

VOLUME II

CHAPTER 1

“To thee, King John, my holy errand is.
I, Pandulph, of fair Milan Cardinal,
And from Pope Innocent the legate here,
Do, in his name, religiously demand
Why thou against the Church, our holy mother,
So wilfully dost spurn?”

—*King John*

HOGAN drove up to the gates of St. Swithin’s shortly after nine o’clock the morning following Lord Brayhead’s dinner. Finding the side-door ajar, as it was the hour for the arrival of the day-pupils, he bade his carman wait, and slipping in amongst a crowd of children, who were assembled waiting for the ringing of the school-bell, speedily found himself at the green baize door of the Mother Superior’s parlour. He knocked; and on hearing his uncle’s tones in reply, entered.

“God bless me, John! what has brought you here?” was the astonished salutation of his lordship, who was seated at his breakfast, and who almost jumped up, so surprised was he.

“Don’t disturb yourself, my lord,” said Hogan, pulling over a chair. “I took the liberty of coming here, as I could not see you to-night. Pray go on with your breakfast; I’ll tell my story as you finish.”

The Bishop chipped his egg—a new-laid one, the produce of the conventual poultry yard. His breakfast was charming. The bread was home-baked; the butter, in pretty little round pats, and the cream in the silver jug, came from a cool dairy situated in a corner of the nuns’ own garden; the cloth was the whitest, the china the prettiest that could any-

where be seen; and the little silver teapot and sugar-pot, which shone bright enough to dazzle one's eyes, had been bequeathed to the sisterhood by an old lady who, having survived all her relations and friends, had died in their convent.

"Well, sir," began Hogan, "you will be astonished at my news. The member for Peatstown is dying, and—ah—I have been recommended to stand for the seat."

"Peatstown! Good Lord! that's Jim Corkran's parish, that was with me at Maynooth. Whew!" And the Bishop almost whistled, so great was his astonishment.

"Mr. Wyldoates is in a hopeless state," continued his nephew; "the vacancy may be declared any minute, and a contest is not anticipated."

"A contest, at least if a Conservative opposed you, would be no hurt; for the Reform Club or the Liberal Association would guarantee your expenses, or part of them, to keep the seat to the Government, wouldn't they now?"

"Well, sir, you see Dissolution is only a year or so off, and I think the Tories are reserving their strength for a tussle then. You see, one man more or less is nothing while the Whigs have such a majority. And they have too firm a hold on the country not to get in again after the General Election. I have no fear at all of not being re-elected if I got in."

"What will it cost?" asked the Bishop abruptly. "Father Corkran won't let you off short of a couple of hundred. God bless us! the time of the last election I remember lie sent to that rich Manchester man (I forget his name) that was opposing Wyldoates, and told him the roof of the parish chapel was out of repair. The fellow sent him a cheque for eighty pounds. Corkran wasn't satisfied, but sent him back a letter to say he had a second chapel wanting a roof to it. He did; and got a fifty-pound note for it. And the cream of the joke was the Manchester man was left out in the cold after all,"—and his lordship laughed heartily.

"I might do it for eight hundred. And I really think I'll chance it, sir. You see this Home Rule platform is sure to rally the people."

"The people!" repeated the Bishop, folding his napkin and pulling away his chair from the breakfast table; "it will go very much according to whether their priests are for Home Rule or not. There's the Education question; if you want to stand with them, put that first. You will not have their support unless you stand firm on that point."

“Home Rule will bring me in the votes,” said Hogan in a dogged tone. “I see nobody anxious for the Education question but the priests. How does it affect the Peatstown people, compared with Home Rule? Kilboggan is an extorting, oppressing absentee. All those fellows are looking to Home Rule to settle the Land question. They are indeed, sir.”

“God help them!” was the sententious reply.

“Would the Cardinal recommend me to the clergy and the chief Catholics of the place? He has never pronounced yet in favour of Home Rule.” Hogan, as he asked this question, leaned on his elbow, and resting his chin in the palm of his hand bent his grey eyes searchingly on the Bishop’s face.

“I don’t believe the Cardinal has ever given it his consideration one way or the other,” said the Bishop, in a slow emphatic tone. “I don’t approve of it; and my acquaintance, so far as it goes, with the opinions among the clergy, leads me to infer that it would not be acceptable at all to the Hierarchy. However, it is neither sedition nor treason; neither, though it has begun,” he added pointedly, “among the Protestants, and independently of the Church, is it irreligious. Some few priests go in for it heart and soul; more say they don’t understand it; and, in fact, it is not decided yet what course is to be pursued with regard to it; nor, what’s more, will it be decided yet awhile. You had better consult your own judgment in that matter. But I warn you, show a proper regard for the Education question. The clergy are set upon that.”

