

CHAPTER XXII

Coming events cast their shadows before

"I s'POSE they'll be marrying each other, one of these fine days!" said Small Porges as they crossed the meadow, side by side.

"Yes, I expect so, Shipmate," nodded Bellew, "and may they live long, and die happy, say I."

"Aye, aye, Captain,—an' Amen!" returned Small Porges.

Now as they went, conversing of marriage, and ships, and the wonders, and marvels of foreign lands,—they met with Adam who stared up at the sky and muttered to himself, and frowned, and shook his head.

"Good arternoon, Mr. Belloo sir,—an' Master Georgy!"

"Well, Adam, how are the hops?"

"'Ops sir,—there never was such 'ops,—no, not in all Kent, sir. All I'm wishin' is that they was all safe picked, an' gathered. W'ot do you make o' them clouds, sir,—over there,—jest over the p'int o' the oast-house?"

Bellew turned, and cast a comprehensive, sailor-like glance in the direction indicated.

"Rain, Adam, and wind,—and plenty of it!" said he.

"Ah! so I think, sir,—driving storm, and thrashing tempest!"

"Well, Adam?"

"Well, sir,—p'raps you've never seen w'ot driving rain, an' raging wind, can do among the 'op-bines, sir. All I wish is that they 'ops was all safe picked an' gathered, sir!" And Adam strode off with his eye still turned heaven-ward, and shaking his head like some great bird of ill-omen.

So the afternoon wore away to evening, and with evening, came Anthea; but a very grave-eyed, troubled Anthea, who sat at the tea-table silent, and preoccupied,—in so much, that Small Porges openly wondered, while Miss Priscilla watched over her, wistful, and tender.

Thus, Tea, which was wont to be the merriest meal of the day, was but the pale ghost of what it should have been, despite Small Porges' flow of conversation, (when not impeded by bread and jam), and Bellew's tactful efforts. Now while he talked light-heartedly, keeping carefully to generalities, he noticed two things,—one was that Anthea made but a pretence at eating, and the second, that though she uttered

a word, now and then, yet her eyes persistently avoided his.

Thus, he, for one, was relieved when tea was over, and, as he rose from the table, he determined, despite the unpropitious look of things, to end the suspense, one way or another, and speak to Anthea just so soon as she should be alone.

But here again he was balked and disappointed, for when Small Porges came to bid him good-night as usual, he learned that "Auntie Anthea" had already gone to bed.

"She says it's a head-ache," said Small Porges, "but I 'specks it's the hops, really, you know."

"The hops, my Porges?"

"She's worrying about them, — she's 'fraid of a storm, like Adam is. An' when she worries, — I worry. Oh Uncle Porges! — if only my prayers can bring the Money Moon — soon, you know, — very soon! If they don't bring it in a day or two, — 'fraid I shall wake up, one fine morning, an' find I've worried, an' worried myself into an old man."

"Never fear, Shipmate!" said Bellew in his most nautical manner, "'all's well that ends well,' — a-low, and aloft all's a-taunto. So just take a turn at the lee braces, and keep

your weather eye lifting, for you may be sure of this, — if the storm does come, — it will bring the Money Moon with it."

Then, having bidden Small Porges a cheery "Good-night" — Bellew went out to walk among the roses. And, as he walked, he watched the flying wrack of clouds above his head, and listened to the wind that moaned in fitful gusts. Wherefore, having learned in his many travels to read, and interpret such natural signs and omens, he shook his head, and muttered to himself — even as Adam had done before him.

Presently he wandered back into the house, and, filling his pipe, went to hold communion with his friend — the Cavalier.

And thus it was that having ensconced himself in the great elbow-chair, and raised his eyes to the picture, he espied a letter tucked into the frame, thereof. Looking closer, he saw that it was directed to himself. He took it down, and, after a momentary hesitation, broke the seal, and read:

Miss Devine presents her compliments to Mr. Bellew, and regrets to say that owing to unforeseen circumstances, she begs that he will provide himself with other quarters at the expiration of the month, being the Twenty-third inst

Bellew read the lines slowly, twice over, then, folding the note very carefully, put it into his pocket, and stood for a long time staring at nothing in particular. At length he lifted his head, and looked up into the smiling eyes of the Cavalier, above the mantel.

