

CHAPTER X

Mrs. Byron, under her stage name of Adelaide Gisborne, was now, for the second time in her career, much talked of in London, where she had boon for many years almost forgotten. The metropolitan managers of her own generation had found that her success in new parts was very uncertain; that she was more capricious than the most petted favorites of the public; and that her invariable reply to a business proposal was that she detested the stage, and was resolved never to set foot upon it again. So they had managed to do without her for so long that the younger London playgoers knew her by reputation only as an old-fashioned actress who wandered through the provinces palming herself off on the ignorant inhabitants as a great artist, and boring them with performances of the plays of Shakespeare. It suited Mrs. Byron well to travel with the nucleus of a dramatic company from town to town, staying a fortnight in each, and repeating half a dozen characters in which she was very effective, and which she knew so well that she never thought about them except when, as indeed often happened, she had nothing else to think about. Most of the provincial populations received her annual visits with enthusiasm. Among them she found herself more excitingly applauded before the curtain, her authority more despotic behind it, her expenses smaller, and her gains greater than in London, for which she accordingly cared as little as London cared for her. As she grew older she made more money and spent less. When she complained to Cashel of the cost of his education, she was rich. Since he had relieved her of that cost she had visited America, Egypt, India, and the colonies, and had grown constantly richer. From this great tour she had returned to England on the day when Cashel added the laurels of the Flying Dutchman to his trophies; and the next Sunday's paper had its sporting column full of the prowess of Cashel Byron, and its theatrical column full of the genius of Adelaide Gisborne. But she never read sporting columns, nor he theatrical ones.

The managers who had formerly avoided Mrs. Byron were by this time dead, bankrupt, or engaged in less hazardous pursuits. One of their successors had lately restored Shakespeare to popularity as signally as Cashel had restored the prize ring. He was anxious to produce the play of "King John," being desirous of appearing as Faulconbridge, a part for which he was physically unfitted. Though he had no suspicion of his unfitness, he was awake to the fact that the favorite London actresses, though admirable in modern comedy, were not mistresses of what he called, after Sir Walter Scott, the "big bow wow" style required for the part of Lady Constance in Shakespeare's history. He knew that he could find in the provinces many veteran players who knew every gesture and inflection of voice associated by tradition with the part; but he was afraid that they would remind Londoners of Richardson's show, and get Faulconbridge laughed at. Then he thought of Adelaide Gisborne. For some hours after the idea came to him he was gnawed at by the fear that her performance would throw his into the shade. But his confidence in his own popularity helped his love of good acting to prevail; and he made the newly returned actress a tempting offer, instigating some journalist friends of his at the same time to lament over the decay of the grand school of acting, and to invent or republish anecdotes of Mrs. Siddons.

This time Mrs. Byron said nothing about detesting the stage. She had really detested it once; but by the time she was rich enough to give up the theatre she had worn that feeling out, and had formed a habit of acting which was as irksome to shake off as any other habit. She also found a certain satisfaction in making money with ease and certainty, and she made so much that at last she began to trifle with plans of retirement, of playing in Paris, of taking a theatre in London, and other whims. The chief public glory of her youth had been a sudden triumph in London on the occasion of her first appearance on any stage; and she now felt a mind to repeat this and crown her career where it had begun. So she accepted the manager's offer, and even went the length of reading the play of "King John" in order to ascertain what it was all about.

The work of advertisement followed her assent. Portraits of Adelaide Gisborne were displayed throughout the town. Paragraphs in the papers mentioned large sums as the cost of mounting the historical masterpiece of the national bard. All the available seats in the theatre--except some six or seven hundred in the pit and gallery--were said to be already disposed of for the first month of the expected run of the performance. The prime minister promised to be present on the opening night. Absolute archaeological accuracy was promised.

Old paintings were compared to ascertain the dresses of the period. A scene into which the artist had incautiously painted a pointed arch was condemned as an anachronism. Many noblemen gave the actor-manager access to their collections of armor and weapons in order that his accoutrement should exactly counterfeit that of a Norman baron. Nothing remained doubtful except the quality of the acting.