“They’ll never get it. The people are against it altogether. Look here, sir: when you can reverse the whole state of society, when you can put the Protestants at the bottom and the Catholics on the top; make the Protestants the low poor people, the struggling traders, and the mushroom rich, and have the Catholics the aristocrats, the refined, high-born, exclusive sect that the others are now, *then* you may have a Catholic university, and *then* the Protestants will be disobeying their rulers and their consciences, and sending their sons to it that they may be improved and refined by coming in contact with us. If you had a chartered university this minute, the wealthy Catholics would send their sons to Trinity all the same; and small blame to them.”

“Tut, tut; you talk nonsense. Why should not we have a Catholic University, as well as the Belgians and the French, and ——?”

“Have it the nest of free-thinkers and atheists that theirs are.” Hogan took out his watch. “No, no; you misunderstand the whole question, my lord—entirely misunderstand it. A quarter past ten, sir. Well, you don’t say against my project?”

“I’ll say nothing at all. I’d like to make inquiries first. There’s no great hurry, is there?”

“Well, no, not exactly,” returned Hogan, who saw clearly that his lordship meant to give his consent; “I’ll call up to you some evening soon.”

Then he remounted his car, and hastened to an appointment at an attorney’s office before Court.

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“Diana, is that young man to be here this afternoon?”

These words were spoken by Mrs. Bursford to her daughter, perhaps at the same moment that the young man referred to was engaged in the conversation with his uncle detailed above.

“Possibly, mamma,” returned Miss Bursford, who was stooping over a large music wagon beside her piano. Miss Bursford was certainly not a morning beauty, like our friend Nellie Davoren: the clear bright sunlight showed many a flaw that the wax-lights of the night before had not discovered; a beauty when unadorned she certainly was not; and her woollen morning dress of plain design betrayed the deficiencies of figure that a *modiste’s* cunning hand had veiled or supplied in her toilette of the night before.

“We must defer our visits until to-morrow, then. I must say that I do not care for Romanist acquaintances. He looks to be well-bred and gentlemanly, I allow; but you never know what the family may turn out to be. There was Elinor Hely insisting on marrying that odious O’Ryan, the surgeon of the —th; and what a mother and sisters-in-law she found herself set up with!”

“I think you know very well, mamma,” returned the young lady, with more than a shade of sharpness in her voice, “that Mr. O’Rooney Hogan has no relatives.” And she continued sorting the music into parcels, laying the separate pieces neatly on top of each other, and picking out two or three which she placed on the piano for practising.

Mrs. Bursford sighed as she rose from her writing-table; she was too well conversant with her daughter's disposition to oppose her in the matter, and too well aware, also, of the hopelessness of this new venture to think it worth risking either opposition or encouragement. She had given up all hopes that her daughter could be married by any effort of hers. She did her best; for she certainly devoted nearly two-thirds of her income exclusively to the furtherance of that great object. She carried her everywhere; she got introductions by the score; she had plenty of relatives, connections, and acquaintances. Still, Miss Bursford did not take: she was ladylike, well educated of course, and possessed a thorough finished society manner,—a bearing that procured her a due amount of deference and attention everywhere she went. Still, the general feeling in a room, when she had taken her departure, was one of relief; her cold blue eyes and distant manner with her own sex were rather repelling. She was always irreproachably dressed, and had a way, whether she meant it or not, of making any woman who was not up to the mark in point of toilette conscious of her deficiency. With men she made the mistake of adopting a totally different manner. She was *empresée*, flattering, and deferential; listening to the silliest chaff with engrossed attentiveness, as if to the utterances of a cabinet minister. But she wanted softness; her *câlineries* were too artificial and too well-worn; the iron hand showed itself too unmistakably beneath the velvet glove. The girl was, in truth, sick of her *rôle*; fourteen years was a long apprenticeship, and she wearied for the day when she might lay aside, literally as well as metaphorically, the war paint and feathers; when she might be natural and affected, and, above all, independent of the mother bird, whose control, prolonged far beyond the natural limits, was now become distasteful and wearisome to her.

Sons escape the maternal rule, to them always light, as soon as they become men; sometimes as soon as they go to school. In many cases, from the very cradle up they are obeyed rather than commanded. But it is not so with the women-children; they leave school to enter upon a still harder regimen, and one that never relaxes until the door of wifehood opens for them—if they are so fortunate as to escape by that risky aperture; if not, as in Diana Bursford's case, they must only bow their necks to the yoke, and hope that time may soften its asperities and make it wear easier. It does sometimes; but, as often as not, a collar too tight-fitting and galling creates a painful raw instead of a callosity.

