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CHAPTER I

Three Editors

Let the reader be introduced to Lady Carbury, upon whose character and doings much will depend of whatever interest these pages may have, as she sits at her writing-table in her own room in her own house in Welbeck Street. Lady Carbury spent many hours at her desk, and wrote many letters – wrote also very much beside letters. She spoke of herself in these days as a woman devoted to Literature, always spelling the word with a big L. Something of the nature of her devotion may be learned by the perusal of three letters which on this morning she had written with a quickly running hand. Lady Carbury was rapid in everything, and in nothing more rapid than in the writing of letters. Here is Letter No. 1: –

'*Thursday, Welbeck Street.*

'DEAR FRIEND – I have taken care that you shall have the early sheets of my two new volumes to-morrow, or Saturday at latest, so that you may, if so minded, give a poor struggler like myself a lift in your next week's paper. Do give a poor struggler a lift. You and I have so much in common, and I have ventured to flatter myself that we are really friends! I do not flatter you when I say, that not only would aid from you help me more than from any other quarter, but also that praise from you would gratify my vanity more than any other praise. I almost think you will like my *Criminal Queens*. The sketch of Semiramis[1] is at any rate spirited, though I had to twist it about a little to bring her in guilty. Cleopatra, of course, I have taken from Shakespeare. What a wench she was! I could not quite make Julia[2] a queen; but it was impossible to pass over so piquant a character. You will recognize in the two or three ladies of the empire how faithfully I have studied my Gibbon. Poor dear old Belisarius![3] I have done the best I could with Joanna, but I could not bring myself to care for her. In our days she would simply have gone to Broadmore.[4] I hope you will not think that I have been too strong in my delineations of Henry VIII and his sinful but unfortunate Howard.[5] I don't care a bit about Anne Boleyne. I am afraid that I have been tempted into too great length about the Italian Catherine;[6] but in truth she has been my favourite. What a woman! What a devil! Pity that a second Dante

could not have constructed for her a special hell. How one traces the effect of her training in the life of our Scotch Mary. I trust you will go with me in my view as to the Queen of Scots. Guilty! guilty always! Adultery, murder, treason, and all the rest of it. But recommended to mercy because she was royal. A queen bred, born and married, and with such other queens around her, how could she have escaped to be guilty? Marie Antoinette[7] I have not quite acquitted. It would be uninteresting – perhaps untrue. I have accused her lovingly, and have kissed when I scourged. I trust the British public will not be angry because I do not whitewash Caroline,[8] especially as I go along with them altogether in abusing her husband.

'But I must not take up your time by sending you another book, though it gratifies me to think that I am writing what none but yourself will read. Do it yourself, like a dear man, and, as you are great, be merciful. Or rather, as you are a friend, be loving.

'Yours gratefully and faithfully,

'MATILDA CARBURY.

'After all how few women there are who can raise themselves above the quagmire of what we call love, and make themselves anything but playthings for men. Of almost all these royal and luxurious sinners it was the chief sin that in some phase of their lives they consented to be playthings without being wives. I have striven so hard to be proper; but when girls read everything, why should not an old woman write anything?'

This letter was addressed to Nicholas Broune, Esq., the editor of the *Morning Breakfast Table*,[9] a daily newspaper of high character; and, as it was the longest, so was it considered to be the most important of the three. Mr Broune was a man powerful in his profession – and he was fond of ladies. Lady Carbury in her letter had called herself an old woman, but she was satisfied to do so by a conviction that no one else regarded her in that light. Her age shall be no secret to the reader, though to her most intimate friends, even to Mr Broune, it had never been divulged. She was forty-three, but carried her years so well, and had received such gifts from nature, that it was impossible to deny that she was still a beautiful woman. And she used her beauty not only to increase her influence – as is natural to women who are well-favoured – but also with a well-considered calculation that she could obtain material assistance in the procuring of bread and cheese, which was very necessary to her, by a prudent adaptation to her purposes of the good things with which providence had endowed her. She did not fall in love,

