

**CHAPTER VI**

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Next evening, Lydia and Alice reached Mrs. Hoskyn's house in Campden Hill Road a few minutes before ten o'clock. They found Lord Worthington in the front garden, smoking and chatting with Mr. Hoskyn. He threw away his cigar and returned to the house with the two ladies, who observed that he was somewhat flushed with wine. They went into a parlor to take off their wraps, leaving him at the foot of the stairs. Presently they heard some one come down and address him excitedly thus,

"Worthington. Worthington. He has begun making a speech before the whole room. He got up the moment old Abendgasse sat down. Why the deuce did you give him that glass of champagne?"

"Sh-sh-sh! You don't say so! Come with me; and let us try to get him away quietly."

"Did you hear that?" said Alice. "Something must have happened."

"I hope so," said Lydia. "Ordinarily, the fault in these receptions is that nothing happens. Do not announce us, if you please," she added to the servant, as they ascended the stairs. "Since we have come late, let us spare the feelings of Herr Abendgasse by going in as quietly as possible."

They had no difficulty in entering unnoticed, for Mrs. Hoskyn considered obscurity beautiful; and her rooms were but dimly lighted by two curious lanterns of pink glass, within which were vaporous flames. In the middle of the larger apartment was a small table covered with garnet-colored plush, with a reading-desk upon it, and two candles in silver candlesticks, the light of which, being brighter than the lanterns, cast strong double shadows from a group of standing figures about the table. The surrounding space was crowded with chairs, occupied chiefly by ladies. Behind them, along the wall, stood a row of men, among whom was Lucian Webber. All were staring at Cashel Byron, who was making a speech to some bearded and spectacled gentlemen at the table. Lydia, who had never before seen him either in evening dress or quite at his ease, was astonished at his bearing. His eyes were sparkling, his confidence overbore the company, and his rough voice created the silence it broke. He was in high good-humor, and marked his periods by the swing of his extended left arm, while he held his right hand close to his body and occasionally pointed his remarks by slyly wagging his forefinger.

"--executive power," he was saying as Lydia entered. "That's a very good expression, gentlemen, and one that I can tell you a lot about. We have been told that if we want to civilize our neighbors we must do it mainly by the example of our own lives, by each becoming a living illustration of the highest culture we know. But what I ask is, how is anybody to know that you're an illustration of culture. You can't go about like a sandwich man with a label on your back to tell all the fine notions you have in your head; and you may be sure no person will consider your mere appearance preferable to his own. You want an executive power; that's what you want. Suppose you walked along the street and saw a man beating a woman, and setting a bad example to the roughs. Well, you would be bound to set a good example to them; and, if you're men, you'd like to save the woman; but you couldn't do it by merely living; for that would be setting the bad example of passing on and leaving the poor creature to be beaten. What is it that you need to know then, in order to act up to your fine ideas? Why, you want to know how to hit him, when to hit him, and where to hit him; and then you want the nerve to go in and do it. That's executive power; and that's what's wanted worse than sitting down and thinking how good you are, which is what this gentleman's teaching comes to after all. Don't you see? You want executive power to set an example. If you leave all that to the roughs, it's their example that will spread, and not yours. And look at the politics of it. We've heard a good deal about the French to-night. Well, they've got executive power. They know how to make a barricade, and how to fight behind it when they've made it. What's the result? Why, the French, if they only knew what they wanted, could have it to-morrow for the asking--more's the pity that they don't know. In this country we can do nothing; and if the lords and the landlords, or any other collection of nob's, were to drive us into the sea, what could we do but go? There's a gentleman laughing at me for saying that; but I ask him what would he do if the police or the soldiers came