It happened that one of the most curious documents of the period in question was a scrap of vellum containing a fragment of a chronicle of Prince Arthur, with an illuminated portrait of his mother. It had been purchased for a trifling sum by the late Mr. Carew, and was now in the possession of Lydia, to whom the actor-manager applied for leave to inspect it. Leave being readily given, he visited the house in Regent's Park, which he declared to be an inexhaustible storehouse of treasure. He deeply regretted, he said, that he could not show the portrait to Miss Gisborne. Lydia replied that if Miss Gisborne would come and look at it, she should be very welcome. Two days later, at noon, Mrs. Byron arrived and found Lydia alone; Alice having contrived to be out, as she felt that it was better not to meet an actress--one could never tell what they might have been.

The years that had elapsed since Mrs. Byron's visit to Dr. Moncrief had left no perceptible trace on her; indeed she looked younger now than on that occasion, because she had been at the trouble of putting on an artificial complexion. Her careless refinement of manner was so different from the studied dignity and anxious courtesy of the actor-manager, that Lydia could hardly think of them as belonging to the same profession. Her voice was not her stage voice; it gave a subtle charm to her most commonplace remarks, and it was as different as possible from Cashel's rough tones. Yet Lydia was convinced by the first note of it that she was Cashel's mother. Besides, their eyes were so like that they might have made an exchange without altering their appearance.

Mrs. Byron, coming to the point without delay, at once asked to see the drawing. Lydia brought her to the library, where several portfolios were ready for inspection. The precious fragment of vellum was uppermost.

"Very interesting, indeed," said Mrs. Byron, throwing it aside after one glance at it, and turning over some later prints, while Lydia, amused, looked on in silence. "Ah," she said, presently, "here is something that will suit me exactly. I shall not trouble to go through the rest of your collection, thank you. They must do that robe for me in violet silk. What is your opinion of it, Miss Carew? I have noticed, from one or two trifles, that your taste is exquisite."

"For what character do you intend the dress?"

"Constance, in 'King John.'"

"But silk was not made in western Europe until three hundred years after Constance's death. And that drawing is a sketch of Marie de Medicis by Rubens."

"Never mind," said Mrs. Byron, smoothly. "What does a dress three hundred years out of date matter when the woman inside it is seven hundred years out? What can be a greater anachronism than the death of Prince Arthur three months hence on the stage of the Panopticon Theatre? I am an artist giving life to a character in romance, I suppose; certainly not a grown-up child playing at being somebody out of Mrs. Markham's history of England. I wear whatever becomes me. I cannot act when I feel dowdy."

"But what will the manager say?"

"I doubt if he will say anything. He will hardly venture to press on me anything copied from that old parchment. As he will wear a suit of armor obviously made the other day in Birmingham, why--!" Mrs. Byron shrugged her shoulders, and did not take sufficient interest in the manager's opinion to finish her sentence.

"After all, Shakespeare concerned himself very little about such matters," said Lydia, conversationally.

"No doubt. I seldom read him."

"Is this part of Lady Constance a favorite one of yours?"

"Troublesome, my dear," said Mrs. Byron, absently. "The men look ridiculous in it; and it does not draw."

"No doubt," said Lydia, watching her face. "But I spoke rather of your personal feeling towards the character. Do you, for instance, like portraying maternal tenderness on the stage?"

"Maternal tenderness," said Mrs. Byron with sudden nobleness, "is far too sacred a thing to be mimicked. Have you any children?"

"No," said Lydia, demurely. "I am not married."

"Of course not. You should get married. Maternity is a liberal education in itself."

"Do you think that it suits every woman?"

"Undoubtedly. Without exception. Only think, dear Miss Carew, of the infinite patience with which you must tend a child, of the necessity of seeing with its little eyes and with your own wise ones at the same time, of bearing without reproach the stabs it innocently inflicts, of forgiving its hundred little selfishnesses, of living in continual fear of wounding its exquisite sensitiveness, or rousing its bitter resentment of injustice and caprice. Think of how you must watch yourself, check yourself, exercise and develop everything in you that can help to attract and retain the most jealous love in the world! Believe me, it is a priceless trial to be a mother. It is a royal compensation for having been born a woman."

"Nevertheless," said Lydia, "I wish I had been born a man. Since you seem to have thought deeply into these problems, I will venture to ask you a question. Do you not think that the acquirement of an art demanding years of careful self-study and training--such as yours, for example--is also of great educational value? Almost a sufficient discipline to make one a good mother?"