she did not wilfully flirt, she did not commit herself; but she smiled and whispered, and made confidences, and looked out of her own eyes into men's eyes as though there might be some mysterious bond between her and them – if only mysterious circumstances would permit it. But the end of all was to induce some one to do something which would cause a publisher to give her good payment for indifferent writing, or an editor to be lenient when, upon the merits of the case, he should have been severe. Among all her literary friends, Mr Broune was the one in whom she most trusted; and Mr Broune was fond of handsome women. It may be as well to give a short record of a scene which had taken place between Lady Carbury and her friend about a month before the writing of this letter which has been produced. She had wanted him to take a series of papers for the *Morning Breakfast Table*, and to have them paid for at rate No. 1, whereas she suspected that he was rather doubtful as to their merit, and knew that, without special favour, she could not hope for remuneration above rate No. 2, or possibly even No. 3. So she had looked into his eyes, and had left her soft, plump hand for a moment in his. A man in such circumstances is so often awkward, not knowing with any accuracy when to do one thing and when another! Mr Broune, in a moment of enthusiasm, had put his arm round Lady Carbury's waist and had kissed her. To say that Lady Carbury was angry, as most women would be angry if so treated, would be to give an unjust idea of her character. It was a little accident which really carried with it no injury, unless it should be the injury of leading to a rupture between herself and a valuable ally. No feeling of delicacy was shocked. What did it matter? No unpardonable insult had been offered; no harm had been done, if only the dear susceptible old donkey could be made at once to understand that that wasn't the way to go on!

Without a flutter, and without a blush, she escaped from his arm, and then made him an excellent little speech. 'Mr Broune, how foolish, how wrong, how mistaken! Is it not so? Surely you do not wish to put an end to the friendship between us!'

'Put an end to our friendship, Lady Carbury! Oh, certainly not that.'

'Then why risk it by such an act? Think of my son and of my daughter – both grown up. Think of the past troubles of my life – so much suffered and so little deserved. No one knows them so well as you do. Think of my name, that has been so often slandered but never disgraced! Say that you are sorry, and it shall be forgotten.'

When a man has kissed a woman it goes against the grain with him to say the very next moment that he is sorry for what he has done. It is as

much as to declare that the kiss had not answered his expectation. Mr Broune could not do this, and perhaps Lady Carbury did not quite expect it. 'You know that for worlds I would not offend you,' he said. This sufficed. Lady Carbury again looked into his eyes, and a promise was given that the articles should be printed – and with generous remuneration.

When the interview was over Lady Carbury regarded it as having been quite successful. Of course when struggles have to be made and hard work done, there will be little accidents. The lady who uses a street cab must encounter mud and dust which her richer neighbour, who has a private carriage, will escape. She would have preferred not to have been kissed – but what did it matter? With Mr Broune the affair was more serious. 'Confound them all,' he said to himself as he left the house; 'no amount of experience enables a man to know them.' As he went away he almost thought that Lady Carbury had intended him to kiss her again, and he was almost angry with himself in that he had not done so. He had seen her three or four times since, but had not repeated the offence.

We will now go on to the other letters, both of which were addressed to the editors of other newspapers. The second was written to Mr Booker, of the *Literary Chronicle*. Mr Booker was a hard-working professor of literature, by no means without talent, by no means without influence, and by no means without a conscience. But, from the nature of the struggles in which he had been engaged, by compromises which had gradually been driven upon him by the encroachment of brother authors on the one side and by the demands on the other of employers who looked only to their profits, he had fallen into a routine of work in which it was very difficult to be scrupulous, and almost impossible to maintain the delicacies of a literary conscience. He was now a bald-headed old man of sixty, with a large family of daughters, one of whom was a widow dependent on him with two little children. He had five hundred a year for editing the *Literary Chronicle*, which, through his energy, had become a valuable property. He wrote for magazines, and brought out some book of his own almost annually. He kept his head above water, and was regarded by those who knew about him, but did not know him, as a successful man. He always kept up his spirits, and was able in literary circles to show that he could hold his own. But he was driven by the stress of circumstances to take such good things as came in his way, and could hardly afford to be independent. It must be confessed that literary scruple had long departed from his mind. Letter No. 2 was as follows: –