this evening and told him to turn out of his comfortable house into the Thames? Tell 'em he wouldn't vote for their employers at the next election, perhaps? Or, if that didn't stop them, tell 'em that he'd ask his friends to do the same? That's a pretty executive power! No, gentlemen. Don't let yourself be deceived by people that have staked their money against you. The first thing to learn is how to fight. There's no use in buying books and pictures unless you know how to keep them and your own head as well. If that gentleman that laughed know how to fight, and his neighbors all knew how to fight too, he wouldn't need to fear police, nor soldiers, nor Russians, nor Prussians, nor any of the millions of men that may be let loose on him any day of the week, safe though he thinks himself. But, says you, let's have a division of labor. Let's not fight for ourselves, but pay other men to fight for us. That shows how some people, when they get hold of an idea, will work it to that foolish length that it's wearisome to listen to them. Fighting is the power of self-preservation; another man can't do it for you. You might as well divide the labor of eating your dinner, and pay one fellow to take the beef, another the beer, and a third the potatoes. But let us put it for the sake of argument that you do pay others to fight for you. Suppose some one else pays them higher, and they fight a cross, or turn openly against you! You'd have only yourself to blame for giving the executive power to money. And so long as the executive power is money the poor will be kept out of their corner and fouled against the ropes; whereas, by what I understand, the German professor wants them to have their rights. Therefore I say that a man's first duty is to learn to fight. If he can't do that he can't set an example; he can't stand up for his own rights or his neighbors'; he can't keep himself in bodily health; and if he sees the weak ill-used by the strong, the most he can do is to sneak away and tell the nearest policeman, who most likely won't turn up until the worst of the mischief is done. Coming to this lady's drawing-room, and making an illustration of himself, won't make him feel like a man after that. Let me be understood, though, gentlemen: I don't intend that you should take everything I say too exactly--too literally, as it were. If you see a man beating a woman, I think you should interfere on principle. But don't expect to be thanked by her for it; and keep your eye on her; don't let her get behind you. As for him, just give him a good one and go away. Never stay to get yourself into a street fight; for it's low, and generally turns out badly for all parties. However, that's only a bit of practical advice. It doesn't alter the great principle that you should get an executive power. When you get that, you'll have courage in you; and, what's more, your courage will be of some use to you. For though you may have courage by nature, still, if you haven't executive power as well, your courage will only lead you to stand up to be beaten by men that have both courage and executive power; and what good does that do you? People say that you're a game fellow; but they won't find the stakes for you unless you can win them. You'd far better put your game in your pocket, and throw up the sponge while you can see to do it.

"Now, on this subject of game, I've something to say that will ease the professor's mind on a point that he seemed anxious about. I am no musician; but I'll just show you how a man that understands one art understands every art. I made out from the gentleman's remarks that there is a man in the musical line named Wagner, who is what you might call a game sort of composer; and that the musical fancy, though they can't deny that his tunes are first-rate, and that, so to speak, he wins his fights, yet they try to make out that he wins them in an outlandish way, and that he has no real science. Now I tell the gentleman not to mind such talk. As I have just shown you, his game wouldn't be any use to him without science. He might have beaten a few second-raters with a rush while he was young; but he wouldn't have lasted out as he has done unless he was clever as well. You will find that those that run him down are either jealous, or they are old stagers that are not used to his style, and think that anything new must be bad. Just wait a bit, and, take my word for it, they'll turn right round and swear that his style isn't new at all, and that he stole it from some one they saw when they were ten years old. History shows us that that is the way of such fellows in all ages, as the gentleman said; and he gave you Beethoven as an example. But an example like that don't go home to you, because there isn't one man in a million that ever heard of Beethoven. Take a man that everybody has heard of--Jack Randall! The very same things were said of HIM. After that, you needn't go to musicians for an example. The truth is, that there are people in the world with that degree of envy and malice in them that they can't bear to allow a good man his merits; and when they have to admit that he can do one thing, they try to make out that there's something else he can't do. Come: I'll put it to you short and business-like. This German gentleman, who knows all about music, tells you that many pretend that this Wagner has game but no science. Well, I, though I know nothing about music, will bet you twenty-five pounds that there's others that allow him to be full of

science, but say that he has no game, and that all he does comes from his head, and not from his heart. I will. I'll bet twenty-five pounds on it, and let the gentleman of the house be stakeholder, and the German gentleman referee. Eh? Well, I'm glad to see that there are no takers.

