

VOLUME I

CHAPTER 9

“Ein garstig Lied! Pfui! ein politisch Lied!
Ein leidig Lied! Dankt Gott mit jedem Morgen
Dass ihr nicht braucht fürs röm’sche Reich zu sorgen.
Ich halt’ es wenigstens für reichlichen Gewinn
Dass ich nicht Kaiser oder Kanzler bin.
Doch muss auch uns ein Oberhaupt nicht fehlen,
Wir wollen einen Papst erwählen.”

—*Faust.*

LORD BRAYHEAD possessed a town house, which he inhabited for a few months in the early spring of each year,—for the Dublin season, in fact, which is over when that of London commences, or nearly so. St. Patrick’s Ball, given on the night of that “immovable” Feast, closes the Castle festivities. The Viceroy and his family usually take wing for London, and the big “whiskey men” and a few—a very few—of the set remain to keep the ball rolling in Dublin. The Roman Catholics are all “fasting” and “abstaining,” and longing for Easter to remove their disabilities.

For these few months Lord Brayhead entertained hospitably enough. His circle was tolerably wide—embracing the Castle set (the private circle, of course, understood),—the Viceroy, his family and acquaintance generally. Then there was the usual *filling*: the Castle officials, the commander of the forces, the Lord Mayor, the provost of Trinity, bishops, chaplains, surgeons, and physicians in ordinary and extraordinary, legal dignitaries,—all these were to be met at Brayhead House. There were not many of them; and the “deadly lively” (as Wyldoates, the larky aide-de-camp, styled them) entertainments were pretty generally

the same; except that the dishes varied with the seasons, while the guests were the same always—at least, while the Government remained unchanged. If the Whigs or Tories went out, of course there was a novelty in the way of Viceroy, Lord Chancellor, and so on.

The first levee and drawing-room of the season had been held. Dublin was full of county people, and the hotels and lodgings were all crowded. Court milliners advertised for additional hands, and the shops were thronged all day by fresh-cheeked purchasers. Stout bucolic gentlemen, addicted to plaid trouserings and to the distinctively provincial habit of staring about them in the streets, tried to kill time in Grafton Street, and wandered from one club to the other. The Courts were all sitting, too, and everybody seemed on the alert. Country witnesses lounged about the quays—shopkeepers and farmers dragged from their avocations in the busiest season, in accordance with the abominable centralized legal system of this country.

Hogan was passing hurriedly one afternoon from the Court of Probate to that of Common Pleas, in obedience to the summons of an attorney, when he felt his arm grasped by some one. Turning round, he found Mr. Saltasche, on whose arm was leaning a tall, elderly man, whose little sunk steel-blue eyes were bent scrutinizingly on him.

“How do you do, Mr. Hogan?” said Saltasche. “Allow me to present you to Lord Brayhead. We heard you speaking just now. I congratulate you on your success.”

Hogan bowed low. He was puzzled by Saltasche’s manner. Then Lord Brayhead, seeing a couple of people beckoning at a doorway, observed, after a remark or two,—

“Do not allow us to detain you, Mr. Hogan. Mr. Saltasche can finish my errand for me.”

“*Fiat justitia!* my lord,” said Hogan; “I need not offer any excuse,”—and hastened away; not, however, until Saltasche had engaged him to call on him the same afternoon at his office. Then the nobleman and his companion remained alone.

“What do you think of him, my lord?” asked Saltasche, placing himself so as to look straight into his companion’s face.

“H’m: he is much better than I had anticipated; much better—gentlemanlike, rather, and of good address. You say he is a Romanist. I should hardly have thought that. I am—er—pleasantly surprised.”

“Oh, yes: nephew to some bishop, I believe. Oh! quite one of that party. Owes everything to them, and is bound to them altogether.”

“Dear, dear!” almost groaned his lordship, standing still; and looked around him with an air of bewilderment. “It might, perhaps, be better to drop the idea.”

“You cannot do without *some one*, my lord,” said the broker emphatically, “in the place of Mr. Wyldoates; and if not well managed, this seat may be lost utterly to you. Besides, we shall hold this man.” And the broker looked significantly at his companion.

“True, true. How much would it cost? Have you endeavoured to ascertain?”

“How much? Well, there is a parish priest there, I’m told; nothing less, between him and the Convent, than a cool hundred will suffice; maybe more will be required: and that’s only one item. To be sure, there are loads of other things, too. And you see it is not so long off dissolution; which must be considered in the case of Mr. Hogan. A man may like to spend his money when he has seven years before him to enjoy his purchase; but with a general election to come on in a year or two, it’s a risky thing.”

“The Liberals are in possession altogether, it seems to me,” said Lord Brayhead. “I don’t believe we have a chance against them. The country never was so Whig before: look at the majority they hold. They think themselves that nothing can upset them. Ruinous state of affairs.”

“Quite so, indeed,” assented the broker, who was not attending to a word. “I think, now, seven or eight hundred pounds should do the business. If there’s no opposition? The Conservatives will hardly think it worth wasting powder on. And if he goes in on Home Rule and the Education question, with his connections in the clerical line, I can’t see any danger of the priests supporting anybody else. I think, too, if properly represented to them, the Reform Club would come down with something.”

“Of course, Mr. Saltasche, my name never appears; and you will undertake to bring Mr. Hogan round to our mutual views cautiously. I shall see you both to-night.”