“Sir,” said he, very gravely, “it would almost seem that you were in the right of it,—that yours is the best method, after all!” Then he knocked the ashes from his pipe, and went, slowly, and heavily, up-stairs to bed.

It was a long time before he fell asleep, but he did so at last, for Insomnia is a demon who rarely finds his way into Arcadia. But, all at once, he was awake again,—broad awake, and staring into the dark, for a thousand voices seemed to be screaming in his ears, and eager hands were shaking, and plucking at window and lattice. He started up, and then he knew that the storm was upon them, at last, in all its fury,—rain, and a mighty wind,—a howling raging tempest. Yes, a great, and mighty wind was abroad,—it shrieked under the eaves, it boomed and bellowed in the chimneys, and roared away to carry destruction among the distant woods; while the rain beat hissing against the window-panes.

Surely in all its many years the old house

of Dapplemere had seldom borne the brunt of such a storm, so wild,—so fierce, and pitiless!

And, lying there upon his bed, listening to the uproar, and tumult, Bellew must needs think of her who had once said:

“We are placing all our hopes, this year, upon the hops!”

CHAPTER XXIII

*How Small Porges, in his hour of need, was
deserted by his Uncle*

“RUINED, sir!—Done for!—Lord love me! they ain’t worth the trouble o’ gatherin’—w’ot’s left on ’em, Mr. Belloo sir.”

“So bad as that, Adam?”

“Bad!—ah, so bad as ever was, sir!” said Adam, blinking suspiciously, and turning suddenly away.

“Has Miss Anthea seen,—does she know?”

“Ah! she were out at dawn, and Oh Lord, Mr. Belloo sir! I can’t never forget her poor, stricken face,—so pale and sad it were. But she never said nothing, only: ‘Oh, Adam!—my poor hops!’ An’ I see her lips all of a quiver while she spoke. An’ so she turned away, an’ came back to the ’ouse, sir. Poor lass! Oh poor lass!” he exclaimed, his voice growing more husky. “She’s made a brave fight for it, sir,—but it weren’t no use, ye see,—it’ll be ‘Good-bye’ for her to Dapplemere, arter all, that there mortgage can’t never be paid now,—nohow.”

“When is it due?”

“Well, according to the bond, or the deed, or whatever they calls it,—it be doo—to-night, at nine o’clock, sir,—though Old Grimes,—as a special favour, an’ arter much persuading,—’ad agreed to hold over till next Saturday,—on account o’ the ’op-picking. But now—seeing as there ain’t no ’ops to be picked,—why he’ll fore-close to-night, an’ glad enough to do it, you can lay your oath on that, Mr. Belloo sir.”

“To-night!” said Bellew, “to-night!” and he stood, for a while with bent head, as though lost in profound thought. “Adam,” said he, suddenly, “help me to harness the mare, I must drive over to the nearest rail-road depot,—hurry, I must be off, the sooner, the better.”

“What!—be you—goin’ sir?”

“Yes;—hurry, man,—hurry!”

“D’ye mean as you’re a-goin’ to leave her—now, in the middle o’ all this trouble?”

“Yes, Adam,—I must go to London—on business,—now hurry, like a good fellow.” And so, together they entered the stable, and together they harnessed the mare. Which done, staying not for breakfast, Bellew mounted the driver’s seat, and, with Adam beside him, drove rapidly away.

But Small Porges had seen these preparations, and now came running all eagerness, but ere he could reach the yard, Bellew was out of ear-shot.

So there stood Small Porges, a desolate little figure, watching the rapid course of the dog-cart until it had vanished over the brow of the hill. And then, all at once the tears welled up into his eyes hot, and scalding, and a great sob burst from him, for it seemed to him that his beloved Uncle Porges had failed him at the crucial moment, — had left him solitary just when he needed him most.