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Byron, decidedly. "People come into the world ready-made. I went on the stage when I was eighteen, and succeeded at once. Had I known anything of the world, or been four years older, I should have been weak, awkward, timid, and flat; it would have taken me twelve years to crawl to the front. But I was young, passionate, beautiful, and indeed terrible; for I had run away from home two years before, and been cruelly deceived. I learned the business of the stage as easily and thoughtlessly as a child learns a prayer; the rest came to me by nature. I have seen others spend years in struggling with bad voices, uncouth figures, and diffidence; besides a dozen defects that existed only in their imaginations. Their struggles may have educated them; but had they possessed sufficient genius they would have had neither struggle nor education. Perhaps that is why geniuses are such erratic people, and mediocrities so respectable. I grant you that I was very limited when I first came out; I was absolutely incapable of comedy. But I never took any trouble about it; and by and by, when I began to mature a little, and to see the absurdity of most of the things I had been making a fuss about, comedy came to me unsought, as romantic tragedy had come before. I suppose it would have come just the same if I had been laboring to acquire it, except that I would have attributed its arrival to my own exertions. Most of the laborious people think they have made themselves what they are--much as if a child should think it had made itself grow."

"You are the first artist I ever met," said Lydia, "who did not claim art as the most laborious of all avocations. They all deny the existence of genius, and attribute everything to work."

"Of course one picks up a great deal from experience; and there is plenty of work on the stage. But it is my genius which enables me to pick up things, and to work on the stage instead of in a kitchen or laundry."

"You must be very fond of your profession."

"I do not mind it now; I have shrunk to fit it. I began because I couldn't help myself; and I go on because, being an old woman, I have nothing else to do. Bless me, how I hated it after the first month! I must retire soon, now. People are growing weary of me."

"I doubt that. I am bound to assume that you are an old woman, since you say so; but you must be aware, flattery apart, that you hardly seem to have reached your prime yet."

"I might be your mother, my dear. I might be a grand mother. Perhaps I am." There was a plaintive tone in the last sentence; and Lydia seized the opportunity.

"You spoke of maternity then from experience, Miss Gisborne?"

"I have one son--a son who was sent to me in my eighteenth year."

"I hope he inherits his mother's genius and personal grace."

"I am sure I don't know," said Mrs. Byron, pensively. "He was a perfect devil. I fear I shock you, Miss Carew; but really I did everything for him that the most devoted mother could do; and yet he ran away from me without making a sign of farewell. Little wretch!"

"Boys do cruel things sometimes in a spirit of adventure," said Lydia, watching her visitor's face narrowly.

"It was not that. It was his temper, which was ungovernable. He was sulky and vindictive. It is quite impossible to love a sulky child. I kept him constantly near me when he was a tiny creature; and when he got too big for that I spent oceans of money on his education. All in vain! He never showed any feeling towards me except a sense of injury that no kindness could remove. And he had nothing to complain of. Never was there a worse son."

Lydia remained silent and grave. Mrs. Byron looked rather beside her than at her. Suddenly she added,

"My poor, darling Cashel" (Lydia suppressed a start), "what a shame to talk of you so! You see, I love him in spite of his wickedness." Mrs. Byron took out her handkerchief, and Lydia for a moment was alarmed by the prospect of tears. But Miss Gisborne only blew her nose with perfect composure, and rose to take her leave. Lydia, who, apart from her interest in Cashel's mother, was attracted and amused by the woman herself, induced her to stay for luncheon, and presently discovered from her conversation that she had read much romance of the Werther sort in her youth, and had, since then, employed her leisure in reading every book that came in her way without regard to its quality. Her acquirements were so odd, and her character so unreasonable, that Lydia, whose knowledge was unusually well organized, and who was eminently reasonable, concluded that she was a woman of genius. For Lydia knew the vanity of her own attainments, and believed herself to be merely a patient and well-taught plodder. Mrs. Byron happening to be pleased with the house, the luncheon, and Lydia's intelligent listening, her unaccountable natural charm became so intensified by her good-humor that Lydia became conscious of it, and began to wonder what its force might have been if some influence--that of a lover, for instance--had ever made Mrs. Byron ecstatically happy. She surprised herself at last in the act of speculating whether she could ever make Cashel love her as his father must, for a time at least, have loved her visitor.