Saltasche opened the door of the brougham, which was in waiting at the entrance of the Law Courts, for his client, and watched him drive off with an amused smile on his lips. “What an old fox!” thought he. “He’ll

pay every penny, unless our friend here be more fool than I take him for," ruminated he. "Poor old Wyldoates must really be dying; begad, it will be a lift to young Hogan. Who the deuce is this?" And Mr. Saltasche bent his sharp eyes on a couple of people advancing in his direction. Poignarde, and the—yes,—the wife, no doubt."

The military man whom we met before in Mr. Saltasche's office now approached. Beside him walked a young woman, not tall, and very slight of figure, dressed in a close-fitting black costume, with a thick veil over her face, through which a clear ivory skin shone more lustrous by the contrast, and which in no way marred the brilliancy of a pair of almond-shaped, hazel eyes. She was walking along in silence, and with a listless air and step—Captain Poignarde seeming engrossed in his cigar. Saltasche caught his eye; and the pair halted simultaneously.

"Captain Poignarde, how do you do?"

"Adelaide: Mr. Saltasche—my wife."

Mrs. Poignarde bent her lithe figure in the least perceptible acknowledgment, and raising her white eyelids a quarter of an inch, met the appreciating glance of the well-dressed man of the world, who was bowing before her, with cool equanimity. Saltasche had been told she was lovely and young; but he, having a standard of his own, paid but little attention to reports. While acknowledging the churlish introduction of her husband, he ran his critical eye over her; veiled, and plainly dressed as she was, he saw enough to cause him the greatest astonishment.

"Nineteen or twenty," thought he, "and clean bred. What a set her head has!" and his practised eye in one moment took in every detail and line of her form.

"Ah, Captain," said he, reproachfully, "you never came back that day we settled, you remember. Mrs. Poignarde, your husband is a sad man of business."

Not a word she spoke in reply, only flashed a glance from him to the gallant youth beside her, who, holding with one lemon-coloured gloved hand his cigar, with the other tugged his whiskers, vainly endeavouring to grasp the purport of what had been said. His wife evidently relished the situation.

“A man of business!” she said at last. “Business!—the idea of Eric and business. What was it?” And she laughed, with a ring of malicious amusement in her voice.

He turned round a sulky countenance upon her. Saltasche, watching every stir, noted the scornful curl of the short upper lip.

“A trifle,” answered Saltasche, airily; “nothing worth remembering or talking about. Any time will do,” he added, looking significantly at Poignarde, who returned the glance by a meaning nod.

“Mrs. Poignarde, your friend Mrs. Grey, the chaplain’s wife, has been a neighbour of mine, at Green Lanes, for some time back. Has she told you that a concert is proposed for the Soldiers’ Widows’ and Orphans’ Home situated near us?”

“I recollect. Yes,” said she, indifferently; she did speak of something of that kind.”

“It is to be exclusively amateur; and you sing, don’t you?” He was watching her closely as he spoke.

“Sing?—no.” And she looked at him with wide-opened eyes.

“Are you sure? I’m certain I was told of your singing so well. Captain Poignarde, I must appeal to you;” and Saltasche turned to the husband.

“Don’t know, ’m sure,” drawled he. “She plays.”

“You must hear more about it. I know you can help them; and the committee are absolutely lost for a really good performer. Oh, I won’t allow you to refuse. I’ll send and tell you all about it.”

She threw back her head, and looked at him with an inimitable air of half bewilderment, half haughtiness. Saltasche coolly returned this with a look of the most expressive, intense admiration. A car was passing, and he signalled the driver by a wave of his hand.

“May I set you down anywhere, Poignarde? Mrs. Poignarde, will you allow me?”

“We’re going home Park way,” nodded the husband.

Mrs. Poignarde vouchsafed not the slightest attention; and with a distant salute from her, they separated.

Saltasche, as he drove towards the Bridge, turned and watched the two retreating figures—the man slouching along by the curbstone, puff-

ing at his cigar, and vacantly turning his head from right to left at everything that passed; she erect and well set up, walking with a firm step, and never heeding, apparently, a single person or thing on either side. Not a word evidently was exchanged between the couple; for the woman, or girl rather, walked along as if unconscious of her companion's presence. Nor was it until the car had turned a corner, and was quite out of sight, that she looked at her companion, and broke the silence between them.

"Eric—I say, Eric—was that the stockbroker Anstruther sent you to?"

"Yes: an awfully rich fellow; no end of a swell. I say, if you're asked to play for them, what do you intend to do?"

"Do?—I don't know. I am not asked yet."

"You'd better decide, then, and at once," grumbled he, in a bullying tone.

"Listen, Eric," she said, indifferently. "I don't intend to be controlled by you in my few amusements. I don't interfere with you; so let me alone."

"I'd like to see you, that's all—damn you."

And so this happy couple strolled home.

The hours sped on till evening. Lord Brayhead got through a heavy day's work of committee meetings, boards of governors, and such like. He visited an English railway magnate at the "Bilton," and from him got the name of a firm of engineers and railway contractors. Altogether, he felt, as his carriage rolled eastward through Merrion Square, on its way to Brayhead House, that he was considerably nearer the object of his ambition.

It was now dark; the grey wintry day had closed rapidly, and a biting frosty air made all the lights sparkle with unusual brilliancy. Brayhead House, a huge red-brick corner house, standing, like some of the fine Paris houses, *entre cour et jardin*, with a splendid granite *porte-cochère* and massive iron gates and railings, showed an unusual excitement. The double doors were open, and a crimson carpet ran down the wide steps. The servants were rushing about, all in their dress liveries of claret and gold. The hall was heated with great stoves placed beneath the staircase. White marble statues gleamed among stands of

hothouse plants; and camellias, like trees, their stems hidden in masses of maidenhair fern, stood everywhere masking the walls.