Thus Small Porges gave way to his grief, hidden in the very darkest corner of the stable, whither he had retired lest any should observe his weakness, until having once more gained command of himself, and wiped away his tears with his small, and dingy pocket-handkerchief, he slowly re-crossed the yard, and entering the house went to look for his Auntie Anthea.

And, after much search, he found her — half-lying, half-kneeling beside his bed. When he spoke to her, though she answered him, she did not look up, and he knew that she was weeping.

“Don’t, Auntie Anthea, — don’t!” he pleaded. “I know Uncle Porges has gone away, an’ left us, but you’ve got me left, you

know, — an’ I shall be a man — very soon, — before my time, I think. So — don’t cry, — though I’m awful’ sorry he’s gone, too — just when we needed him the most, you know!”

“Oh Georgy!” she whispered, “my dear, brave little Georgy! We shall only have each other soon, — they’re going to take Dapple-mere away from us, — and everything we have in the world, — Oh Georgy!”

“Well, never mind!” said he, kneeling beside her, and drawing one small arm protectingly about her, “we shall always have each other left, you know, — nobody shall ever take you away from me. An’ then — there’s the — Money Moon! It’s been an awful’ long time coming, — but it may come to-night, or to-morrow night. *He* said it would be sure to come if the storm came, an’ so I’ll find the fortune for you at last. I know I shall find it *some day* a course — ’cause I’ve prayed, an’ prayed for it so very hard, an’ *He* said my prayers went straight up to heaven, an’ didn’t get blown away, or lost in the clouds. So — don’t cry, Auntie Anthea let’s wait — just a little longer — till the Money Moon comes.”

CHAPTER XXIV

*In which shall be found mention of a certain
black bag*

"BAXTER!"

"Sir?"

"Get me a pen, and ink!"

"Yes, sir."

Now any ordinary mortal might have manifested just a little surprise to behold his master walk suddenly in, dusty and dishevelled of person, his habitual languor entirely laid aside, and to thus demand pen and ink, forthwith. But then, Baxter, though mortal, was the very cream of a gentleman's gentleman, and the acme of valets, (as has been said), and comported himself accordingly.

"Baxter!"

"Sir?"

"Oblige me by getting this cashed."

"Yes, sir."

"Bring half of it in gold."

"Sir," said Baxter, glancing down at the slip of paper, "did you say — half, sir?"

"Yes, Baxter, — I'd take it all in gold only

that it would be rather awkward to drag around. So bring half in gold, and the rest in — five pound notes."

"Very good, sir!"

"And — Baxter!"

"Sir?"

"Take a cab!"

"Certainly sir." And Baxter went out, closing the door behind him. Meanwhile Bellew busied himself in removing all traces of his journey, and was already bathed, and shaved, and dressed, by the time Baxter returned.

Now gripped in his right hand Baxter carried a black leather bag which jingled as he set it down upon the table.

"Got it?" enquired Bellew.

"I have, sir."

"Good!" nodded Bellew. "Now just run around to the garage, and fetch the new racing car, — the Mercedes."

"Now, sir?"

"Now, Baxter!"

Once more Baxter departed, and, while he was gone, Bellew began to pack, — that is to say, he bundled coats and trousers, shirts and boots into a portmanteau in a way that would have wrung Baxter's heart, could he have seen. Which done, Bellew opened the black bag,

glanced inside, shut it again, and, lighting his pipe, stretched himself out upon an ottoman, and immediately became plunged in thought.

So lost was he, indeed, that Baxter, upon his return was necessitated to emit three distinct coughs, — (the most perfectly proper, and gentleman-like coughs in the world) ere Bellew was aware of his presence.

“ Oh! — that you, Baxter? ” said he, sitting up, “ back so soon? ”

“ The car is at the door, sir. ”

“ The car? — ah yes, to be sure! — Baxter. ”

“ Sir? ”

“ What should you say if I told you — ” Bellew paused to strike a match, broke it, tried another, broke that, and finally put his pipe back into his pocket, very conscious the while of Baxter’s steady, though perfectly respectful regard.

“ Baxter, ” said he again.

“ Sir? ” said Baxter.

