VOLUME III

CHAPTER 10

"Ich muss dich nun vor allen Dingen
Zu lustige Gesellschaft bringen,
Damit du siehst, wie leicht sich's leben lässt
Dem Wölke hier wird jeder Tag ein Fest:
Mit wenig Witz und viel Betragen
Dreht jeder sich im engen Zirkeltanz
Wie junge Katzen mit dem Schwanz;
Wenn sie nicht über Kopfweh klagen,
So lang der Wirth nur weiter borgt,
Sind sie vergnügt und unbesorgt."

—*Faust.*

CAPTAIN ERIC POIGNARDE, formerly of the 2nd Dragoon Guards, formerly of the —th Regiment, and now of the —th Line, with a detachment of which he was enjoying, in Her Majesty's ship *Ramchunder*, the amenities of the Bay of Biscay on his way to India, was by no means the only person whom the Derby "event" had affected injuriously.

Mr. Gagan's rooms were the scene of a melancholy committee-meeting on the afternoon of the fatal day.

Mr. Gagan, looking remarkably anxious and ill-at-ease, occupied the window-seat. Tad Griffiths sat astride of one of the three wooden chairs—his arms folded on the back rail and his head resting disconsolately on them. Orpen, whose impassive countenance preserved its equable expression under all circumstances, was sitting at the head of the ink-besmeared table; beside him Dicky, his eyes fixed on the open page of a memorandum-book, in mournful silence. Mr. Wylding, who had

been admitted to the subscribers' fund on the last occasion, was smoking by the fireside, with his boots resting on the top bar of the grate.

"A blessed go, I call it, and no mistake!" spoke Gagan: "two pounds gone in a crack like that."

"Two?—ten pounds!" roared Tad; "and what on earth's to become of me? I've pawned my Sunday coat, and every blessed book."

"You're easily managed, you noisy beggar!" returned the gentleman by the fireside. "Look at me: I have Charlie's togs and my own in the bank, and a whole load of the governor's law-books (he's on circuit), and my mother's Injun shawl. Oh Lord! what'll I do at all, at all?"

"And me," said Dicky,—"I've boned the fees, and it's the second time; there are two sets owing now," and the boy almost sobbed. "If I hadn't been cleared out at that billiard-room, I could have paid both a fortnight ago."

Orpen looked at him with a sneer of contempt.

"Bob Aubrey owes a whole year's fees, you little flat; and he's not one bit afraid."

"Aubrey's father is a clergyman, and he'll be let down where I won't; he's got friends here. What am I to do? what am I to do?"

"I say, Gagan, have you got any whiskey? I do believe this little softy is sick."

Gagan nodded sulkily at the cupboard, and continued tattooing on the window-pane. Orpen fetched out a black quart bottle and a tumbler, and administered a dose of raw spirits to Dicky.

"Look here!" said he, sitting down; "we must do something,—it won't do to have a shindy just at present. Mahoney, you see, has rather blown up on us a little. Did you hear of his doings, Wylding?"

"No: what's that, now?" asked a couple of the lads together.

"Well, some friends of the family discovered that Mahoney and the housemaid were spending a deal of time in each other's company; and it's been discovered by the family that they've been married this month or two. So my bold Mahoney is to sail for Australia next Monday, with his *sposa*."

"I knew another fellow did that sort of thing," said Wylding, with a grin. "Do you remember Jack Leonard, that went to Oxford? They say he

missed a fellowship examination on purpose. Awful clever chap: he's a reporter in London now."

"I'll tell you," said Orpen, reverting to the first part of his previous speech, "what must be done to stave over this time. We must club, and do a bill. I know a money-lender."

"A bill!" echoed the company, terrified. "Oh! oh!"

Orpen shut up his red pocket-book with a snap, and moved as if to rise from his chair, saying distantly,—

"Please yourselves: what is it to me? I'm not in difficulties. Look at Davoren, owing two sets of fees. Aubrey has been warned by Dr. —— that his name will be taken off the books in three days."

"You said just now he wasn't afraid," interrupted Dicky hotly.

"Neither is he afraid; 'cause he's always drunk, that's why. Wylding, you'd better be looking out, too. I want that four pounds for my tutor, if you please."

"I tell you what, boys," said Tad, lifting up his head for the first time: "come on and settle the bill notion at once; it must be done. How much will it have to be for?"

"Eleven pounds for me," said Dicky, drawing a deep despairing sigh in spite of the whiskey.

"Six will do me; I'm going to be economical," said Mr. Wylding, taking his feet out of the grate and coming over to the table.

"How will six do you, I'd like to know?" asked Orpen insolently; "you owe me four, and you have all those traps in pawn."

"So as you get your four, Judas Iscariot, what's that to you?" was the gracious answer of the gentleman, as he poured himself out a dram of spirits.

Mr. Orpen took no notice; he continued writing down the several amounts in a column of his pocket-book. Then he added them all up.

"Five-and-thirty pounds. Now, see here: this must be divided; we'll make two bills, say of twenty pounds each. And then there'll be the interest—forty per cent. That'll be, let me see, eight pounds on each bill."

"Sixteen pounds to pay! O Lor'! we can't ever," cried Dicky.

"Per annum, you idiot; for a month or two it's only the twelfth of that," hastily added the financier.

"Must be done," said Tad, lighthearted and impecunious ever. "We have had one blow-up, and will have to be good boys for a while, till that jackass Mahoney is forgotten."