When Lydia was alone, she considered whether she was justified in keeping Mrs. Byron apart from her son. It seemed plain that at present Cashel was a disgrace to his mother, and had better remain hidden from her. But if he should for any reason abandon his ruffianly pursuits, as she had urged him to do, then she could bring about a meeting between them; and the truant's mother might take better care of him in the future, besides

making him pecuniarily independent of prize-fighting. This led Lydia to ask what new profession Cashel could adopt, and what likelihood there was of his getting on with his mother any better than formerly. No satisfactory answer was forthcoming. So she went back to the likelihood of his reforming himself for her sake. On this theme her imagination carried her so far from all reasonable probability, that she was shaking her head at her own folly when Bashville appeared and announced Lord Worthington, who came into the room with Alice. Lydia had not seen him since her discovery of the true position of the tenant he had introduced to her, and he was consequently a little afraid to meet her. To cover his embarrassment, he began to talk quickly on a number of commonplace topics. But when some time had elapsed, he began to show signs of fresh uneasiness. He looked at his watch, and said,

"I don't wish to hurry you, ladies; but this affair commences at three."

"What affair?" said Lydia, who had been privately wondering why he had come.

"The assault-at-arms. King What's-his-name's affair. Webber told me he had arranged that you should come with me."

"Oh, you have come to take us there. I had forgotten. Did I promise to go?"

"Webber said so. He was to have taken you himself; but, failing that, he promised to do a good thing for me and put me in his place. He said you particularly wanted to go, hang him!"

Lydia then rose promptly and sent for her carriage. "There is no hurry," she said. "We can drive to St. James's Hall in twelve minutes."

"Hut we have to go to Islington, to the Agricultural Hall. There will be cavalry charges, and all sorts of fun."

"Bless me!" said Lydia. "Will there be any boxing?"

"Yes," said Lord Worthington, reddening, but unabashed. "Lots of it. It will be by gentlemen, though, except perhaps one bout to show the old king our professional form."

"Then excuse me while I go for my hat," said Lydia, leaving the room. Alice had gone some time before to make a complete change in her dress, as the occasion was one for display of that kind.

"You look awfully fetching, Miss Goff," Lord Worthington said, as he followed them to the carriage. Alice did not deign to reply, but tossed her head superbly, and secretly considered whether people would, on comparison, think her overdressed or Lydia underdressed. Lord Worthington thought they both looked their best, and reflected for several seconds on the different styles of different women, and how what would suit one would not do at all for another. It seemed to him that Miss Carew's presence made him philosophical.

The Agricultural Hall struck Alice at first sight as an immense barn round which heaps of old packing-cases had been built into race-course stands, scantily decorated with red cloth and a few flags. She was conducted to a front seat in one of these balconies, which overhung the tan-strewn arena. Just below her were the palisades, ornamented at intervals with evergreens in tubs, and pressed against from without by a crowd who had paid a shilling apiece for the privilege of admission. She remarked that it was little to the credit of the management that these people should be placed so close beneath her that she could hear their conversation; but as Lydia did not seem to share her disgust, she turned her attention to the fashionable part of the audience. On the opposite side of the arena the balconies seemed like beds of flowers in bloom, blacknesses formed here and there by the hats and coats of gentlemen representing the interspaces of clay. In the midst of the flowers was a gaudy dais, on which a powerfully-built black gentleman sat in a raised chair, his majestic impassivity contrasting with the overt astonishment with which a row of savagely ugly attendant chiefs grinned and gaped on either

side of him.

"What a pity we are not nearer the king!" said Alice. "I can hardly see the dear old fellow."

"You will find these the best seats for seeing the assault. It will be all right," said Lord Worthington.

Lydia's attention was caught by something guilty in his manner. Following a furtive glance of his, she saw in the arena, not far from her, an enclosure about twenty feet square, made with ropes and stakes. It was unoccupied, and there were a few chairs, a basin, and a sponge, near it.

"What is that?" she asked.

"That! Oh, that's the ring."

"It is not a ring. It is square."

"They call it the ring. They have succeeded in squaring the circle."

Here there was a piercing bugle-call, and a troop of cavalry trotted into the arena. Lydia found it pleasant enough to sit lazily admiring the horses and men, and comparing the members of the Olympian Club, who appeared when the soldiers retired, to the marble gods of Athens, and to the Bacchus or David of Michael Angelo. They fell short of the Greek statues in refinement, and of the Italian in impressiveness as they vaulted over a wooden horse, and swung upon horizontal bars, each cheapening the exploits of his forerunner by out-doing them. Lord Worthington, who soon grew tired of this, whispered that when all that rubbish was over, a fellow would cut a sheep in two with a sword, after which there would be some boxing.