"Now we'll go to another little point that the gentleman forgot. He recommended you to LEARN--to make yourselves better and wiser from day to day. But he didn't tell you why it is that you won't learn, in spite of his advice. I suppose that, being a foreigner, he was afraid of hurting your feelings by talking too freely to you. But you're not so thin-skinned as to take offence at a little plain-speaking, I'll be bound; so I tell you straight out that the reason you won't learn is not that you don't want to be clever, or that you are lazier than many that have learned a great deal, but just because you'd like people to think that you know everything already--because you're ashamed to be seen going to school; and you calculate that if you only hold your tongue and look wise you'll get through life without your ignorance being found out. But where's the good of lies and pretence? What does it matter if you get laughed at by a cheeky brat or two for your awkward beginnings? What's the use of always thinking of how you're looking, when your sense might tell you that other people are thinking about their own looks and not about yours? A big boy doesn't look well on a lower form, certainly, but when he works his way up he'll be glad he began. I speak to you more particularly because you're Londoners; and Londoners beat all creation for thinking about themselves. However, I don't go with the gentleman in everything he said. All this struggling and striving to make the world better is a great mistake; not because it isn't a good thing to improve the world if you know how to do it, but because striving and struggling is the worst way you could set about doing anything. It gives a man a bad style, and weakens him. It shows that he don't believe in himself much. When I heard the professor striving and struggling so earnestly to set you to work reforming this, that, and the other, I said to myself, 'He's got himself to persuade as well as his audience. That isn't the language of conviction.' Whose--"

"Really, sir," said Lucian Webber, who had made his way to the table, "I think, as you have now addressed us at considerable length, and as there are other persons present whose opinions probably excite as much curiosity as yours--" He was interrupted by a, "Hear, hear," followed by "No, no," and "Go on," uttered in more subdued tones than are customary at public meetings, but with more animation than is usually displayed in drawing-rooms. Cashel, who had been for a moment somewhat put out, turned to Lucian and said, in a tone intended to repress, but at the same time humor his impatience, "Don't you be in a hurry, sir. You shall have your turn presently. Perhaps I may tell you something you don't know, before I stop." Then he turned again to the company, and resumed.

"We were talking about effort when this young gentleman took it upon himself to break the ring. Now, nothing can be what you might call artistically done if it's done with an effort. If a thing can't be done light and easy, steady and certain, let it not be done at all. Sounds strange, doesn't it? But I'll tell you a stranger thing. The more effort you make, the less effect you produce. A WOULD-BE artist is no artist at all. I see that in my own profession (never mind what that profession is just at present, as the ladies might think the worse of me for it). But in all professions, any work that shows signs of labor, straining, yearning--as the German gentleman said--or effort of any kind, is work beyond the man's strength that does it, and therefore not well done. Perhaps it's beyond his natural strength; but it is more likely that he was badly taught. Many teachers set their pupils on to strain, and stretch, so that they get used up, body and mind, in a few months. Depend upon it, the same thing is true in other arts. I once taught a fiddler that used to get a hundred guineas for playing two or three tunes; and he told me that it was just the same thing with the fiddle--that when you laid a tight hold on your fiddle-stick, or even set your teeth hard together, you could do nothing but rasp like the fellows that play in bands for a few shillings a night."

"How much more of this nonsense must we endure?" said Lucian, audibly, as Cashel stopped for breath. Cashel turned and looked at him.

"By Jove!" whispered Lord Worthington to his companion, "that fellow had better be careful. I wish he would hold his tongue."

