

CHAPTER VII

Society was much occupied during Alice's first season in London with the upshot of an historical event of a common kind. England, a few years before, had stolen a kingdom from a considerable people in Africa, and seized the person of its king. The conquest proved useless, troublesome, and expensive; and after repeated attempts to settle the country on impracticable plans suggested to the Colonial Office by a popular historian who had made a trip to Africa, and by generals who were tired of the primitive remedy of killing the natives, it appeared that the best course was to release the captive king and get rid of the unprofitable booty by restoring it to him. In order, however, that the impression made on him by England's short-sighted disregard of her neighbor's landmark abroad might be counteracted by a glimpse of the vastness of her armaments and wealth at home, it was thought advisable to take him first to London, and show him the wonders of the town. But when the king arrived, his freedom from English prepossessions made it difficult to amuse, or even to impress him. A stranger to the idea that a private man could own a portion of the earth and make others pay him for permission to live on it, he was unable to understand why such a prodigiously wealthy nation should be composed partly of poor and uncomfortable persons toiling incessantly to create riches, and partly of a class that confiscated and dissipated the wealth thus produced without seeming to be at all happier than the unfortunate laborers at whose expense they existed. He was seized with strange fears, first for his health, for it seemed to him that the air of London, filthy with smoke, engendered puniness and dishonesty in those who breathed it; and eventually for his life, when he learned that kings in Europe were sometimes shot at by passers-by, there being hardly a monarch there who had not been so imperilled more than once; that the Queen of England, though accounted the safest of all, was accustomed to this variety of pistol practice; and that the autocrat of an empire huge beyond all other European countries, whose father had been torn asunder in the streets of his capital, lived surrounded by soldiers who shot down all strangers that approached him even at his own summons, and was an object of compassion to the humblest of his servants. Under these circumstances, the African king was with difficulty induced to stir out of doors; and he only visited Woolwich Arsenal--the destructive resources of which were expected to influence his future behavior in a manner favorable to English supremacy--under compulsion. At last the Colonial Office, which had charge of him, was at its wit's end to devise entertainments to keep him in good-humor until the appointed time for his departure.

On the Tuesday following Mrs. Hoskyn's reception, Lucian Webber called at his cousin's house in Regent's Park, and said, in the course of a conversation with the two ladies there,

"The Colonial Office has had an idea. The king, it appears, is something of an athlete, and is curious to witness what Londoners can do in that way. So a grand assault-at-arms is to be held for him."

"What is an assault-at-arms?" said Lydia. "I have never been at one; and the name suggests nothing but an affray with bayonets."

"It is an exhibition of swordsmanship, military drill, gymnastics, and so forth."

"I will go to that," said Lydia. "Will you come, Alice?"

"Is it usual for ladies to go to such exhibitions?" said Alice, cautiously.

"On this occasion ladies will go for the sake of seeing the king," said Lucian. "The Olympian gymnastic society, which has undertaken the direction of the part of the assault that is to show off the prowess of our civilians, expects what they call a flower-show audience."

"Will you come, Lucian?"

"If I can be spared, yes. If not, I will ask Worthington to go with you. He understands such matters better than I."

"Then let us have him, by all means," said Lydia.

"I cannot see why you are so fond of Lord Worthington," said Alice. "His manners are good; but there is nothing in him. Besides, he is so young. I cannot endure his conversation. He has begun to talk about Goodwood already."

"He will grow out of his excessive addiction to sport," said Lucian.

"Indeed," said Lydia. "And what will he grow into?"

"Possibly into a more reasonable man," said Lucian, gravely.

"I hope so," said Lydia; "but I prefer a man who is interested in sport to a gentleman who is interested in nothing."

"Much might indubitably be said from that point of view. But it is not necessary that Lord Worthington should waste his energy on horse-racing. I presume you do not think political life, for which his position peculiarly fits him, unworthy his attention."