"Do you mean to say," said Lydia, indignantly, "that they are going to turn a sheep loose and hunt it on horseback with swords?"

Lord Worthington laughed and said yes; but it presently appeared that by a sheep was meant a lean carcass of mutton. A stalwart sergeant cut it in half as a climax to slicing lemons, bars of lead, and silk handkerchiefs; and the audience, accustomed to see much more disgusting sights in butchers' shops, liberally applauded him.

Two gentlemen of the Olympian Club now entered the enclosure which Lord Worthington called the ring. After shaking hands with one another as well as their huge padded gloves permitted, they hugged themselves with their right arms as if there were some danger of their stomachs falling out if not held tightly in, and danced round one another, throwing out and retracting their left fists like pawing horses. They were both, as Lydia learned from the announcement of their names and achievements by the master of the ceremonies, amateur champions. She thought their pawing and dancing ridiculous; and when they occasionally rushed together and scuffled, she could distinguish nothing of the leading off, stopping, ducking, countering, guarding, and getting away to which Lord Worthington enthusiastically invited her attention, and which elicited alternate jeers and applause from the shilling audience below. She laughed outright when, at the expiration of three minutes, the two dropped supine into chairs at opposite corners of the ring as if they had sustained excessive fatigue. At the end of a minute, some one hoarsely cried "Time!" and they rose and repeated their previous performance for three minutes more. Another minute of rest followed; and then the dancing and pawing proceeded for four minutes, after which the champions again shook hands and left the arena.

"And is that all?" said Lydia.

"That's all," said Lord Worthington. "It's the most innocent thing in the world, and the prettiest."

"It does not strike me as being pretty," said Lydia; "but it seems as innocent as inanity can make it." Her mind misgave her that she had ignorantly and unjustly reproached Cashel Byron with ferocity merely because he practised this harmless exercise.

The show progressed through several phases of skilled violence. Besides single combats between men armed in various fashions, there were tilts, tent-peggings, drilling and singlestick practice by squads of British tars, who were loudly cheered, and more boxing and vaulting by members of the club. Lydia's attention soon began to wander from the arena. Looking down at the crowd outside the palisades, she saw a small man whom she vaguely remembered, though his face was turned from her. In conversation with him was a powerful man dressed in a yellow tweed suit and green scarf. He had a coarse, strong voice, and his companion a shrill, mean one, so that their remarks could be heard by an attentive listener above the confused noise of the crowd.

"Do you admire that man?" said Lord Worthington, following Lydia's gaze.

"No. Is he anybody in particular?"

"He was a great man once--in the days of the giants. He was champion of England. He has a special interest for us as the preceptor of a mutual friend of ours."

"Please name him," said Lydia, intending that the mutual friend should be named.

"Ned Skene," said Lord Worthington, taking her to mean the man below. "He has done so well in the colonies that he has indulged himself and his family with a trip to England. His arrival made quite a sensation in this country: last week he had a crowded benefit, at which he sparred with our mutual friend and knocked him about like a baby. Our mutual behaved very well on the occasion in letting himself be knocked about. You see he could have killed old Skene if he had tried in earnest."

"Is that Skene?" said Lydia, looking at him with an earnest interest that astonished Lord Worthington. "Ah! Now I recognize the man with him. He is one of my tenants at the Warren Lodge--I believe I am indebted to you for the introduction."

"Mellish the trainer?" said Lord Worthington, looking a little foolish. "So it is. What a lovely bay that lancer has!--the second from the far end."

But Lydia would not look at the lancer's horse. "Paradise!" she heard Skene exclaim just then with scornful incredulity. "Ain't it likely?" It occurred to her that if he was alluding to his own chance of arriving there, it was not likely.

"Less likely things have happened," said Mellish. "I won't say that Cashel Byron is getting stale; but I will say that his luck is too good to last; and I know for a fact that he's gone quite melancholy of late."

"Melancholy be blowed!" said Skene. "What should he go melancholy for?"

"Oh, *I* know," said Mellish, reticently.

"You know a lot," retorted Skene with contempt. "I s'pose you mean the young 'oman he's always talking to my missis about."