"You think it's nonsense, do you?" said Cashel, after a pause. Then he raised one of the candles, and illuminated a picture that hung on the wall, "Look at that picture," he said. "You see that fellow in armor--St. George and the dragon, or whatever he may be. He's jumped down from his horse to fight the other fellow--that one with his head in a big helmet, whose horse has tumbled. The lady in the gallery is half crazy with anxiety for St. George; and well she may be. THERE'S a posture for a man to fight in! His weight isn't resting on his legs; one touch of a child's finger would upset him. Look at his neck craned out in front of him, and his face as flat as a full moon towards his man, as if he was inviting him to shut up both his eyes with one blow. You can all see that he's as weak and nervous as a cat, and that he doesn't know how to fight. And why does he give you that idea? Just because he's all strain and stretch; because he isn't at his ease; because he carries the weight of his body as foolishly as one of the ladies here would carry a hod of bricks; because he isn't safe, steady, and light on his pins, as he would be if he could forget himself for a minute, and leave his body to find its proper balance of its own accord. If the painter of that picture had known his business he would never have sent his man up to the scratch in such a figure and condition as that. But you can see with one eye that he didn't understand--I won't say the principles of fighting, but the universal principles that I've told you of, that ease and strength, effort and weakness, go together. Now," added Cashel, again addressing Lucian; "do you still think that notion of mine nonsense?" And he smacked his lips with satisfaction; for his criticism of the picture had produced a marked sensation, and he did not know that this was due to the fact that the painter, Mr. Adrian Herbert, was present.

Lucian tried to ignore the question; but he found it impossible to ignore the questioner. "Since you have set the example of expressing opinions without regard to considerations of common courtesy," he said, shortly, "I may say that your theory, if it can be called one, is manifestly absurd."

Cashel, apparently unruffled, but with more deliberation of manner than before, looked about him as if in search of a fresh illustration. His glance finally rested on the lecturer's seat, a capacious crimson damask arm-chair that stood unoccupied at some distance behind Lucian.

"I see you're no judge of a picture," said he, good-humoredly, putting down the candle, and stepping in front of Lucian, who regarded him haughtily, and did not budge. "But just look at it in this way. Suppose you wanted to hit me the most punishing blow you possibly could. What would you do? Why, according to your own notion, you'd make a great effort. 'The more effort the more force,' you'd say to yourself. 'I'll smash him even if I burst myself in doing it.' And what would happen then? You'd only cut me and make me angry, besides exhausting all your strength at one gasp. Whereas, if you took it easy--like this--" Here he made a light step forward and placed his open palm gently against the breast of Lucian, who instantly reeled back as if the piston-rod of a steam-engine had touched him, and dropped into the chair.

"There!" exclaimed Cashel, standing aside and pointing to him. "It's like pocketing a billiard-ball!"

A chatter of surprise, amusement, and remonstrance spread through the rooms; and the company crowded towards the table. Lucian rose, white with rage, and for a moment entirely lost his self-control. Fortunately, the effect was to paralyze him; he neither moved nor spoke, and only betrayed his condition by his pallor and the hatred in his expression. Presently he felt a touch on his arm and heard his name pronounced by Lydia. Her voice calmed him. He tried to look at her, but his vision was disturbed; he saw double; the lights seemed to dunce before his eyes; and Lord Worthington's voice, saying to Cashel, "Rather too practical, old fellow," seemed to come from a remote corner of the room, and yet to be whispered into his ear. He was moving irresolutely in search of Lydia when his senses and his resentment were restored by a clap on the shoulder.

"You wouldn't have believed that now, would you?" said Cashel. "Don't look startled; you've no bones broken. You had your little joke with me in your own way; and I had mine in MY own way. That's only--"

He stopped; his brave bearing vanished; he became limp and shamefaced. Lucian, without a word, withdrew with Lydia to the adjoining apartment, and left him staring after her with wistful eyes and slackened jaw.

In the meantime Mrs. Hoskyn, an earnest-looking young woman, with striking dark features and gold spectacles, was looking for Lord Worthington, who betrayed a consciousness of guilt by attempting to avoid her. But she cut off his retreat, and confronted him with a steadfast gaze that compelled him to stand and answer for himself.

"Who is that gentleman whom you introduced to me? I do not recollect his name."

"I am really awfully sorry, Mrs. Hoskyn. It was too bad of Byron. But Webber was excessively nasty."