"Party tactics are both exciting and amusing, no doubt. But are they better than horse-racing? Jockeys and horse-breakers at least know their business; our legislators do not. Is it pleasant to sit on a bench--even though it be the treasury bench--and listen to either absolute nonsense or childish disputes about conclusions that were foregone in the minds of all sensible men a hundred years ago?"

"You do not understand the duties of a government, Lydia. You never approach the subject without confirming my opinion that women are constitutionally incapable of comprehending it."

"It is natural for you to think so, Lucian. The House of Commons is to you the goal of existence. To me it is only an assemblage of ill-informed gentlemen who have botched every business they have ever undertaken, from the first committee of supply down to the last land act; and who arrogantly assert that I am not good enough to sit with them."

"Lydia," said Lucian, annoyed; "you know that I respect women in their own sphere--"

"Then give them another sphere, and perhaps they will earn your respect in that also. I am sorry to say that men, in THEIR sphere, have not won my respect. Enough of that for the present. I have to make some domestic arrangements, which are of more immediate importance than the conversion of a good politician into a bad philosopher. Excuse me for five minutes."

She left the room. Lucian sat down and gave his attention to Alice, who had still enough of her old nervousness to make her straighten her shoulders and look stately. But he did not object to this; a little stiffness of manner gratified his taste.

"I hope," he said, "that my cousin has not succeeded in inducing you to adopt her peculiar views."

"No," said Alice. "Of course her case is quite exceptional--she is so wonderfully accomplished. In general, I do not think women should have views. There are certain convictions which every lady holds: for instance, we know that Roman Catholicism is wrong. But that can hardly be called a view; indeed it would be wicked to call it so, as it is one of the highest truths. What I mean is that women should not be political agitators."

"I understand, and quite agree with you. Lydia is, as you say, an exceptional case. She has lived much abroad; and her father was a very singular man. Even the clearest heads, when removed from the direct influence of

English life and thought, contract extraordinary prejudices. Her father at one time actually attempted to leave a large farm to the government in trust for the people; but fortunately he found that it was impossible; no such demise was known to the English law or practicable by it. He subsequently admitted the folly of this by securing Lydia's rights as his successor as stringently as he could. It is almost a pity that such strength of mind and extent of knowledge should be fortified by the dangerous independence which great wealth confers. Advantages like these bring with them certain duties to the class that has produced them--duties to which Lydia is not merely indifferent, but absolutely hostile."

"I never meddle with her ideas on--on these subjects. I am too ignorant to understand them. But Miss Carew's generosity to me has been unparalleled. And she does not seem to know that she is generous. I owe more to her than I ever can repay. At least," Alice added, to herself, "I am not ungrateful."

Miss Carew now reappeared, dressed in a long, gray coat and plain beaver hat, and carrying a roll of writing materials.

"I am going to the British Museum to read," said she.

"To walk!--alone!" said Lucian, looking at her costume.

"Yes. Prevent me from walking, and you deprive me of my health. Prevent me from going alone where I please and when I please, and you deprive me of my liberty--tear up Magna Charta, in effect. But I do not insist upon being alone in this instance. If you can return to your office by way of Regent's Park and Gower Street without losing too much time, I shall be glad of your company."

Lucian decorously suppressed his eagerness to comply by looking at his watch and pretending to consider his engagements. In conclusion, he said that he should be happy to accompany her.

It was a fine summer afternoon, and there were many people in the park. Lucian was soon incommoded by the attention his cousin attracted. In spite of the black beaver, her hair shone like fire in the sun. Women stared at her with unsympathetic curiosity, and turned as they passed to examine her attire. Men resorted to various subterfuges to get a satisfactory look without rudely betraying their intention. A few stupid youths gaped; and a few impudent ones smiled. Lucian would gladly have kicked them all, without distinction. He at last suggested that they should leave the path, and make a short cut across the green-sward. As they emerged from the shade of the trees he had a vague impression that the fineness of the weather and the beauty of the park made the occasion romantic, and that the words by which he hoped to make the relation between him and his cousin dearer and closer would be well spoken there. But he immediately began to talk, in spite of himself, about the cost of maintaining the public parks, of the particulars of which he happened to have some official knowledge. Lydia, readily interested by facts of any sort, thought the subject not a bad one for a casual afternoon conversation, and pursued it until they left the turf and got into the Euston Road, where the bustle of traffic silenced them for a while. When they escaped from the din into the respectable quietude of Gower Street, he suddenly said,