"I mean a young woman that he ain't likely to get. One of the biggest swells in England--a little un with a face like the inside of a oyster-shell, that he met down at Wiltstoken, where I trained him to fight the Flying Dutchman. He went right off his training after he met her--wouldn't do anything I told him. I made so cock-sure that he'd be licked that I hedged every penny I had laid on him except twenty pound that I got a flat

to bet agin him down at the fight after I had changed my mind. Curse that woman! I lost a hundred pound by her."

"And served you right, too, you old stupid. You was wrong then; and you're wrong now, with your blessed Paradise."

"Paradise has never been licked yet."

"No more has my boy."

"Well, we'll see."

"We'll see! I tell you I've seed for myself. I've seed Billy Paradise spar; and it ain't fighting, it's ruffianing: that's what it is. Ruffianing! Why, my old missis has more science."

"Mebbe she has," said Mellish. "But look at the men he's licked that were chock full of science. Shepstone, clever as he is, only won a fight from him by claiming a foul, because Billy lost his temper and spiked him. That's the worst of Billy; he can't keep his feelings in. But no fine-lady sparrer can stand afore that ugly rush of his. Do you think he'll care for Cashel's showy long shots? Not he: he'll just take 'em on that mahogany nut of his, and give him back one o' them smashers that he settled poor Dick Weeks with."

"I'll lay you any money he don't. If he does, I'll go back into the ring myself, and bust his head off for it." Here Skene, very angry, applied several epithets to Paradise, and became so excited that Mellish had to soothe him by partially retracting his forebodings, and asking how Cashel had been of late.

"He's not been taking care of himself as he oughter," said Skene, gloomily. "He's showing the London fashions to the missis and Fanny--they're here in the three-and-sixpenny seats, among the swells. Theatres every night; and walks every day to see the queen drive through the park, or the like. My Fan likes to have him with her on account of his being such a gentleman: she don't hardly think her own father not good enough to walk down Piccadilly with. Wants me to put on a black coat and make a parson of myself. The missis just idolizes him. She thinks the boy far too good for the young 'oman you was speaking of, and tells him that she's only letting on not to care for him to raise her price, just as I used to pretend to be getting beat, to set the flats betting agin me. The women always made a pet of him. In Melbourne it was not what *I* liked for dinner: it was always what the boy 'ud like, and when it 'ud please him to have it. I'm blest if I usen't to have to put him up to ask for a thing when I wanted it myself. And you tell me that that's the lad that's going to let Billy Paradise lick him, I s'pose. Walker!"

Lydia, with Mrs. Byron's charm fresh upon her, wondered what manner of woman this Mrs. Skene could be who had supplanted her in the affections of her son, and yet was no more than a prize-fighter's old missis. Evidently she was not one to turn a young man from a career in the ring. Again the theme of Cashel's occupation and the chances of his quitting it ran away with Lydia's attention. She sat with her eyes fixed on the arena, without seeing the soldiers, swordsmen, or athletes who were busy there; her mind wandered further and further from the place; and the chattering of the people resolved itself into a distant hum and was forgotten.

Suddenly she saw a dreadful-looking man coming towards her across the arena. His face had the surface and color of blue granite; his protruding jaws and retreating forehead were like those of an orang-outang. She started from her reverie with a shiver, and, recovering her hearing as well as her vision of external things, became conscious of an attempt to applaud this apparition by a few persons below. The man grinned ferociously, placed one hand on a stake of the ring, and vaulted over the ropes. Lydia now remarked that, excepting his hideous head and enormous hands and feet, he was a well-made man, with loins and shoulders that shone in the light, and gave him an air of great strength and activity.

"Ain't he a picture?" she heard Mellish exclaim, ecstatically. "There's condition for you!"

"Ah!" said Skene, disparagingly. "But ain't HE the gentleman! Just look at him. It's like the Prince of Wales walking down Pall Mall."

Lydia, hearing this, looked again, and saw Cashel Byron, exactly as she had seen him for the first time in the elm vista at Wiltstoken, approaching the ring with the indifferent air of a man going through some tedious public ceremony.

"A god coming down to compete with a gladiator," whispered Lord Worthington, eagerly. "Isn't it, Miss Carew? Apollo and the satyr! You must admit that our mutual friend is a splendid-looking fellow. If he could go into society like that, by Jove, the women--"

"Hush," said Lydia, as if his words were intolerable.

Cashel did not vault over the ropes. He stepped through them languidly, and, rejecting the proffered assistance of a couple of officious friends, drew on a boxing-glove fastidiously, like an exquisite preparing for a fashionable promenade. Having thus muffled his left hand so as to make it useless for the same service to his right, he dipped his fingers into the other glove, gripped it between his teeth, and dragged it on with the action of a tiger tearing its prey. Lydia shuddered again.