Mrs. Hoskyn, additionally annoyed by apologies which she had not invited, and which put her in the ignominious position of a complainant, replied coldly, "Mr. Byron! Thank you; I had forgotten," and was turning away when Lydia came up to introduce Alice, and to explain why she had entered unannounced. Lord Worthington then returned to the subject of Cashel, hoping to improve his credit by claiming Lydia's acquaintance with him.

"Did you hear our friend Byron's speech, Miss Carew? Very characteristic, I thought."

"Very," said Lydia. "I hope Mrs. Hoskyn's guests are all familiar with his style. Otherwise they must find him a little startling."

"Yes," said Mrs. Hoskyn, beginning to wonder whether Cashel could be some well-known eccentric genius. "He is very odd. I hope Mr. Webber is not offended."

"He is the less pleased as he was in the wrong," said Lydia. "Intolerant refusal to listen to an opponent is a species of violence that has no business in such a representative nineteenth-century drawing-room as yours, Mrs. Hoskyn. There was a fitness in rebuking it by skilled physical violence. Consider the prodigious tact of it, too! One gentleman knocks another half-way across a crowded room, and yet no one is scandalized."

"You see, Mrs. Hoskyn, the general verdict is 'Served him right,'" said Lord Worthington.

"With a rider to the effect that both gentlemen displayed complete indifference to the comfort of their hostess," said Lydia. "However, men so rarely sacrifice their manners to their minds that it would be a pity to blame them. You do not encourage conventionality, Mrs. Hoskyn?"

"I encourage good manners, though certainly not conventional manners."

"And you think there is a difference?"

"I FEEL that there is a difference," said Mrs. Hoskyn, with dignity.

"So do I," said Lydia; "but one can hardly call others to account for one's own subjective ideas."

Lydia went away to another part of the room without waiting for a reply. Meanwhile, Cashel stood friendless in the middle of the room, stared at by most of his neighbors, and spoken to by none. Women looked at him coldly lest it should be suspected that they were admiring him; and men regarded him stiffly according to the national custom. Since his recognition of Lydia, his self-confidence had given place to a misgiving that he had been making a fool of himself. He began to feel lonely and abashed; and but for his professional habit of maintaining a cheerful countenance under adverse circumstances, he would have hid himself in the darkest corner of the room. He was getting sullen, and seeking consolation in thoughts of how terribly he could handle all these distantly-mannered, black-coated gentlemen if he chose, when Lord Worthington came up to him.

"I had no idea you were such an orator, Byron," he said. "You can go into the Church when you cut the other

trade. Eh?"

"I wasn't brought up to the other trade," said Cashel; "and I know how to talk to ladies and gentlemen as well as to what you'd suppose to be my own sort. Don't you be anxious about me, my lord. I know how to make myself at home."

"Of course, of course," said Lord Worthington, soothingly. "Every one can see by your manners that you are a gentleman; they recognize that even in the ring. Otherwise--I know you will excuse my saying so--I daren't have brought you here."

Cashel shook his head, but was pleased. He thought he hated flattery; had Lord Worthington told him that he was the best boxer in England--which he probably was--he would have despised him. But he wished to believe the false compliment to his manners, and was therefore perfectly convinced of its sincerity. Lord Worthington perceived this, and retired, pleased with his own tact, in search of Mrs. Hoskyn, to claim her promise of an introduction to Madame Szczymplika, which Mrs. Hoskyn had, by way of punishing him for Cashel's misdemeanor, privately determined not to redeem.

Cashel began to think he had better go. Lydia was surrounded by men who were speaking to her in German. He felt his own inability to talk learnedly even in English; and he had, besides, a conviction that she was angry with him for upsetting her cousin, who was gravely conversing with Miss Goff. Suddenly a horrible noise caused a general start and pause. Mr. Jack, the eminent composer, had opened the piano-forte, and was illustrating some points in a musical composition under discussion by making discordant sounds with his voice, accompanied by a few chords. Cashel laughed aloud in derision as he made his way towards the door through the crowd, which was now pressing round the pianoforte at which Madame Szczymplika had just come to the assistance of Jack. Near the door, and in a corner remote from the instrument, he came upon Lydia and a middle-aged gentleman, evidently neither a professor nor an artist.