"It is one of the evils of great wealth in the hands of a woman, that she can hardly feel sure--" His ideas fled suddenly. He stopped; but he kept his countenance so well that he had the air of having made a finished speech, and being perfectly satisfied with it.

"Do you mean that she can never feel sure of the justice of her title to her riches? That used to trouble me; but it no longer does so."

"Nonsense!" said Lucian. "I alluded to the disinterestedness of your friends."

"That does not trouble me either. Absolutely disinterested friends I do not seek, as I should only find them

among idiots or somnambulists. As to those whose interests are base, they do not know how to conceal their motives from me. For the rest, I am not so unreasonable as to object to a fair account being taken of my wealth in estimating the value of my friendship."

"Do you not believe in the existence of persons who would like you just as well if you were poor?"

"Such persons would, merely to bring me nearer to themselves, wish me to become poor; for which I should not thank them. I set great store by the esteem my riches command, Lucian. It is the only set-off I have against the envy they inspire."

"Then you would refuse to believe in the disinterestedness of any man who--who--"

"Who wanted to marry me? On the contrary: I should be the last person to believe that a man could prefer my money to myself. If he were independent, and in a fair way to keep his place in the world without my help, I should despise him if he hesitated to approach me for fear of misconstruction. I do not think a man is ever thoroughly honest until he is superior to that fear. But if he had no profession, no money, and no aim except to live at my expense, then I should regard him as an adventurer, and treat him as one--unless I fell in love with him."

"Unless you fell in love with him!"

"That--assuming that such things really happen--would make a difference in my feeling, but none in my conduct. I would not marry an adventurer under any circumstances. I could cure myself of a misdirected passion, but not of a bad husband."

Lucian said nothing; he walked on with long, irregular steps, lowering at the pavement as if it were a difficult problem, and occasionally thrusting at it with his stick. At last he looked up, and said,

"Would you mind prolonging your walk a little by going round Bedford Square with me? I have something particular to say."

She turned and complied without a word; and they had traversed one side of the square before he spoke again, in these terms:

"On second thoughts, Lydia, this is neither the proper time nor place for an important communication. Excuse me for having taken you out of your way for nothing."

"I do not like this, Lucian. Important communications--in this case--corrupt good manners. If your intended speech is a sensible one, the present is as good a time, and Bedford Square as good a place, as you are likely to find for it. If it is otherwise, confess that you have decided to leave it unsaid. But do not postpone it. Reticence is always an error--even on the treasury bench. It is doubly erroneous in dealing with me; for I have a constitutional antipathy to it."

"Yes," he said, hurriedly; "but give me one moment--until the policeman has passed."

The policeman went leisurely by, striking the flags with his heels, and slapping his palm with a white glove.

"The fact is, Lydia, that--I feel great difficulty--"

"What is the matter?" said Lydia, after waiting in vain for further particulars. "You have broken down twice in a speech." There was a pause. Then she looked at him quickly, and added, incredulously, "Are you going to get married? Is that the secret that ties your practised tongue?"

"Not unless you take part in the ceremony."

"Very gallant; and in a vein of humor that is new in my experience of you. But what have you to tell me, Lucian? Frankly, your hesitation is becoming ridiculous."

"You have certainly not made matters easier for me, Lydia. Perhaps you have a womanly intuition of my purpose, and are intentionally discouraging me."

"Not the least. I am not good at speculations of that sort. On my word, if you do not confess quickly, I will hurry away to the museum."