“ What should you say if I told you that I was in love — at last, Baxter! — Head over ears — hopelessly — irretrievably? ”

“ Say, sir? — why I should say, — indeed, sir? ”

“ What should you say, ” pursued Bellew, staring thoughtfully down at the rug under his

feet, “ if I told you that I am so very much in love that I am positively afraid to — tell her so? ”

“ I should say — very remarkable, sir! ”

Bellew took out his pipe again, looked at it very much as if he had never seen such a thing before, and laid it down upon the mantelpiece.

“ Baxter, ” said he, “ kindly understand that I am speaking to you as — er — man to man, — as my father’s old and trusted servant and my early boy-hood’s only friend; sit down, John. ”

“ Thank you, Master George, sir. ”

“ I wish to — confess to you, John, that — er — regarding the — er — Haunting Spectre of the Might Have Been, — you were entirely in the right. At that time I knew no more the meaning of the — er — the word, John — ”

“ Meaning the word — Love, Master George? ”

“ Precisely; I knew no more about it than — that table. But during these latter days, I have begun to understand, and — er — the fact of the matter is — I’m — I’m fairly — up against it, John! ”

Here, Baxter, who had been watching him with his quick, sharp eyes nodded his head solemnly:

“Master George,” said he, “speaking as your father’s old servant, and your boyhood’s friend, — I’m afraid you are.”

Bellew took a turn up and down the room, and then pausing in front of Baxter, (who had risen also, as a matter of course), he suddenly laid his two hands upon his valet’s shoulders.

“Baxter,” said he, “you’ll remember that after my mother died, my father was always too busy piling up his millions to give much time or thought to me, and I should have been a very lonely small boy if it hadn’t been for you, John Baxter. I was often ‘up against it,’ in those days, John, and you were always ready to help, and advise me; — but now, — well, from the look of things, I’m rather afraid that I must stay ‘up against it’ — that the game is lost already, John. But which ever way Fate decides — win, or lose, — I’m glad — yes, very glad to have learned the true meaning of — the word, John.”

“Master George, sir, — there was a poet once — Tennyson, I think, who said, — ‘Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all,’ and I know — that he was — right. Many years ago, — before you were born, Master George, I loved — and lost, and that is how

I know. But I hope that Fortune will be kinder to you, indeed I do.”

“Thank you, John, — though I don’t see why she should be.” And Bellew stood staring down at the rug again, till aroused by Baxter’s cough:

“Pray sir, what are your orders, the car is waiting downstairs?”

“Orders? — why — er — pack your grip, Baxter, I shall take you with me, this time, into Arcadia, Baxter.”

“For how long, sir?”

“Probably a week.”

“Very good, sir.”

“It is now half-past three, I must be back in Dapplemere at eight. Take your time — I’ll go down to look at the machine. Just lock the place up, and — er — don’t forget the black bag.”

Some ten minutes later the great racing car set out on its journey, with Bellew at the wheel, and Baxter beside him with the black bag held firmly upon his knee.

Their process was, necessarily, slow at first, on account of the crowded thoroughfares. But, every now and then, the long, low car would shoot forward through some gap in the traffic, grazing the hubs of bus-wheels, dodging han-

soms, shaving sudden corners in an apparently reckless manner. But Baxter, with his hand always upon the black leather bag, sat calm and unruffled, since he knew, by long experience, that Bellew's eye was quick and true, and his hand firm and sure upon the wheel.

Over Westminster Bridge, and along the Old Kent Road they sped, now fast, now slow, — threading a tortuous, and difficult way amid the myriad vehicles, and so, betimes, they reached Blackheath.

And now the powerful machine hummed over that ancient road that had aforetime, shaken to the tread of stalwart Roman Legionaries, — up Shooter's Hill, and down, — and so into the open country.

And, ever as they went, they talked. And not as master and servant but as "between man and man," — wherefore Baxter the Valet became merged and lost in Baxter the Human, — the honest John of the old days, — a gray haired, kindly-eyed, middle-aged cosmopolitan who listened to, and looked at, Young Alcides beside him as if he had indeed been the Master George, of years ago.