A second hall was divided by a velvet curtain, held back at either side by a beautiful marble figure. The staircase was carved oak; and off the drawing-room lobby was a conservatory, filled with spring flowers; great pots of pale narcissus, Russian violets, and hyacinths of every hue. The sweet fresh scent penetrated to the drawing-rooms, where the maids were busy giving the final touch to everything.

His lordship stalked gravely up the staircase until he reached his dressing-room. Here he rang the bell; and, after giving some orders to the servant who answered the summons, went to his wife's room.

Lady Brayhead was in the hands of her maid, a grim Abigail, who left the room in obedience to a look from his lordship. Standing with his back to the fire, he waited for a minute without speaking.

"That invitation you dispatched last night, Sophronia?"

"Yes, Lord Brayhead," responded she meekly, crossing her thin chilly fingers in her lap.

"Did the answer come from Mr. Hogan this morning, or this afternoon?"

"Mr. Hogan sent an acceptance by the midday post."

"Good. Sophronia! I desire you will be attentive to him; I have particular reasons for it."

"Is it true, my lord, that this young man is—a Romanist?"

To this question his lordship replied with a stiff inclination of his chin; and as he moved away slowly from the fire, added, as though prompted by an after-thought:

"I desire you will convey my wishes to your nieces in this matter also."

"Certainly, since it is your wish." And the countess wrapped herself in her swansdown *peignoir*.

She was a little old woman of sixty, with a perpetual red nose, and pinched-up, wintry little face. In the hottest day of midsummer it was her peculiarity to look cold. She was rather Low Church in her religious views; Conservative, of course, like her lord; and like him, too, abominating Roman Catholics. Ritualists she held in a horror second only to that

she entertained for the Scarlet Lady herself. She was a soured woman. Of her two sons, her favourite, the second, had not lived to grow up, and the eldest, Lord Greystones, had never agreed with his father, and lived always abroad. There was a rumour, too, of his having made a low match with a barmaid, or some one even more disreputable still; and his name was never mentioned at all.

The Brayheads were not held of much account in London. The Earl was a stupid man, pig-headed and narrow-minded. He liked dabbling in business, and to be the great man of a Board of Directors or a Committee of Managers. It gave him a little importance in his own eyes. People said, too, that the guineas were an attraction. A good sort of vestryman, in short. He had never taken any part in politics, or come to the front in any useful way; and they were not rich enough to hold a prominent position in London society by virtue of their entertainments or disbursements alone. They might, had Lord Greystones been so minded, have been accounted of some use and importance through him. The heir to an earldom and sixteen thousand a year confers a vast weight of responsibility and value on his family generally. They are noticed, flattered, and made much of for his sake; and if he fails, on the other hand, to come up to the public estimate and expectations, his family are pretty sure to be made bear the weight of the disappointment. It had been so with the Brayheads. However, London and Dublin are quite different; and a very second-rate personage in London may become a corner-stone of the social edifice in the Irish capital.

Dinner was appointed at eight, and their Excellencies were expected. Lady Brayhead was connected with the Lady Lieutenant's family; and at ten minutes to eight the hostess and her nieces, the Misses Braginton, took up their position in the drawing-room. After a while the company began to pour in—the Lord Chancellor and his lady, a brace of judges and their wives, the physician in ordinary, a couple of dowagers, a few country gentlemen, the provost, and a dean celebrated in the world of letters, but asked solely on account of his family name. Lord Brayhead, though he had written a book of unexampled stupidity, considered literature as the last of the professions. Miss Bursford and her mother arrived at the same moment with Mr. Saltasche and Hogan. The Bragintons instantly seized on Saltasche. "*Nil desperandum*" was the family motto; and Miss Blanche had already planned her assault on this fortress.

Conversation went on pretty smoothly. The fact of their Excellencies being expected gave a fillip to the spirits of the guests. Her ladyship, in peach velvet and silver, with little bunches of wispy, blonde curls on each side of her face, twittered little insipidities to a grave judicial dignitary standing beside her. The physician in ordinary was talking to a deaf dowager through a trumpet, and cudgelling his brains for some news for her. The Lord Chancellor, who had met the Chief Justice of Appeal the day before at the Castle dinner, and who was to meet him the next day at the Chief Secretary's, was exchanging some commonplaces about a street accident with his brother dignitary. An agrarian outrage was the prevailing topic; and one of the bucolic contingent, a Mr. Fitzharmon Dillon, was holding forth loudly on the generally seditious aspect of rural affairs to Saltasche, who hardly had made up his mind which was the most intolerable—the fascinating *minauderies* of Miss Braginton, or the pompous twaddle of the J.P. Mr. Fitzharmon Dillon was one of that class of Irish gentry who would have it to be believed that they are suffering all the woes of exile by being condemned to live in their native country. They take care always to speak of it as “this country,” in the tone Burton or Stanley might use in describing Zanzibar or Unyanyembe.