"I cannot find a suitable form of expression," said Lucian, in painful perplexity. "I am sure you will not attribute any sordid motive to my--well, to my addresses, though the term seems absurd. I am too well aware that there is little, from the usual point of view, to tempt you to unite yourself to me. Still--"

A rapid change in Lydia's face showed him that he had said enough. "I had not thought of this," she said, after a silence that seemed long to him. "Our observations are so meaningless until we are given the thread to string them on! You must think better of this, Lucian. The relation that at present exists between us is the very best that our different characters will admit of. Why do you desire to alter it?"

"Because I would make it closer and more permanent. I do not wish to alter it otherwise."

"You would run some risk of simply destroying it by the method you propose," said Lydia, with composure. "We could not co-operate. There are differences of opinion between us amounting to differences of principle."

"Surely you are not serious. Your political opinions, or notions, are not represented by any party in England; and therefore they are practically ineffective, and could not clash with mine. And such differences are not personal matters."

"Such a party might be formed a week after our marriage--will, I think, be formed a long time before our deaths. In that case I fear that our difference of opinion would become a very personal matter."

He began to walk more quickly as he replied, "It is too absurd to set up what you call your opinions as a serious barrier between us. You have no opinions, Lydia. The impracticable crotchets you are fond of airing are not recognized in England as sane political convictions."

Lydia did not retort. She waited a minute in pensive silence, and then said,

"Why do you not marry Alice Goff?"

"Oh, hang Alice Goff!"

"It is so easy to come at the man beneath the veneer by expertly chipping at his feelings," said Lydia, laughing. "But I was serious, Lucian. Alice is energetic, ambitious, and stubbornly upright in questions of principle. I believe she would assist you steadily at every step of your career. Besides, she has physical robustness. Our student-stock needs an infusion of that."

"Many thanks for the suggestion; but I do not happen to want to marry Miss Goff."

"I invite you to consider it. You have not had time yet to form any new plans."

"New plans! Then you absolutely refuse me--without a moment's consideration?"

"Absolutely, Lucian. Does not your instinct warn you that it would be a mistake for you to marry me?"

"No; I cannot say that it does."

"Then trust to mine, which gives forth no uncertain note on this question, as your favorite newspapers are fond of saying."

"It is a question of feeling," he said, in a constrained voice.

"Is it?" she replied, with interest. "You have surprised me somewhat, Lucian. I have never observed any of the extravagances of a lover in your conduct."

"And you have surprised me very unpleasantly, Lydia. I do not think now that I ever had much hope of success; but I thought, at least, that my disillusion would be gently accomplished."

"What! Have I been harsh?"

"I do not complain."

"I was unlucky, Lucian; not malicious. Besides, the artifices by which friends endeavor to spare one another's feelings are pretty disloyalties. I am frank with you. Would you have me otherwise?"

"Of course not. I have no right to be offended."

"Not the least. Now add to that formal admission a sincere assurance that you ARE not offended."

"I assure you I am not," said Lucian, with melancholy resignation.

They had by this time reached Charlotte Street, and Lydia tacitly concluded the conference by turning towards the museum, and beginning to talk upon indifferent subjects. At the corner of Russell Street he got into a cab and drove away, dejectedly acknowledging a smile and wave of the hand with which Lydia tried to console him. She then went to the national library, where she forgot Lucian. The effect of the shock of his proposal was in store for her, but as yet she did not feel it; and she worked steadily until the library was closed and she had to leave. As she had been sitting for some hours, and it was still light, she did not take a cab, and did not even walk straight home. She had heard of a bookseller in Soho who had for sale a certain scarce volume which she wanted; and it occurred to her that the present was a good opportunity to go in search of him. Now, there was hardly a capital in western Europe that she did not know better than London. She had an impression that Soho was a region of quiet streets and squares, like Bloomsbury. Her mistake soon became apparent; but she felt no uneasiness in the narrow thoroughfares, for she was free from the common prejudice of her class that poor people are necessarily ferocious, though she often wondered why they were not so. She got as far as Great Pulteney Street in safety; but in leaving it she took a wrong turning and lost herself in a labyrinth of courts where a few workmen, a great many workmen's wives and mothers, and innumerable workmen's children were passing the summer evening at gossip and play. She explained her predicament to one of the women, who sent a little boy with her to guide her. Business being over for the day, the street to which the boy led her was almost deserted. The only shop that seemed to be thriving was a public-house, outside which a few roughs were tossing for pence.