"Bob Mellish," said Skene, "I'll lay you twenty to one he stops that rush that you think so much of. Come: twenty to one!"

Mellish shook his head. Then the master of the ceremonies, pointing to the men in succession, shouted, "Paradise: a professor. Cashel Byron: a professor. Time!"

Cashel now looked at Paradise, of whose existence he had not before seemed to be aware. The two men advanced towards the centre of the ring, shook hands at arm's-length, cast off each other's grasp suddenly, fell back a step, and began to move warily round one another from left to right like a pair of panthers.

"I think they might learn manners from the gentlemen, and shake hands cordially," said Alice, trying to appear unconcerned, but oppressed by a vague dread of Cashel.

"That's the traditional manner," said Lord Worthington. "It is done that way to prevent one from holding the other; pulling him over, and hitting him with the disengaged hand before he could get loose."

"What abominable treachery!" exclaimed Lydia.

"It's never done, you know," said Lord Worthington, apologetically. "Only it might be."

Lydia turned away from him, and gave all her attention to the boxers. Of the two, Paradise shocked her least. He was evidently nervous and conscious of a screwed-up condition as to his courage; but his sly grin implied a wild sort of good-humor, and seemed to promise the spectators that he would show them some fun presently. Cashel watched his movements with a relentless vigilance and a sidelong glance in which, to Lydia's apprehension, there was something infernal.

Suddenly the eyes of Paradise lit up: he lowered his head, made a rush, balked himself purposely, and darted at Cashel. There was a sound like the pop of a champagne-cork, after which Cashel was seen undisturbed in the middle of the ring, and Paradise, flung against the ropes and trying to grin at his discomfiture, showed his white teeth through a mask of blood.

"Beautiful!" cried Skene with emotion. "Beautiful! There ain't but me and my boy in the world can give the upper cut like that! I wish I could see my old missis's face now! This is nuts to her."

"Let us go away," said Alice.

"That was a very different blow to any that the gentlemen gave," said Lydia, without heeding her, to Lord Worthington. "The man is bleeding horribly."

"It's only his nose," said Lord Worthington. "He's used to it."

Meanwhile Cashel had followed Paradise to the ropes.

"Now he has him," chuckled Skene. "My boy's got him agin the ropes; and he means to keep him there. Let him rush now, if he can. See what it is to have a good judgment."

Mellish shook his head again despondently. The remaining minutes of the round were unhappy ones for Paradise. He struck viciously at his opponent's ribs; but Cashel stepped back just out of his reach, and then returned with extraordinary swiftness and dealt him blows from which, with the ropes behind him, he had no room to retreat, and which he was too slow to stop or avoid. His attempts to reach his enemy's face were greatly to the disadvantage of his own; for Cashel's blows were never so tremendous as when he turned his head deftly out of harm's way, and met his advancing foe with a counter hit. He showed no chivalry and no mercy, and revelled in the hardness of his hitting; his gloves either resounding on Paradise's face or seeming to go almost through his body. There was little semblance to a contest: to Lydia there was nothing discernible but a cruel assault by an irresistible athlete on a helpless victim. The better sort among the spectators were disgusted by the sight; for, as Paradise bled profusely, and as his blood besmeared the gloves and the gloves besmeared the heads and bodies of both combatants, they were soon stained with it from their waists upward. The managers held a whispered consultation as to whether the sparring exhibition had not better be stopped; but they decided to let it proceed on seeing the African king, who had watched the whole entertainment up to the present without displaying the least interest, now raise his hands and clap them with delight.

"Billy don't look half pleased with hisself," observed Mellish, as the two boxers sat down. "He looks just like he did when he spiked Shepstone."

"What does spiking mean?" said Lydia.

"Treading on a man's foot with spiked boots," replied Lord Worthington. "Don't be alarmed; they have no spikes in their shoes to-day. It is not my fault that they do such things, Miss Carew. Really, you make me feel quite criminal when you look at me in that way."

