well!' he continued, 'there's where the difference comes in! It's in the training. The other Viscount have been horse-racing, and dicing, and carrying on all his life. All right enough, no doubt; but what I do say is, that it don't lead to nothink. Whereas—'

'Whereas Mr. Rowley's?' I put in.

'My Viscount?' said he. 'Well, sir, I did say it; and now that I've seen you, I say it again!'

I could not refrain from smiling at this outburst, and the rascal caught me in the mirror and smiled to me again.

'I'd say it again, Mr. Hanne,' he said. 'I know which side my bread's buttered. I know when a gen'leman's a gen'leman. Mr. Powl can go to Putney with his one! Beg your pardon, Mr. Anne, for being so familiar,' said he, blushing suddenly scarlet. 'I was especially warned against it by Mr. Powl.'

'Discipline before all,' said I. 'Follow your front-rank man.'

With that, we began to turn our attention to the clothes. I was amazed to find them fit so well: not à la diable, in the haphazard manner of a soldier's uniform or a ready-made suit; but with nicety, as a trained artist might rejoice to make them for a favourite subject.

'Tis extraordinary,' cried I: 'these things fit me perfectly.'

'Indeed, Mr. Anne, you two be very much of a shape,' said Rowley.

'Who? What two?' said I.

'The Viscount,' he said.

'Damnation! Have I the man's clothes on me, too?' cried I.

But Rowley hastened to reassure me. On the first word of my coming, the Count had put the matter of my wardrobe in the hands of his own and my cousin's tailors; and on the rumour of our resemblance, my clothes had

been made to Alain's measure.

'But they were all made for you express, Mr. Anne. You may be certain the Count would never do nothing by 'alf: fires kep' burning; the finest of clothes ordered, I'm sure, and a body-servant being trained a-purpose.'

'Well,' said I, 'it's a good fire, and a good set-out of clothes; and what a valet, Mr. Rowley! And there's one thing to be said for my cousin—I mean for Mr. Powl's Viscount—he has a very fair figure.'

'Oh, don't you be took in, Mr. Anne,' quoth the faithless Rowley: 'he has to be hyked into a pair of stays to get them things on!'

'Come, come, Mr. Rowley,' said I, 'this is telling tales out of school! Do not you be deceived. The greatest men of antiquity, including Caesar and Hannibal and Pope Joan, may have been very glad, at my time of life or Alain's, to follow his example. 'Tis a misfortune common to all; and really,' said I, bowing to myself before the mirror like one who should dance the minuet, 'when the result is so successful as this, who would do anything but applaud?'

My toilet concluded, I marched on to fresh surprises. My chamber, my new valet and my new clothes had been beyond hope: the dinner, the soup, the whole bill of fare was a revelation of the powers there are in man. I had not supposed it lay in the genius of any cook to create, out of

common beef and mutton, things so different and dainty. The wine was of a piece, the doctor a most agreeable companion; nor could I help reflecting on the prospect that all this wealth, comfort and handsome profusion might still very possibly become mine. Here were a change indeed, from the common soldier and the camp kettle, the prisoner and his prison rations, the fugitive and the horrors of the covered cart!