Lydia's guide, having pointed out her way to her, prepared to return to his playmates. She thanked him, and gave him the smallest coin in her purse, which happened to be a shilling. He, in a transport at possessing what was to him a fortune, uttered a piercing yell, and darted off to show the coin to a covey of small ragamuffins who had just raced into view round the corner at which the public-house stood. In his haste he dashed against one of the group outside, a powerfully built young man, who turned and cursed him. The boy retorted

passionately, and then, overcome by pain, began to cry. When Lydia came up the child stood whimpering directly in her path; and she, pitying him, patted him on the head and reminded him of all the money he had to spend. He seemed comforted, and scraped his eyes with his knuckles in silence; but the man, who, having received a sharp kick on the ankle, was stung by Lydia's injustice in according to the aggressor the sympathy due to himself, walked threateningly up to her and demanded, with a startling oath, whether HE had offered to do anything to the boy. And, as he refrained from applying any epithet to her, he honestly believed that in deference to Lydia's sex and personal charms, he had expressed himself with studied moderation. She, not appreciating his forbearance, recoiled, and stepped into the roadway in order to pass him. Indignant at this attempt to ignore him, he again placed himself in her path, and was repeating his question with increased sternness, when a jerk in the pit of his stomach caused him a severe internal qualm, besides disturbing his equilibrium so rudely that he narrowly escaped a fall against the curb-stone. When he recovered himself he saw before him a showily dressed young man, who accosted him thus:

"Is that the way to talk to a lady, eh? Isn't the street wide enough for two? Where's your manners?"

"And who are you; and where are you shoving your elbow to?" said the man, with a surpassing imprecation.

"Come, come," said Cashel Byron, admonitorily. "You'd better keep your mouth clean if you wish to keep your teeth inside it. Never you mind who I am."

Lydia, foreseeing an altercation, and alarmed by the threatening aspect of the man, attempted to hurry away and send a policeman to Cashel's assistance. But, on turning, she discovered that a crowd had already gathered, and that she was in the novel position of a spectator in the inner ring at what promised to be a street fight. Her attention was recalled to the disputants by a violent demonstration on the part of her late assailant. Cashel seemed alarmed; for he hastily retreated a step without regard to the toes of those behind him, and exclaimed, waving the other off with his open hand,

"Now, you just let me alone. I don't want to have anything to say to you. Go away from me, I tell you."

"You don't want to have nothink to say to me! Oh! And for why? Because you ain't man enough; that's why. Wot do you mean by coming and shoving your elbow into a man's bread-basket for, and then wanting to sneak off? Did you think I'd 'a' bin frightened of your velvet coat?"

"Very well," said Cashel, pacifically; "we'll say that I'm not man enough for you. So that's settled. Are you satisfied?"

But the other, greatly emboldened, declared with many oaths that he would have Cashel's heart out, and also that of Lydia, to whom he alluded in coarse terms. The crowd cheered, and called upon him to "go it." Cashel then said, sullenly,

"Very well. But don't you try to make out afterwards that I forced a quarrel on you. And now," he added, with a grim change of tone that made Lydia shudder, and shifted her fears to the account of his antagonist, "I'll make you wish you'd bit your tongue out before you said what you did a moment ago. So, take care of yourself."

"Oh, I'll take care of myself," said the man, defiantly. "Put up your hands."

Cashel surveyed his antagonist's attitude with unmistakable disparagement. "You will know when my hands are up by the feel of the pavement," he said, at last. "Better keep your coat on. You'll fall softer."