“The idea, my dear sir, that in a country calling itself civilized, in the—ah—nineteenth century, I am obliged to keep two policemen in my own house! Daren't stir without their protection.” And he paused and looked round for admiration and interest. A county gentleman buried in his estate for eight months out of the twelve is obliged to make the best of his little opportunities. It is not everybody that is honoured with a threatening letter; and people have little idea of the importance conferred by being the recipient of one of these missives. It is, positively, the next thing to being fired at; and raises a man enormously in his own and public estimation. Mr. Fitzharmon Dillon had frequent interviews with the editor of *The Daily Alarmist*, who was forcing the Coercion Bill on the notice of the Government.

Saltasche was not unacquainted with the variety, and listened with an expression of compassionate deference.

“Dreadful position, indeed; dreadful, dreadful!” And he had to smile in return, as he spoke, in reply to Miss Blanche's *œillade*.

“Last year, after nightfall, every shutter had to be closed immediately. A mere glimmer of light, and we might have lost our lives.”

“Why didn’t you go away to London, Mr. Dillon?” asked Diana Bursford, who was sitting close by, speculating wearily as to her probable partner at the dinner-table, and inwardly praying that the Bragintons, contrary to their customary good-natured practice, would have forgotten to put her down to a married man, or some useless “detri-mental.”

Poor Miss Burford! her opportunities were not to be wasted now. Who would think that under the cold, well-bred, smiling manner there lay such a torrent of disgust, contempt, and fierce self-upbraidings? She looked round and round the room; noted with a sneer that ancient man-hunter, Blanche Braginton, playing off all the well-worn tricks in her repertory on the tough hide of Cosmo Saltasche; then noted the sofa, where a couple of women, well-dressed and dull, were keeping up a feeble trickle of small talk with some dining-out professional; Lord Brayhead, wooden as usual, on the hearthrug, and the place of honour vacant as yet for the Lord Lieutenant.

She wished the vice-regal party would arrive and decide events. Miss Bursford lived now but from day to day; and every season, as she well knew, instead of advancing her nearer to her prize, landed her farther from it. Every day was of value now. She had started in life as a beauty; and like many girls, oblivious of the exigencies brought about by economic social change, had counted too much upon her beauty, and had flown too high. Then there came the Vesey crash; and what a long grudge she owed the Bragintons for that ill deed! After that she had abated her price by degrees; and now, to her mother’s terror, had decided to take anybody who might offer himself. She had been hawked about from London to Dublin, from Dublin to Scarborough, to Bath, Leamington, Dieppe, Florence, and Rome. If Mrs. Bursford heard of a *parti* on the summit of Mont Blanc, they would have toiled up after him, or have sat down at the bottom and waited his descent, to attack him. There had been no end to their efforts; and yet here was Diana Miss Bursford still, seated on a *causeuse* and speculating on the dark-complexioned, intelligent-looking young man who had come in with Mr. Saltasche, while she, at the same time, affected to join in the talk of the group around her as anxiously and hopefully as if it was her first season.

“Why did I not go to London?” replied Mr. Dillon. “Ah, well! that’s all very well, but”—and Mr. Dillon put on an air of resignation and self-abnegation—“there is not the least use in trying to escape your fate that

way. If I am a marked man, I may"—and he raised his voice and looked round the room—"just as well stop where I am. Besides, it would be abandoning the field to them; it would be—er—cowardice!"

Hogan fixed his keen eyes on the speaker. "You had reason, then, for apprehension?" he said, with a cross-examining sort of air.

"Reason, sir! reason!" spluttered Mr. Dillon. "Everybody knows what reason any man of property has for apprehension in these days. But what can we expect, sir, with a Government that panders, sir—panders to the mere mob in this way? Communism——"

"Miss Bursford, have you heard the Italian Opera is coming next week? Town will be very full." Saltasche broke violently into this new topic.

"We are to have a very good company, I am told," said Hogan.

"By-the-bye," said Lord Brayhead, "speaking of the opera, His Excellency has been obliged to give directions concerning the 'Huguenots.' An appointment was made for the manager this afternoon at the Castle."

"Ah! that may be the cause of the delay of their Excellencies," chirped Lady Brayhead, glancing at a timepiece: "quite twenty minutes late."

"The 'Huguenots' is quite calculated to rouse party, h'm—spirit." This from Saltasche, uttered in the gravest tone. "Now, that Rataplan chorus, and the scene where they clap their hands—Kentish fire, you know—that must be excised completely. No one could answer for the consequences, otherwise."

Hogan, who had seen the opera alluded to several times, was trying to make out what particularly inflammatory material lurked in the scene alluded to.

"Very wrong, very wrong," said the host. "I quite disapprove of this conciliatory policy; it is nothing but cowardice. Why should we make such ignoble concessions?"

"Do you not think it would be better," asked a quiet, gentlemanly man of the last speaker, "to yield in trifles like this than to provoke conflict? Keep the fire and tow apart as much as possible."

Hogan, wondering and amused, and by no means certain that they were in earnest, turned and shot an inquisitive glance at Saltasche.

That mentor returned it with a knowing nod; and, under pretext of taking his young friend to admire a lately-executed bust of the earl at the other end of the room, said in a low voice,—

“I see you’re diverted. Did ever mortal man hear such foolery? His Excellency, I suppose, is holding a Privy Council to decide whether the Rataplan chorus is to be excised or not. He’ll send alarming despatches to Downing Street over it, to show them what he is doing. Pooh! he must give a little value for his money, you know, or seem to do so.” Then, louder, “Capital likeness, is it not?”

“Oh! speaking expression. Quite so: life-like.”

“More than ever the original was,” muttered the incorrigible Saltasche. “There he comes now: hear the outriders?”