"So you see, John, if all things *do* go well with me, we should probably take a trip to the Mediterranean."

"In the — 'Silvia,' of course, Master George?"

"Yes; though — er — I've decided to change her name, John."

"Ah! — very natural — under the circumstances, Master George," said honest John, his eyes twinkling slyly as he spoke, "Now, if I might suggest a new name it would be hard to find a more original one than 'The Haunting Spectre of the —'"

"Bosh, John! — there never was such a thing, you were quite right, as I said before, and — by heaven, — potato sacks!"

"Eh, — what? — potato sacks, Master George?"

They had been climbing a long, winding ascent, but now, having reached the top of the hill, they overtook a great, lumbering market cart, or wain, piled high with sacks of potatoes, and driven by an extremely surly-faced man in a smock-frock.

"Hallo there!" cried Bellew, slowing up, "how much for one of your potato-sacks?"

"Get out, now!" growled the surly-faced man, in a tone as surly as his look, "can't ye see as they're all occipied?"

"Well, — empty one."

"Get out, now!" repeated the man, scowling blacker than ever.

"I'll give you a sovereign for one."

"Now, don't ye try to come none o' your jokes wi' me, young feller!" growled the carter. "Sovereign!—bah!—Show us."

"Here it is," said Bellew, holding up the coin in question. "Catch!" and, with the word, he tossed it up to the carter who caught it, very dexterously, looked at it, bit it, rubbed it on his sleeve, rang it upon the foot-board of his waggon, bit it again and finally pocketed it.

"It's a go, sir," he nodded, his scowl vanishing as by magic; and as he spoke, he turned, seized the nearest sack, and, forthwith sent a cascade of potatoes rolling, and bounding all over the road. Which done, he folded up the sack, and handed it down to Bellew who thrust it under the seat, nodded, and, throwing in the clutch, set off down the road. But, long after the car had hummed itself out of sight, and the dust of its going had subsided, the carter sat staring after it—open-mouthed.

If Baxter wondered at this purchase, he said nothing, only he bent his gaze thoughtfully upon the black leather bag that he held upon his knee.

On they sped between fragrant hedges, under whispering trees, past lonely cottages and

farm-houses, past gate, and field, and wood, until the sun grew low.

At last, Bellew stopped the automobile at a place where a narrow lane, or cart track, branched off from the high road, and wound away between great trees.

"I leave you here," said he as he sprang from the car, "this is Dapplemere,—the farmhouse lies over the up-land, yonder, though you can't see it because of the trees."

"Is it far, Master George?"

"About half a mile."

"Here is the bag, sir; but—do you think it is—quite safe—?"

"Safe, John?"

"Under the circumstances, Master George, I think it would be advisable to—to take this with you." And he held out a small revolver. Bellew laughed, and shook his head.

"Such things aren't necessary—here in Arcadia, John,—besides, I have my stick. So good-bye, for the present, you'll stay at the 'King's Head,'—remember."

"Good-night, Master George, sir, good-night! and good fortune go with you."

"Thank you!" said Bellew, and reached out his hand, "I think we'll shake on that, John!"

So they clasped hands, and Bellew turned, and set off along the grassy lane. And, presently, as he went, he heard the hum of the car grow rapidly fainter and fainter until it was lost in the quiet of the evening.

CHAPTER XXV

The Conspirators

THE shadows were creeping down, and evening was approaching, as Bellew took his way along that winding lane that led to the House of Dapplemere.

Had there been anyone to see, (which there was not), they might have noticed something almost furtive in his manner of approach, for he walked always under the trees where the shadows lay thickest, and paused, once or twice, to look about him warily. Being come within sight of the house, he turned aside, and forcing his way through a gap in the hedge, came by a roundabout course to the farm-yard. Here, after some search, he discovered a spade, the which, (having discarded his stick), he took upon his shoulder, and with the black leather bag tucked under his arm, crossed the paddock with the same degree of caution, and so, at last, reached the orchard. On he went, always in the shadow until, at length, he paused beneath the mighty, knotted branches of "King Arthur." Never did conspirator glance about him with sharper eyes, or hearken with keener ears, than