Nor had Diana's training and mode of life been the best suited to fit her to bear the inequalities of her lot with that patience and philosophy which, under some conditions, rise to the level of dignity. One-third of every day of her life, perhaps, was devoted to the cares of her toilet, and to practising her music. This last she disliked naturally, and had not a particle of native aptitude for it. But music, vocal or other, is an indispensable part of the equipment of a young lady, and so Diana had been forced to learn; and, by dint of much expenditure of time and money, succeeded in singing and playing in a fashionable and mechanical manner. It was no pleasure to hear either performance; but then, it was patent to everybody that she had been well taught—*i.e.*, by expensive teachers. When an audience cannot pronounce any other compliment, they are seldom chary of their acknowledgments on this particular point.

Miss Bursford and her mother had paid their tribute to society; and society, in return, graciously accorded its sense, not of gratitude—to express it more accurately, let us say, tendered a receipt for value received. There were times, it is true, when Diana was fairly tired out; and, despairing, threatened to take refuge at last in one of the new sisterhoods: and then Mrs. Bursford would rage and storm. She had, as we have said, abandoned all hopes that a husband could be caught in the ordinary way for her daughter; but she still cherished a belief in fate, or providence, or chance. She designated the mysterious hidden potentiality by all three names, varying them according to the frame of mind she happened to be in. On Sundays, or when she chanced to be in a religious mood, it was generally providence; when she coupled Diana in an especial manner with the contingency referred to, it was fate she invoked; while the good luck of other women's daughters was always ascribed to mere chance. When things seemed most hopeless, she would cast over in her mind all the odd pieces of luck that had fallen to the lot of women much older than Diana: Miss Dillon, without a penny, who was forty, and who had been proposed for* by her parish priest—in trust—for a grazier, of enormous wealth, who had seen her walking along the road; and Miss Hare, without a penny also, and more than forty, who married a general worth five thousand a year; then again, only the other day, old Miss Stoney getting a judge (Miss Stoney's age was notorious).

* The expression "proposed for," like many idioms apparently unaccountable, exactly defines the action. A proposal of marriage is seldom made *to* the lady, but *to* her guardian *for* her.

So she would rake up precedents, her hopes rising in corresponding ratio with the ages and drawbacks of the personages she adduced, till Diana would fling out of the room almost in hysterics.

Miss Bursford seated herself at the piano, and began to pick out slowly and deliberately, bar by bar and line by line, the last fashion in waltzes. When ten or twelve years younger, she might have taken a novel and abandoned herself to the luxury of castle-building, leaving the ways and means to develop themselves; but it was not so now. Romance had long ago taken wing; and feeling, not to say love, she had never known since she was twenty-five; for Captain Vesey had certainly carried poor Miss Bursford's heart to Abyssinia, and left it there, for he married an Indian widow on his way home. She took everything in the most practical, business-like way; and having selected a fort to be stormed, drew her lines around it, dug trenches, and turned every available gun on the weakest points with the skill and dexterity to be learnt only in the heavy campaigning business to which her existence had been devoted.

When her allotted time of practising was over, she went to her room to make her toilette for the afternoon, and seated herself before her mirror. The Venetian blind pulled carefully down, and her long fair hair well in process of the complicated brushings, spongings, and rubbings necessary to coax it into brightness and silkiness, she began to consider her position and calculate her chances. Brushing her hair seemed to set her thinking powers in action; it was like a considering cap, and every vexed question was kept methodically for this hour of the day. She was not one of those people who, to use an Americanism, "borrow trouble" by forecasting complications or situations ere they actually exist. She took things as they came, in a matter-of-fact, practical way; and, turning the full force of a somewhat narrow intellect directly upon them, just as she did with a difficult passage in a piece of music, exerted herself to her utmost until she succeeded, or found she had miscalculated her forces.

She had estimated Hogan pretty accurately; and Saltasche had given her mother a rough outline of his career, past and present, which had led that veteran to conclude, although she disliked him on personal as well as on religious and social grounds, that this barrister was worth looking up. He had nothing at present; but an embryo M.P. is always a judge or colonial dignitary in perspective; and as to his religion, in Ireland it was a drawback certainly, but in London it might be rather an advantage. People of undoubted rank and position in England seemed to

think most highly of her uncle Monsignor Bursford; while in Dublin he could only be spoken of with bated breath, as of some disgraceful appendage, and always as a *convert*; her mother felt it quite a duty to have it known that her brother-in-law had not been *born* a Roman Catholic.