In fact, the noise of the horses could be heard below; and the Lord Lieutenant entered directly, and, after a few minutes’ delay, the party filed off in proper order of precedence.

Hogan fell to Diana Bursford, and Saltasche paired off with the evergreen Blanche. They found themselves close to each other in the dining-room, at the farthest end from the representatives of Royalty; who in their turn were seated beside the usual dignitaries invited to meet them, and bored each other as a matter of course. Mr. Saltasche devoted himself to his dinner; and on Hogan, devoid as yet of that *aplomb* and *savoir faire* which enables a man to secure his own exclusive interests in a well-bred manner, fell the burthen of talking to the ladies. Blanche was ambitious: she saw clearly that there was no use wasting powder on the gentleman beside her until the needs of his inner man had been satisfied; so she talked to Miss Bursford and at Hogan, who was not a little puzzled at her *æillades* and affectations. She was not altogether bad-looking, and certainly possessed the manner and appearance of a well-bred woman accustomed to society. Her black eyes, however, had a beady, hard look; as to the complexion, even violet powder and a faint suspicion of rouge could not replace the bloom that had fled with youth. Her best points were her teeth and hands; and the first-named she managed to show with every word she uttered, while in using the last, which were loaded with rings, she rivalled the great Father O’Hea himself. She and her sister were the daughters of a needy and disreputable baronet; they had a small income—just sufficient to maintain them—which came to them from their mother; and they always accompanied Lady Brayhead in her yearly visits to Ireland. Like their noble relations, they

were too insignificant to make any real figure in London; and though they would strenuously have denied it, they thoroughly enjoyed their sojourn in Dublin. They loved domineering over the willing serfs whom they encountered in their aunt's set, and bullied and condescended to their hearts' delight. The dresses of last season did duty very well in Dublin; as also did their second-hand gossip and scandal-mongering.

Mr. Saltasche looked up at last from his *bisque d'écrevisse*, and, peeping between the branches of a table vine mounted in a silver pot on the table between them,—

“Oh, Miss Bursford, I must not forget to speak to you of the concert we're getting up. You will have to help.”

Diana Bursford sang extremely well—that is, in a finished, though unpleasing way—and her amiable cousin grudged her this accomplishment heartily.

“Is this the Soldiers' Home affair, Mr. Saltasche?” cried she, hastily forestalling Miss Bursford's reply. “Now really, do you think it will pay to have amateurs? I fancied you, so sensible as *you* are”—this with a killing look—“would have gone in for professionals at once. It saves so much trouble and worry; now, does it not?”

“Yes, to the amateurs it does indeed,” said Diana coldly.

Saltasche looked at her for an instant; but the immovable smiling face gave no sign, except that the brows were the least bit harder looking. She looked away up the table, through the blaze of wax-lights and gorgeous bloom of flowers, past the double line of faces, some serious, some gay, to where his Excellency sat, eating nothing, and barely civil to the withered old lady beside him.

“I really think, in a charitable thing such as this is, that all the performers should be amateurs,” ventured Hogan. “It takes such a large sum of money from the profits to pay professionals.”

“I have got Major Sands,” continued Saltasche, “of the Hussars, to play accompaniments; and the Greys say that they have quite a chorus made up. We want a good pianist for a solo or two, and a good soprano.”

“Diana, why don't you volunteer?” asked Miss Braginton in her most acid tone, casting a spiteful look at her relative.

“That’s exactly what I want, Miss Braginton,” said Saltasche; “won’t you join your entreaties to mine? You can’t refuse us, Miss Bursford: I have heard you sing—often, you know.”

Miss Braginton was outnumbered, and she went on eating her quail in silence.

Diana turned and looked full in Hogan’s face. “You sing, I am sure, Mr. Hogan; you have a singing voice: I am certain you do,”—and the cold blue eyes looked straight into his. She had put on her most pleasing manner, and her tone was deferential and soft, flattering in the extreme to the young man, who was raw and unpractised as yet in the ways of such women of the world.

Hogan felt a pleased glow steal over him. Flattery’s silver tongue was new to him; and it was with a sense of swelling delight and pride that he recognised and accepted his tribute. His neighbour evidently considered him worth her attention and civility; and he returned gratefully and cordially the glance of the practised coquette.

“I don’t sing, I assure you,” said he. “I never sang for anybody—anybody, at least, worth talking about.”

“There’s a confession, now! We shall make something of him, believe me,” murmured Saltasche.

Then they passed to other topics; and at last the signal was given by Lady Brayhead, and the ladies sailed off to the drawing-room.

Diana seated herself on a chair near the door. The room was hot, and her complexion after dinner was not trustworthy. Her cousin, who came in last, looked about, and swooped down on her. These ladies were always most scrupulously polite to each other, though the hatred between them was something that could never be measured.

“Diana, love, your dress is charming; and that blue and salmon is perfect—suits you so well, dear.”

Miss Bursford cast her eyes over her interlocutor’s attire, but finding nothing noteworthy, contented herself with giving a twitch to a flounce. She knew something was coming.

“Who was that young man that took you down to dinner? Did you catch his name? Nice-looking, eh?” and Miss Braginton’s black eyes were fixed on her greedily.

“H’m—I didn’t notice, I’m sure,” replied Diana carelessly, to outward appearance at least. In reality her guard was up. “His name, if you want it particularly, is O’Rooney Hogan; he’s some *protégé* of Mr. Saltasche’s. Tell me, Blanche,—is the O’Gorman Mulcahy here?” And Diana, who well knew he was not, pretended to look round for that personage.