"Ab'n'gas is a very clever man," the gentleman was saying. "I am sorry I didn't hear the lecture. But I leave all that to Mary. She receives the people who enjoy high art up-stairs; and I take the sensible men down to the garden or the smoking-room, according to the weather."

"What do the sensible women do?" said Lydia.

"They come late," said Mr. Hoskyn, and then laughed at his repartee until he became aware of the vicinity of Cashel, whose health he immediately inquired after, shaking his hand warmly and receiving a numbing grip in return. As soon as he saw that Lydia and Cashel were acquainted, he slipped away and left them to entertain one another.

"I wonder how he knows me," said Cashel, heartened by her gracious reception of a nervous bow. "I never saw him before in my life."

"He does not know you," said Lydia, with some sternness. "He is your host, and therefore concludes that he ought to know you."

"Oh! That was it, was it?" He paused, at a loss for conversation. She did not help him. At last he added, "I haven't seen you this long time, Miss Carew."

"It is not very long since I saw you, Mr. Cashel Byron. I saw you yesterday at some distance from London."

"Oh, Lord!" exclaimed Cashel, "don't say that. You're joking, ain't you?"

"No. Joking, in that sense, does not amuse me."

Cashel looked at her in consternation. "You don't mean to say that you went to see a--a--Where--when did you see me? You might tell me."

"Certainly. It was at Clapham Junction, at a quarter-past six."

"Was any one with me?"

"Your friend, Mr. Mellish, Lord Worthington, and some other persons."

"Yes. Lord Worthington was there. But where were you?"

"In a waiting-room, close to you."

"I never saw you," said Cashel, growing red as he recalled the scene. "We must have looked very queer. I had had an accident to my eye, and Mellish was not sober. Did you think I was in bad company?"

"That was not my business, Mr. Cashel Byron."

"No," said Cashel, with sudden bitterness. "What did YOU care what company I kept? You're mad with me because I made your cousin look like a fool, I suppose. That's what's the matter."

Lydia looked around to see that no one was within earshot, and, speaking in a low tone to remind him that they were not alone, said, "There is nothing the matter, except that you are a grown-up boy rather than a man. I am not mad with you because of your attack upon my cousin; but he is very much annoyed, and so is Mrs. Hoskyn, whose guest you were bound to respect."

"I knew you'd be down on me. I wouldn't have said a word if I'd known that you were here," said Cashel, dejectedly. "Lie down and be walked over; that's what you think I'm fit for. Another man would have twisted his head off."

"Is it possible that you do not know that gentlemen never twist one another's heads off in society, no matter how great may be the provocation?"

"I know nothing," said Cashel with plaintive sullenness. "Everything I do is wrong. There. Will that satisfy you?"

Lydia looked up at him in doubt. Then, with steady patience, she added: "Will you answer me a question on your honor?"

He hesitated, fearing that she was going to ask what he was.

"The question is this," she said, observing the hesitation. "Are you a simpleton, or a man of science pretending to be a simpleton for the sake of mocking me and my friends?"

"I am not mocking you; honor bright! All that about science was only a joke--at least, it's not what you call science. I'm a real simpleton in drawing-room affairs; though I'm clever enough in my own line."

"Then try to believe that I take no pleasure in making you confess yourself in the wrong, and that you cannot have a lower opinion of me than the contrary belief implies."

"That's just where you're mistaken," said Cashel, obstinately. "I haven't got a low opinion of you at all. There's such a thing as being too clever."

"You may not know that it is a low opinion. Nevertheless, it is so."

"Well, have it your own way. I'm wrong again; and you're right."

"So far from being gratified by that, I had rather that we were both in the right and agreed. Can you understand that?"

"I can't say I do. But I give in to it. What more need you care for?"

"I had rather you understood. Let me try to explain. You think that I like to be cleverer than other people. You are mistaken. I should like them all to know whatever I know."