The rough expressed his repudiation of this counsel by beginning to strip energetically. A thrill of delight passed through the crowd. Those who had bad places pressed forward, and those who formed the inner ring

pressed back to make room for the combatants. Lydia, who occupied a coveted position close to Cashel, hoped to be hustled out of the throng; for she was beginning to feel faint and ill. But a handsome butcher, who had made his way to her side, gallantly swore that she should not be deprived of her place in the front row, and bade her not be frightened, assuring her that he would protect her, and that the fight would be well worth seeing. As he spoke, the mass of faces before Lydia seemed to give a sudden lurch. To save herself from falling, she slipped her arm through the butcher's; and he, much gratified, tucked her close to him, and held her up effectually. His support was welcome, because it was needed.

Meanwhile, Cashel stood motionless, watching with unrelenting contempt the movements of his adversary, who rolled up his discolored shirt-sleeves amid encouraging cries of "Go it, Teddy," "Give it 'im, Ted," and other more precise suggestions. But Teddy's spirit was chilled; he advanced with a presentiment that he was courting destruction. He dared not rush on his foe, whose eye seemed to discern his impotence. When at last he ventured to strike, the blow fell short, as Cashel evidently knew it would; for he did not stir. There was a laugh and a murmur of impatience in the crowd.

"Are you waiting for the copper to come and separate you?" shouted the butcher. "Come out of your corner and get to work, can't you?"

This reminder that the police might balk him of his prey seemed to move Cashel. He took a step forward. The excitement of the crowd rose to a climax; and a little man near Lydia cut a frenzied caper and screamed, "Go it, Cashel Byron."

At these words Teddy was terror-stricken. He made no attempt to disguise his condition. "It ain't fair," he exclaimed, retreating as far as the crowd would permit him. "I give in. Cut it, master; you're too clever for me." But his comrades, with a pitiless jeer, pushed him towards Cashel, who advanced remorselessly. Teddy dropped on both knees. "Wot can a man say more than that he's had enough?" he pleaded. "Be a Englishman, master; and don't hit a man when he's down."

"Down!" said Cashel. "How long will you stay down if I choose to have you up?" And, suiting the action to the word, he seized Teddy with his left hand, lifted him to his feet, threw him into a helpless position across his knee, and poised his right fist like a hammer over his upturned face. "Now," he said, "you're not down. What have you to say for yourself before I knock your face down your throat?"

"Don't do it, gov'nor," gasped Teddy. "I didn't mean no harm. How was I to know that the young lady was a pal o' yours?" Here he struggled a little; and his face assumed a darker hue. "Let go, master," he cried, almost inarticulately. "You're ch--choking me."

"Pray let him go," said Lydia, disengaging herself from the butcher and catching Cashel's arm.

Cashel, with a start, relaxed his grasp; and Teddy rolled on the ground. He went away thrusting his hands into his sleeves, and out-facing his disgrace by a callous grin. Cashel, without speaking, offered Lydia his arm; and she, seeing that her best course was to get away from that place with as few words as possible, accepted it, and then turned and thanked the butcher, who blushed and became speechless. The little man whose exclamation had interrupted the combat, now waved his hat, and cried,

"The British Lion forever! Three cheers for Cashel Byron."

Cashel turned upon him curtly, and said, "Don't you make so free with other people's names, or perhaps you may get into trouble yourself."

The little man retreated hastily; but the crowd responded with three cheers as Cashel, with Lydia on his arm, withdrew through a lane of disreputable-looking girls, roughs of Teddy's class, white-aproned shopmen who

had left their counters to see the fight, and a few pale clerks, who looked with awe at the prize-fighter, and with wonder at the refined appearance of his companion. The two were followed by a double file of boys, who, with their eyes fixed earnestly on Cashel, walked on the footways while he conducted Lydia down the middle of the narrow street. Not one of them turned a somersault or uttered a shout. Intent on their hero, they pattered along, coming into collision with every object that lay in their path. At last Cashel stopped. They instantly stopped too. He took some bronze coin from his pocket, rattled it in his hand, and addressed them.