But Blanche was off. She pretended to see a signal from Lady Brayhead’s end of the room, and took her departure speedily.

Some one began to play on a grand piano. The servants carried in tea into the back drawing-room, and the women all abandoned themselves to the state of semi-torpor in which the interval between their departure from the dining-room and the arrival of the men in the drawing-room is usually spent. At last they entered. Miss Blanche seized on Saltasche; her sister secured a military widower.

Saltasche was the least bit sulky. He had been snubbed by his Excellency; and in this wise. He had told a capital anecdote, brand new from the Paris Jockey Club; and it had fallen flat, for the simple reason that his Excellency did not know the *raconteur*, and had chosen to consider it a sort of a liberty for a man with whom he was not acquainted to attempt to amuse him. It was so easy for his Excellency to administer the snub; and it was done in a very common way. He had listened, or had seemed to listen, attentively until the point of the story came, and then, instead of laughing amiably and condescendingly, had thrown back his aristocratic chin in a manner that expressed in a way there was no mistaking his conviction that he had certainly heard that story before, and only needed an effort of memory to recall it. Of course, everybody had politely waited for his Excellency to laugh first, save one *aide de camp*, who exploded prematurely, and then chose to consider that Saltasche had placed him in a false position, and was ill-tempered and aggressive towards him in consequence.

Hogan came in last, and dropped himself, in obedience to a glance from Miss Bursford, into a chair beside her.

The rooms were looking their best now; the guests seemed more at ease; and their tongues, loosened by good cheer, kept up an endless murmur, broken now and again by ripples of well-bred laughter. The wax-lights cast a mellowed, soft light on the faces—none of them too fresh, for the Bragintons stoutly resisted the introduction of girls—of the women, and toned down the rich hues of their dresses. The Lord

Lieutenant, bored to death, was talking of horses with one of his friends on the hearthrug. Mr. Vickars and Mr. Wyldoates, the gentlemen in attendance, stood near the door; the second named, whenever he met Hogan's eye, turning away his head. A small party—the musical clique, who always attract one another—migrated to the piano; and a gentleman, who was said to have owed his appointment in the household to his vocal powers, sat down and sang an Italian buffo song with fine spirit and execution.

“Do you know him?” asked Diana of Hogan. She was a little curious to find out the gentleman's set, and had resorted to the customary device—not by any means in the “best form,” as the slang goes—of putting through him a categorical list of names of people of note.

She was foiled in this; for the barrister, reading her purpose, and being very slightly acquainted with the gentleman alluded to, made answer in the affirmative. In reality, he only knew him professionally.

“What a pretty woman his wife is! Delightful musician; I heard her play the other evening.”

“I am not fond of music at all—have no ear,” he replied. “Moreover, I hold that pretty women have sufficiently fulfilled their duty to society in looking nice. They have no business with accomplishments.”

“You think, then, that only plain women should be allowed to cultivate their minds?”

“Certainly; to me it seems a fearful extravagance for a pretty woman. They have no business being clever. When the true philosopher's millennium arrives, it will be unlawful for any woman possessed of more than a certain number (to be agreed on) of good points, to sing, play, draw, or indulge in any of the current accomplishments of the day.”

“Oh dear! And a good-looking blue-stocking, or a *belle* who dabbles in the 'ologies?”

“I would make such infractions an indictable offence; and I would visit aggravated cases, such as the dead languages or mathematics, with the extreme penalty of the law.”

“Are you serious? I think not,” she said, turning and looking directly at him. The slightly sardonic expression of his eyes and mouth disappeared as he replied.

“I am not serious; and I am too. We are not at all logical or consistent in our method. It is tacitly acknowledged that women who are devoid of mere personal charms are expected to make up for the deficiency by acquired attractions; but if accomplishments, or indeed solid learning (for they seem to take that up now), be a marketable acquisition, why should not all women possess that additional charm?”

“If,” said Miss Bursford with an emphasis: “that is by no means agreed; and for myself I quite disapprove of ladies intruding into men’s sphere. I don’t in the least see how this higher education of women is to help them.” Diana said this with real feeling, for she had tried botany and conchology one summer, but not finding those branches of science any special aid, she had concluded to put off the “*blue stage*” a little longer.

“I don’t see it either,” returned he thoughtfully; “it is not that women in general are in need of higher education; the mistake does not lie so much in the quality or quantity of instruction meted out to women, as in the mode of administering it. It is quite a mistake to suppose that women in general are inferior in point of education to men.”

Miss Bursford set down her coffee-cup and looked at him.

“I really mean what I say,” he went on. “It is notorious, and admitted on all sides, that in the lowest classes, both in the rural districts and in the towns, the women are infinitely beyond the men in intellect.”

“Yes, yes; I have heard that. I quite recollect it. Lord Brayhead says the chief work of the missionaries, and that sort of people who go amongst the lower orders, is accomplished by women, and they are so much easier to work among and instruct than the men.”

“Quite so. And even ascending a step or two in the social scale,—getting up amongst the traders, shopkeepers, farmers,—the women at the present moment are enormously, destructively in advance.

“I really have heard that the women of the Roman Catholic classes in this country are very well educated—play, sing, draw, dance, and all that sort of thing; the nuns, you know, are so nice.”