So it was settled that two bills, one of twenty and the other of fifteen pounds, were to be drawn. There was a slight difficulty as to whose name should adorn them—none of the boys save Orpen having reached his twenty-first year—and Orpen declined positively to take them out in his name. After much debating, a person was found—the keeper of a saloon frequented by the lads—who for a consideration agreed to appear as the drawer of the bills.

Mr. Melchisedech insisted on having a month's interest in advance, and the bills were drawn for two months. Dicky received his share, and gave a note of hand for the amount to Orpen, as did also the other lads.

Relieved from present anxiety, Dicky Davoren speedily forgot his narrow escape, and spent the half-sovereign that remained to him of his ill-gotten money with his usual spend-thrift carelessness. Tad Griffiths had fifteen shillings left, after settling his little bills; and he proposed to Dicky to have a night's jollification.

"Where's the use of troubling?" said Mr. Tad, in an offhand tone. "If you get in a hole your governor will only have to stump up, you know. Enjoy your life while you're young—that's my notion. Something's sure to turn up before two months, you know; and Melchisedech can be got to renew. Lor'! I don't mind one fig."

Thus this philosopher discoursed. And Dicky, whose mind was relieved from the terror ever haunting it of Dr. ——'s notification being sent to his father, jingled his shillings in his pocket, and yielded himself to the glamour of his friend's tongue. So instead of going home to dinner, he and Tad took an outside car and drove to a billiard-room near the canal. Here they remained for a couple of hours, betting on the game and occasionally taking part in it. Betting they found to be the more lucrative. Tad had some experience, and knew whom and when to back. Some officers from the barracks were playing. There was a stout English major, who seemed remarkably skilful, and whose play was certainly a study: betimes, in the beginning of a game, he made strokes so grotesquely bad that even Dicky laughed at them; then he would collect himself, and do astonishing execution. They left this at six o'clock, having won about five shillings between them. Mr. Griffiths proposed dinner, and named "The Brander," near Hawkins Street, as a satisfactory

place. Then of course another car was hailed, although they could have walked the distance in fifteen minutes; and they were speedily set down at the door of the restaurant. The brazen-faced barmaid bestowed a nod of recognition on Tad that filled Dicky's soul with envy.

"Now, what'll you have, gentlemen?" asked she.

"Dinner. We're going to dine," replied Dicky, with an important swagger.

"I'll take a glass of sherry—*dry*," answered Tad, with nice discrimination. "Try one, Dick: give you an appetite."

"*Pale* for me," returned Dicky, not to be outdone. "Will you take a glass for yourself, my dear?"

The barmaid grinned as she filled both youths' glasses out of a decanter of Hambro sherry, and her own out of a private decanter of burnt sugar and water.

"Now, what have you got for our dinner?" Dicky shouted to a waiter. "Lobster?—eh?"

"Lobster, sir? No, sir; there's nothing at all in the house except a cold shoulder of mutton, sir."

Dicky and Tad made a grimace of indescribable contempt and disgust. Ted swore audibly. There was no help for it, however. Presently the cold shoulder of mutton made its appearance, flanked by a dish of such potatoes as are in vogue at these establishments—hideous to see; and greens which had been cooked in the early morning, and were now made presentable by the simple process of dipping them into boiling water. Beer was ordered by Tad, and sherry by Dicky. When the waiter returned with them, the last-named young gentleman, fixing him with his eye, demanded, in an offhand tone,—

"Where's the currant jelly?"

"Currant jelly, sir! For what, sir?" asked the waiter respectfully.

"For this mutton of course: do you imagine I'm going to eat it without?"

"We don't furnish currant jelly, sir."

"You don't, eh? Is this an hotel?"

"It is, sir; it's the Brander Hotel, sir!" The waiter was indignant.

"You call this an hotel, do you? and you expect people to dine without the proper sauces and condiments—eh! do you? Fetch me red currant jelly at once."

"Divle iver I see any one ait such a thing!"

"You didn't!" returned Dicky in a tone of withering contempt. "Well, allow me to tell you, my good man, I never saw any one dine on cold mutton without it in all my life."

"Faix, I did often then, sir—begor did I," said the waiter; taken in, however, by the authoritative manner of the youth, he went out and returned with a pot of currant jelly, of which Mr. Davoren showed his appreciation by eating it clean out. He refused most positively to pay extra for this item when their bill was brought—telling the waiter coolly that he would charge for the salt next, and reminding him sarcastically that he had omitted to notice the mustard which the other gentleman had consumed. The other gentleman looked on, meantime, with semi-drunken gravity. Dicky carried the day. He profited by a moment of irresolution on the waiter's part to consign him to the warm regions, and towing the amount of the bill—ten shillings—on the table, hooked his arm into Tad's and left the restaurant triumphant. The carman who had waited outside informed them gratuitously that it was very dry weather. Tad jerked him a sixpence, and nodded in the direction of the bar they had just left. Having refreshed himself the jarvey came out in high good humour and suggested to the gentlemen to take "a breath of fresh element out towards the Park." They agreed; and what with the drive and the theatre and supper afterwards, there remained of their joint twenty-five shillings, and their winnings besides, only a few coppers in Dicky's pocket when his considerate friend helped him into the railway carriage on his way home.

"Good-night, ole f'ler," said Mr. Griffiths, after a prolonged handshaking. "Never mind, I shay. Get in a hole, you know, gov'nor'sh 'bliged help sh'out again."

Dicky thanked him with effusion.

Somehow the idea did not seem at all so reassuring, next day. The brilliant and comfortable perspective sketched by his friend Tad melted away almost altogether; and there remained only the deadening sensation that he owed eleven pounds since the day before yesterday, and was

twelve shillings further off being able to pay it than he had been last night.