Cashel laughed cunningly, and shook his head. "Don't you make any mistake about that," he said. "You don't want anybody to be quite as clever as yourself; it isn't in human nature that you should. You'd like people to be just clever enough to show you off--to be worth beating. But you wouldn't like them to be able to beat you. Just clever enough to know how much cleverer you are; that's about the mark. Eh?"

Lydia made no further effort to enlighten him. She looked at him thoughtfully, and said, slowly, "I begin to hold the clew to your idiosyncrasy. You have attached yourself to the modern doctrine of a struggle for existence, and look on life as a perpetual combat."

"A fight? Just so. What is life but a fight? The curs forfeit or get beaten; the rogues sell the fight and lose the confidence of their backers; the game ones and the clever ones win the stakes, and have to hand over the lion's share of them to the loafers; and luck plays the devil with them all in turn. That's not the way they describe life in books; but that's what it is."

"Oddly put, but perhaps true. Still, is there any need of a struggle? Is not the world large enough for us all to live peacefully in?"

"YOU may think so, because you were born with a silver spoon in your mouth. But if you hadn't to fight for that silver spoon, some one else had; and no doubt he thought it hard that it should be taken away from him and given to you. I was a snob myself once, and thought the world was made for me to enjoy myself and order about the poor fellows whose bread I was eating. But I was left one day where I couldn't grab any more of their bread, and had to make some for myself--ay, and some extra for loafers that had the power to make me pay for what they didn't own. That took the conceit out of me fast enough. But what do you know about such things?"

"More than you think, perhaps. These are dangerous ideas to take with you into English society."

"Hmf!" growled Cashel. "They'd be more dangerous if I could give every man that is robbed of half what he earns twelve lessons--in science."

"So you can. Publish your lessons. 'Twelve lectures on political economy, by Cashel Byron.' I will help you to publish them, if you wish."

"Bless your innocence!" said Cashel: "the sort of political economy I teach can't be learned from a book."

"You have become an enigma again. But yours is not the creed of a simpleton. You are playing with me--revealing your wisdom from beneath a veil of infantile guilelessness. I have no more to say."

"May I be shot if I understand you! I never pretended to be guileless. Come: is it because I raised a laugh against your cousin that you're so spiteful?"

Lydia looked earnestly and doubtfully at him; and he instinctively put his head back, as if it were in danger. "You do not understand, then?" she said. "I will test the genuineness of your stupidity by an appeal to your obedience."

"Stupidity! Go on."

"But will you obey me, if I lay a command upon you?"

"I will go through fire and water for you."

Lydia blushed faintly, and paused to wonder at the novel sensation before she resumed. "You had better not apologize to my cousin: partly because you would only make matters worse; chiefly because he does not deserve it. But you must make this speech to Mrs. Hoskyn when you are going: 'I am very sorry I forgot myself--'"

"Sounds like Shakespeare, doesn't it?" observed Cashel.

"Ah! the test has found you out; you are only acting after all. But that does not alter my opinion that you should apologize."

"All right. I don't know what you mean by testing and acting; and I only hope you know yourself. But no matter; I'll apologize; a man like me can afford to. I'll apologize to your cousin, too, if you like."

"I do not like. But what has that to do with it? I suggest these things, as you must be aware, for your own sake and not for mine."

"As for my own, I don't care twopence: I do it all for you. I don't even ask whether there is anything between you and him."

"Would you like to know?" said Lydia, deliberately, after a pause of astonishment.

"Do you mean to say you'll tell me?" he exclaimed. "If you do, I'll say you're as good as gold."

"Certainly I will tell you. There is an old friendship and cousinship between us; but we are not engaged, nor at all likely to be. I tell you so because, if I avoided the question, you would draw the opposite and false conclusion."

"I am glad of it," said Cashel, unexpectedly becoming very gloomy. "He isn't man enough for you. But he's your equal, damn him!"

"He is my cousin, and, I believe, my sincere friend. Therefore please do not damn him."

"I know I shouldn't have said that. But I am only damning my own luck."

"Which will not improve it in the least."