“They can do more than that,” said Hogan, smiling at a droll reminiscence which came to his mind—that of young Brangan’s blunder in the tea-room at the Raffertys’ ball. “But that’s not the question. I disapprove of the entire separation of the girls and boys; it seems to me so irrational. They are to live together afterwards, and be companions for life;

and how are they to get along? The boys are always herded together when young, and are not subjected to any refining influences. I remember at the college of St. Ignatius there was not even a woman-servant in the house. A little fellow was dying there, and he had to be carried out to lodgings, otherwise his mother could not have been near him—according to the rule she would not be allowed into the infirmary. Then later on we find them living in their clubs, or substitutes for clubs; anywhere, in fact, out of their own houses, and away from the restraints of the female society to which they are so unaccustomed, and which, I am sorry to say, is distasteful to them in most instances.”

“It really looks like it,” she replied; “and in London it is as bad as it can be. My friends there say the labour of collecting men for their entertainments is absolutely dreadful. Men won’t go into society nowadays; you may get them to dinner-parties, but as to balls and that sort of thing, it is impossible. I can’t imagine why.”

Miss Bursford was called upon to sing now, so Hogan found his way over to Mr. Saltasche, who was flirting, out of pure good-nature, as men do sometimes, with Miss Braginton. The lady continued her conversation in a *sotto voce* tone, while her cousin was singing one of the eternal Claribel or Gabriel effusions.

Mr. Saltasche made a little *moue*, as if to impress on her the necessity of keeping silence; but the young lady returned, with a pretty infantile shake of her head,—

“Don’t ask me; pray don’t. I have heard it so *often*—over and over again, I do assure you. The effort would be quite beyond me.”

The two gentlemen smiled in reply. Both of them read clearly the ill-nature that lurked in her words, and both saw in it still more clearly its prompting motive—the desire to please them, and cunningly depreciate a possible rival; and so they smiled amiably in encouragement and appreciation of the manœuvre. Each appropriated the implied flattery to himself: Saltasche by virtue of his large fortune, high standing, and admitted desirability; and the younger man with a keen sense of his new importance and dignity. The evening was indeed a triumph for him. To be admitted to such a house was in itself an inestimable honour. But to be invited, to be held worthy to meet the Viceroy himself, it was almost overwhelming. And then Miss Bursford’s manner was certainly cordial and affable in the extreme. He looked across the room to where she was sitting at the piano, her cousin, Colonel Bursford, turning over the

leaves of her music. The light shone full on her face and figure. "Gone off rather, I should say," thought he, "and decidedly too thin; but what a style and air she has!"

This was true. Diana was looking her best. An artful touch of rice-powder veiled the sallowness of her temples and toned down the sharp outline of her rather high cheek-bones. She was richly dressed; and her hair, plentiful, whether her own or not, was becomingly and softly arranged. Her small hands were white; and the wrists, rather too anatomical for beauty, were judiciously concealed by handsome bracelets. She sang well, but with a hard and unsympathetic, if highly-cultured, voice.

The viceregal party left as early as it was possible for them to get away; and after a short interval the rest of the guests followed suit. Saltasche, who was engaged on a committee which had been formed to get up a concert for a charitable institution—one of the many which he patronized, and which in turn patronized him—remained to the last.

"How very well Lord —— is looking! Never saw him better—never!" He said this to Lord Brayhead, who was staring absently into the fire. People who entertain the Castle set feel usually a sort of proprietary interest in them; so it was with the air of one deeply concerned in the matter that the host made answer.

"I am glad to hear you say so; very glad. Yes, I think he looks very well,—much better, indeed. Quite so."

"Aunt, did you observe her Excy's dress? Oh, so sweet: lemon and strawberry——" This was from the second Braginton.

"And ice-cream," muttered Mr. Saltasche, who was wanting to get off to his cigar.

"And quite new too," said Mrs. Bursford acidly; "a rarity that—"

"No, then, for I heard her say to Lady Guinevère Fraisefeuilles last week that she had been at the great Gore House ball, and that it was so unlucky Lady de Montfort had a dress exactly the same. Both came from Paris." So spoke Miss Blanche, the well-informed.

"Well," interposed Mr. Saltasche, who did not know to what lengths this gossip might be extended by the voluble lady, "I have engaged Mr. Hogan; and now I must have these young ladies' assistance. Oh now! Mr.

Papillon has also promised me; really, ladies I am even going to sing myself. I am—in the chorus.”

It was finally settled that the younger of the Bragintons was to sing in the chorus and Hogan, who was firmly persuaded that it was out of the question he could sing at a Protestant concert, allowed Saltasche to arrange that he was to call at the Bursfords’ house in Merrion Square to see the music proposed, which was in Miss Diana’s keeping. As they went down the stairs, Lord Brayhead held back Saltasche an instant, and murmured in his ear, “I received a telegram this evening. Mr. Wyldoates has gone up to Paris to be under the care of doctors there. No hope of him at all. They speak of gangrene——”

Mr. Saltasche gave utterance to a sort of whistle. “I’d better tell this man, then, and see what he is inclined to do.”

“I leave it in your hands entirely, Mr. Saltasche,” said Lord Brayhead, turning back to the drawing-room.

And they sallied forth. The night was clear and cold, and the stars were brilliant overhead. The street was perfectly quiet and deserted; not a creature to be seen. Saltasche struck a match on his boot-heel, and lighting a cigar, took Hogan’s arm and set out at a brisk pace.

“You mentioned something once, Mr. Hogan, of your intention of trying for a seat in Parliament some of these days.”