Diana reflected also that Mr. Hogan was a *débutant* in society—that he knew nobody. Lord Brayhead had taken him up, she felt certain, for some purpose of his own in connection, doubtless, with some of his selfish, absurd schemes. The private opinions of his female relatives regarding that great gentleman were not too flattering. As for Mr. Saltasche, he was utterly unaccountable; and being a man of reputed wealth, and moving in the best society, equally irresponsible. She had the greatest confidence in his discernment, however, and felt fully disposed to act on his information and suggestions. As to introducing his friend to her own set generally, she had her doubts as to the prudence of that. There were too many girls younger and more attractive than herself, who would do their best to secure even such an uncertain prize as this promising young barrister. The more Diana thought it over, the more firmly convinced she was of the necessity of keeping him out of the way of people as much as possible. “*Experientia docet*”; and Diana’s wisdom was of that solid kind that has been bought and paid for.

When fully dressed, she pulled up the blind and looked out, and up and down the street. Not that she expected to see anybody or anything; but it was a habit of hers. Then she turned a large cheval glass round to the light, and surveyed herself critically from head to foot. Her dress was a mixture of dark violet cashmere, and pale blue silk; the lighter shade gave a golden reflection to her hair, and a soft ruffle of cambric and lace concealed the thinness, while adding to the whiteness of her neck; velvet wristbands performed the same friendly office for her hands and wrists. She had scarcely finished her inspection when a loud knock resounded through the house.

A sneer curled Miss Bursford’s lips as the thought flashed through her mind that Hogan was so hurried to confirm his introduction to people of respectability. And she went down to the drawing-room with a leisurely step, intending to maintain her advantage by a chillingly condescending tone.

To her surprise, instead of Mr. O’Rooney Hogan, there was Mr. Saltasche’s rotund figure reclining in the easiest chair by the fire. Saltasche had been a school friend of Diana’s eldest brother, and was on

intimate terms with the family. He managed Mrs. Bursford's business for her in general, and had charge of the investments of her money.

"Well, Miss Di., good morning; is your mother in? I can't stay a moment. By-the-bye," and he got up and leaned against the mantelpiece, "Miss Diana, Mr. Hogan—er—" (Diana glanced up at him with a look full of interest)—"is pretty safe to get in for Peatstown. Try and—ah—engage him for the concert if you can. He will call this afternoon after court; about five, maybe. Tell him I am away to London to-night; will be back on Saturday morning. Can I do anything for you there?"

"No," she replied; "it would be too much to trouble you with commissions. You are too kind." She was rapidly thinking over his words, and trying to account for his evident desire to interest her in his protégé.

Mrs. Bursford came in now.

"Mr. Saltasche, I am very glad to see you. How do you do? Pray sit down."

"I am going over to the 'little village' to-night. I just leave you these in your own hands before starting. Just sign me this receipt for the Leadmines stock—and you, Miss Diana"; and he handed her a large roll of papers.

Mrs. Bursford took the envelope to her secretary, and, after examining its contents, locked it up. She and Miss Diana signed the prepared receipt, which he then transferred to his pocket-book.

"How very well their 'Excies' looked last night!" Mr. Saltasche observed for about the twelfth time that day.

"Very well indeed," responded the ladies simultaneously.

"He has bought a couple of Lord Newmarket's hunters at Newby's. Splendid animals! Gave three hundred guineas for one of them. Sent them down to the Curragh this morning," continued Mr. Saltasche, with the same tone of proprietorial interest. "I am told, though, that one of them has rather—ah—an inclination to sandcrack," he added, as gloomily as if the price of the animal had come out of his own pocket.

"Dear me!" said the ladies; who did not in the least know what the sandcrack was, but who felt interested and sympathetic immediately in anything ever so remotely concerning their dear Excellencies.

"You will go on Saturday to the theatre?" continued he; "it's a Command night. I shall be there if I can get back in time. Must go now. We'll

meet again. Don't forget my message, Miss Diana. Good-bye. Can't I do anything for you in London? No, no: I have had lunch. Quite sure. Adieu! adieu!"

And so Mr. Saltasche took himself off, bowing and smiling to the last moment; and leaving the two lathes quite refreshed and roused up by his visit. It was just as if a wholesome out-of-door breeze had suddenly invaded a close-heated room.

Diana felt invigorated and braced up for action: as she sat down to lunch she said to her mother, "Do you think, mamma, we could get those visits paid in the Square, and be back here by half-past four?"

Mrs. Bursford paused for a second. She knew perfectly well, from her daughter's tone and the mention of the particular hour, that Saltasche had given her some hint before she came down to the drawing-room. What was the good of demurring? So she shrugged her shoulders in a helpless sort of way, and replied resignedly, "We may as well, I suppose."