"I know that. You needn't have said it. I wouldn't have said a thing like that to you, stupid as I am."

"Evidently you suppose me to have meant more than I really did. However, that does not matter. You are still an enigma to me. Had we not better try to hear a little of Madame Szczyplica's performance?"

"I'm a pretty plain enigma, I should think," said Cashel, mournfully. "I would rather have you than any other

woman in the world; but you're too rich and grand for me. If I can't have the satisfaction of marrying you, I may as well have the satisfaction of saying I'd like to."

"Hardly a fair way of approaching the subject," said Lydia, composedly, but with a play of color again in her cheeks. "Allow me to forbid it unconditionally. I must be plain with you, Mr. Cashel Byron. I do not know what you are or who you are; and I believe you have tried to mystify me on both points--"

"And you never shall find out either the one or the other, if I can help it," put in Cashel; "so that we're in a preciously bad way of coming to a good understanding."

"True," assented Lydia. "I do not make secrets; I do not keep them; and I do not respect them. Your humor clashes with my principle."

"You call it a humor!" said Cashel, angrily. "Perhaps you think I am a duke in disguise. If so, you may think better of it. If you had a secret, the discovery of which would cause you to be kicked out of decent society, you would keep it pretty tight. And that through no fault of your own, mind you; but through downright cowardice and prejudice in other people."

"There are at least some fears and prejudices common in society that I do not share," said Lydia, after a moment's reflection. "Should I ever find out your secret, do not too hastily conclude that you have forfeited my consideration."

"You are just the last person on earth by whom I want to be found out. But you'll find out fast enough. Pshaw!" cried Cashel, with a laugh, "I'm as well known as Trafalgar Square. But I can't bring myself to tell you; and I hate secrets as much as you do; so let's drop it and talk about something else."

"We have talked long enough. The music is over, and the people will return to this room presently, perhaps to ask me who and what is the stranger who made them such a remarkable speech."

"Just a word. Promise me that you won't ask any of THEM that."

"Promise you! No. I cannot promise that."

"Oh, Lord!" said Cashel, with a groan.

"I have told you that I do not respect secrets. For the present I will not ask; but I may change my mind. Meanwhile we must not hold long conversations. I even hope that we shall not meet. There is only one thing that I am too rich and grand for. That one thing--mystification. Adieu."

Before he could reply she was away from him in the midst of a number of gentlemen, and in conversation with one of them. Cashel seemed overwhelmed. But in an instant he recovered himself, and stepped jauntily before Mrs. Hoskyn, who had just come into his neighborhood.

"I'm going, ma'am," he said. "Thank you for a pleasant evening--I'm very sorry I forgot myself. Good-night."

Mrs. Hoskyn, naturally frank, felt some vague response within herself to this address. But, though not usually at a loss for words in social emergencies, she only looked at him, blushed slightly, and offered her hand. He took it as if it were a tiny baby's hand and he afraid of hurting it, gave it a little pinch, and turned to go. Mr. Adrian Herbert, the painter, was directly in his way, with his back towards him.

"If YOU please, sir," said Cashel, taking him gently by the ribs, and moving him aside. The artist turned indignantly, but Cashel was passing the doorway. On the stairs he met Lucian and Alice, and stopped a

moment to take leave of them.

"Good-night, Miss Goff," he said. "It's a pleasure to see the country roses in your cheeks." He lowered his voice as he added, to Lucian, "Don't you worry yourself over that little trick I showed you. If any of your friends chafe you about it, tell them that it was Cashel Byron did it, and ask them whether they think they could have helped themselves any better than you could. Don't ever let a person come within distance of you while you're standing in that silly way on both your heels. Why, if a man isn't properly planted on his pins, a broom-handle falling against him will upset him. That's the way of it. Good-night."

Lucian returned the salutation, mastered by a certain latent dangerousness in Cashel, suggestive that he might resent a snub by throwing the offender over the balustrade. As for Alice, she had entertained a superstitious dread of him ever since Lydia had pronounced him a ruffian. Both felt relieved when the house door, closing, shut them out of his reach.