“A seat! Hey? Yes!”

“A seat”—puff—“in Parliament; because if you were seriously inclined for it, I might”—puff—“put you up to a good thing.”

Hogan stood stock-still with amazement, and looked at his companion; but the darkness left nothing discernible of Saltasche’s face but his bright cunning eyes, which shone from between his half-closed eyelids almost as brilliantly as the burning tip of the cheroot.

“It is possible before the month is out,” said Saltasche slowly and indistinctly, speaking with his cigar between his teeth, “that a seat will be vacant.”

“Ha! You mean that man who was obliged to resign some time ago, and is at Hyères now for his health?”

“He is not at Hyères now, and his recovery is impossible. So anybody that wants can take the ball on the hop. Hum.”

“Peatstown,” said Hogan. “I know it. I have been there at quarter sessions; precious nest of Nationalists. Nothing but an Ultra will get in there.”

“*Ultra?*” repeated Saltasche, taking the cigar out of his mouth; “Ultramontane, do you mean?”

“Tut; not at all. Very opposite. Ultra Repealer; Ultra Home Ruler. Poor Wyldoates got in through the priests. I recollect it well.”

“Humph!” said Saltasche; “that was before the Ballot. They will get a taste of that novelty now. By Jove, the wind will be taken out of all our sails by that.”

Saltasche stopped under a lamp, and looked at his watch.

“Lord Brayhead is wanting to rim a railway out to Lead Mines. I’ll send you from Hanaper and Die Sele’s some title-deeds to look over. He owns most of the ground to be broken through: but at the same time one must be sure, and have everything in order.”

Hogan murmured his acknowledgments.

“And at the same time, Mr. Hogan—I speak as a friend—now don’t you think you had better consider about Peatstown? No time to be lost. It would cost, I daresay, a thousand pounds.”

“Any prospect of a contest? In that case the Liberals might help to keep the Opposition out of it. Nay? And then you see, sir, it would involve the sacrifice of my professional engagements, in great part. Really it is a risk to a man who has his living to earn; only a barrister in a well-rooted practice can afford the luxury of Parliament. Moreover, Dissolution is only a year and a half or so distant.”

“Nonsense, my dear fellow; the Liberals have an overwhelming majority. They literally have booked the Government of this country for an age to come. God bless me—what can shake them with such a majority? Besides, as a member of Parliament you will have opportunities to compensate for the loss of your time. There are committees: you are the very man for such things; commissions and directorships innumerable. Then, the position, the social advantages!”

Position! Social advantages!! The wily man of the world had well calculated the force of his words, and their effect on his friend. Hogan was, indeed, dazzled by the glittering prospect dangled so skilfully over his head, and was astounded at the wonderful chance thrown in his way.

He had, indeed, entertained visions, very airy and unsubstantial visions, of risking his fate at the approaching Dissolution.

A Dissolution is the best chance for men of his stamp; the chances being that in the general hurly-burly and scramble some small constituency may be overlooked, and either the previous member returned unopposed, or some outsider get in easily by blazoning the particular clap-trap of the hour as his motto. Hogan was on the watch for some such cheap investment for his money. So, indeed, was the Bishop; who, if the outlay were necessary, had determined to give his nephew a helping hand financially.

“I must consider about it,” he said hurriedly. “Mr. Saltasche, I am greatly obliged to you for your kindness. I’ll let you know in a few days.”

“See,” continued Saltasche, “you know Peatstown is Lord Kilboggan’s place; and his family have always influenced the elections there—always controlled them, begad. They’re not resident, of course. They live abroad, on account of the son’s health. Well, the nephew, an elder brother of that A. D. C. Wyldoates, and a finished scamp too, is somewhere round. He is heir, you know, and it is not unlikely he’d try for it. These people,” with a backward gesture of his head signifying the Brayhead family, don’t agree with the Kilboggans; never did. So what I’m coming to is: you should steal a march on them—go down and proclaim your intentions, take your soundings, in short.”

“Can’t do that till the man’s dead, hey? It wouldn’t be decent.”

“Try and make up your mind by Saturday,—this is Wednesday; and come in and tell me your final decision: take care not to, ventilate the thing. Good-night, then.” And Mr. Saltasche mounted a car and drove to the railway.

Hogan strode on across town, ruminating the affair. He did not know what to think of it. It might, after all, be the best chance that ever would present itself to him; and, indeed, how could he hope for a better? Young as he was, he had seen fortunes lost and reputations impaired in the struggle of elections. Everything seemed to combine to favour him. The Kilboggans were in bad odour. Lord Brayhead was to assist. That was certainly an unaccountable combination. He felt sure Saltasche would not be so gracious for nothing; no doubt he would require some indemnification. But, after all, what was he indebted to him for, more than a friendly hint? And it was to be considered, too, that Dissolution was not

more than a year off: if he were not to be re-elected, there would be all the money gone for nothing—a thousand at least. The honour would be dear at that price. And there was also the possibility of failure in the first instance to be considered. If the parish priest were powerful enough to return Mr. Wyldoates, he might be able to “cast” him. In those remote country parishes the priests are omnipotent. There was the Ballot, to be sure. But the Ballot Act was not long in force at the time of which we write; and Hogan, who knew the unscrupulous people whose interests were in direct opposition to and jeopardized by it, had little hope in its potentiality to aid him.

“Night brings counsel,” thought he wearily, as he turned into bed; “and the first thing to do in the morning must be to see the Bishop.”