"Boys!" Dead silence. "Do you know what I have to do to keep up my strength?" The hitherto steadfast eyes wandered uneasily. "I have to eat a little boy for supper every night, the last thing before to bed. Now, I haven't quite made up my mind which of you would be the most to my taste; but if one of you comes a step further, I'll eat HIM. So, away with you." And he jerked the coin to a considerable distance. There was a yell and a scramble; and Cashel and Lydia pursued their way unattended.

Lydia had taken advantage of the dispersion of the boys to detach herself from Cashel's arm. She now said, speaking to him for the first time since she had interceded for Teddy,

"I am sorry to have given you so much trouble, Mr. Cashel Byron. Thank you for interfering to protect me; but I was in no real danger. I would gladly have borne with a few rough words for the sake of avoiding a disturbance."

"There!" cried Cashel. "I knew it. You'd a deal rather I had minded my own business and not interfered. You're sorry for the poor fellow I treated so badly; ain't you now? That's a woman all over."

"I have not said one of these things."

"Well, I don't see what else you mean. It's no pleasure to me to fight chance men in the streets for nothing: I don't get my living that way. And now that I have done it for your sake, you as good as tell me I ought to have kept myself quiet."

"Perhaps I am wrong. I hardly understand what passed. You seemed to drop from the clouds."

"Aha! You were glad when you found me at your elbow, in spite of your talk. Come now; weren't you glad to see me?"

"I was--very glad indeed. But by what magic did you so suddenly subdue that man? And was it necessary to sully your hands by throttling him?"

"It was a satisfaction to me; and it served him right."

"Surely a very poor satisfaction! Did you notice that some one in the crowd called out your name, and that it seemed to frighten the man terribly?"

"Indeed? Odd, wasn't it? But you were saying that you thought I dropped from the sky. Why, I had been following you for five minutes before! What do you think of that? If I may take the liberty of asking, how did you come to be walking round Soho at such an hour with a little ragged boy?"

Lydia explained. When she finished, it was nearly dark, and they had reached Oxford Street, where, like Lucian in Regent's Park that afternoon, she became conscious that her companion was an object of curiosity to many of the young men who were lounging in that thoroughfare.

"Alice will think that I am lost," she said, making a signal to a cabman. "Good-bye; and many thanks. I am always at home on Fridays, and shall be very happy to see you."

She handed him a card. He took it, read it, looked at the back to see if there was anything written there, and then said, dubiously,

"I suppose there will be a lot of people."

"Yes; you will meet plenty of people."

"Hm! I wish you'd let me see you home now. I won't ask to go any further than the gate."

Lydia laughed. "You should be very welcome," she said; "but I am quite safe, thank you. I need not trouble you."

"But suppose the cabman bullies you for double fare," persisted Cashel. "I have business up in Finchley; and your place is right in any way there. Upon my soul I have," he added, suspecting that she doubted him. "I go every Tuesday evening to the St. John's Wood Cestus Club."

"I am hungry and in a hurry to get home," said Lydia. "I must be gone and live, or stay and die.' Come if you will; but in any case let us go at once."

She got into the cab, and Cashel followed, making some remark which she did not quite catch about its being too dark for any one to recognize him. They spoke little during the drive, which was soon over. Bashville was standing at the open door as they came to the house. When Cashel got out the footman looked at him with interest and some surprise, But when Lydia alighted he was so startled that he stood open-mouthed, although he was trained to simulate insensibility to everything except his own business, and to do that as automatically as possible. Cashel bade Lydia good-bye, and shook hands with her. As she went into the house, she asked Bashville whether Miss Goff was within. To her surprise, he paid no attention to her, but stared after the retreating cab. She repeated the question.

"Madam," he said, recovering himself with a start, "she has asked for you four times."

Lydia, relieved of a disagreeable suspicion that her usually faultless footman must be drunk, thanked him and went up-stairs.