Time was now called; and the pugilists, who had, by dint of sponging, been made somewhat cleaner, rose with mechanical promptitude at the sound, Cashel had hardly advanced two steps when, though his adversary seemed far out of his reach, he struck him on the forehead with such force as to stagger him, and then jumped back laughing. Paradise rushed forward; but Cashel eluded him, and fled round the ring, looking back derisively over his shoulder. Paradise now dropped all pretence of good-humor. With an expression of reckless ferocity, he dashed at Cashel; endured a startling blow without flinching, and engaged him at close quarters. For a moment the falling of their blows reminded Lydia of the rush of raindrops against a pane in a sudden gust of wind. The next moment Cashel was away; and Paradise, whose blood was again flowing, was trying to repeat his manoeuvre, to be met this time by a blow that brought him upon one knee. He had scarcely risen when Cashel sprang at him; dealt him four blows with dazzling rapidity; drove him once more against the ropes; but this time, instead of keeping him there, ran away in the manner of a child at play. Paradise, with foam as well as blood at his lips, uttered a howl, and tore off his gloves. There was a shout of protest from the audience; and Cashel, warned by it, tried to get off his gloves in turn. But Paradise was upon him before he

could accomplish this, and the two men laid hold of one another amid a great clamor, Lord Worthington and others rising and excitedly shouting, "Against the rules! No wrestling!" followed by a roar of indignation as Paradise was seen to seize Cashel's shoulder in his teeth as they struggled for the throw. Lydia, for the first time in her life, screamed. Then she saw Cashel, his face fully as fierce as Paradise's, get his arm about his neck; lift him as a coal-heaver lifts a sack, and fling him over his back, heels over head, to the ground, where he instantly dropped on him with his utmost weight and impetus. The two were at once separated by a crowd of managers, umpires, policemen, and others who had rushed towards the ring when Paradise had taken off his gloves. A distracting wrangle followed. Skene had climbed over the palisade, and was hurling oaths, threats, and epithets at Paradise, who, unable to stand without assistance, was trying to lift his leaden eyelids and realize what had happened to him. A dozen others were trying to bring him to his senses, remonstrating with him on his conduct, or trying to pacify Skene. Cashel, on the other side, raged at the managers, who were reminding him that the rules of glove-fighting did not allow wrestling and throwing.

"Rules be d---d," Lydia heard him shouting. "He bit me; and I'll throw him to--" Then everybody spoke at once; and she could only conjecture where he would throw him to. He seemed to have no self-control: Paradise, when he came to himself, behaved better. Lord Worthington descended into the ring and tried to calm the hubbub; but Cashel shook his hand fiercely from his arm; menaced a manager who attempted to call him sternly to order; frantically pounded his wounded shoulder with his clenched fist, and so outswore and outwangled them all, that even Skene began to urge that there had been enough fuss made. Then Lord Worthington whispered a word more; and Cashel suddenly subsided, pale and ashamed, and sat down on a chair in his corner as if to hide himself. Five minutes afterwards, he stepped out from the crowd with Paradise, and shook hands with him amid much cheering. Cashel was the humbler of the two. He did not raise his eyes to the balcony once; and he seemed in a hurry to retire. But he was intercepted by an officer in uniform, accompanied by a black chief, who came to conduct him to the dais and present him to the African king; an honor which he was not permitted to decline.

The king informed him, through an interpreter, that he had been unspeakably gratified by what he had just witnessed; expressed great surprise that Cashel, notwithstanding his prowess, was neither in the army nor in Parliament; and finally offered to provide him with three handsome wives if he would come out to Africa in his suite. Cashel was much embarrassed; but he came off with credit, thanks to the interpreter, who was accustomed to invent appropriate speeches for the king on public occasions, and was kind enough to invent equally appropriate ones for Cashel on this.

Meanwhile, Lord Worthington had returned to his place. "It is all settled now," he said to Lydia. "Byron shut up when I told him his aristocratic friends were looking at him; and Paradise has been so bullied that he is crying in a corner down-stairs. He has apologized; but he still maintains that he can beat our mutual friend without the gloves; and his backers apparently think so too, for it is understood that they are to fight in the autumn for a thousand a side."

"To fight! Then he has no intention of giving up his profession?"

"No!" said Lord Worthington, astonished. "Why on earth should he give it up? Paradise's money is as good as in his pocket. You have seen what he can do."

"I have seen enough. Alice, I am ready to go as soon as you are."

Early in the following week Miss Carew returned to Wiltstoken. Miss Goff remained in London to finish the season in charge of a friendly lady who, having married off all her own daughters, was willing to set to work again to marry Alice sooner than remain idle.