'*Welbeck Street, 25th February, 187–*

'DEAR MR BOOKER – I have told Mr Leadham' – Mr Leadham was senior partner in the enterprising firm of publishers known as Messrs Leadham and Loiter – 'to send you an early copy of my *Criminal Queens*. I have already settled with my friend Mr Broune that I am to do your *New Tale of a Tub* in the *Breakfast Table*. Indeed, I am about it now, and am taking great pains with it. If there is anything you wish to have specially said as to your view of the Protestantism of the time, let me know. I should like you to say a word as to the accuracy of my historical details, which I know you can safely do. Don't put it off, as the sale does so much depend on early notices. I am only getting a royalty, which does not commence till the first four hundred are sold.

'Yours sincerely,
'MATILDA CARBURY.

'ALFRED BOOKER, ESQ.,
'*Literary Chronicle, Office, Strand.*'

There was nothing in this which shocked Mr Booker. He laughed inwardly, with a pleasantly reticent chuckle, as he thought of Lady Carbury dealing with his views of Protestantism – as he thought also of the numerous historical errors into which that clever lady must inevitably fall in writing about matters of which he believed her to know nothing. But he was quite alive to the fact that a favourable notice in the *Breakfast Table* of his very thoughtful work, called the *New Tale of a Tub*, would serve him, even though written by the hand of a female literary charlatan, and he would have no compunction as to repaying the service by fulsome praise in the *Literary Chronicle*. He would not probably say that the book was accurate, but he would be able to declare that it was delightful reading, that the feminine characteristics of the queens had been touched with a masterly hand, and that the work was one which would certainly make its way into all drawing-rooms. He was an adept at this sort of work, and knew well how to review such a book as Lady Carbury's *Criminal Queens*, without bestowing much trouble on the reading. He could almost do it without cutting the book, so that its value for purposes of after sale might not be injured. And yet Mr Booker was an honest man, and had set his face persistently against many literary malpractices. Stretched-out type, insufficient lines, and the French habit of meandering with a few words over an entire page,[10] had been rebuked by him with conscientious strength. He was supposed to be

rather an Aristides[11] among reviewers. But circumstanced as he was he could not oppose himself altogether to the usages of the time. 'Bad; of course it is bad,' he said to a young friend who was working with him on his periodical. 'Who doubts that? How many very bad things are there that we do! But if we were to attempt to reform all our bad ways at once, we should never do any good thing. I am not strong enough to put the world straight, and I doubt if you are.' Such was Mr Booker.

Then there was letter No. 3, to Mr Ferdinand Alf. Mr Alf managed, and, as it was supposed, chiefly owned, the *Evening Pulpit*, which during the last two years had become 'quite a property', as men connected with the press were in the habit of saying. The *Evening Pulpit* was supposed to give daily to its readers all that had been said and done up to two o'clock in the day by all the leading people in the metropolis, and to prophesy with wonderful accuracy what would be the sayings and doings of the twelve following hours. This was effected with an air of wonderful omniscience, and not unfrequently with an ignorance hardly surpassed by its arrogance. But the writing was clever. The facts, if not true, were well invented; the arguments, if not logical, were seductive. The presiding spirit of the paper had the gift, at any rate, of knowing what the people for whom he catered would like to read, and how to get his subjects handled, so that the reading should be pleasant. Mr Booker's *Literary Chronicle* did not presume to entertain any special political opinions. The *Breakfast Table* was decidedly Liberal. The *Evening Pulpit* was much given to politics, but held strictly to the motto which it had assumed: –

Nullius addictus jurare in verba magistri –[12]

and consequently had at all times the invaluable privilege of abusing what was being done, whether by one side or by the other. A newspaper that wishes to make its fortune should never waste its columns and weary its readers by praising anything. Eulogy is invariably dull – a fact that Mr Alf had discovered and had utilized.

Mr Alf had, moreover, discovered another fact. Abuse from those who occasionally praise is considered to be personally offensive, and they who give personal offence will sometimes make the world too hot to hold them. But censure from those who are always finding fault is regarded so much as a matter of course that it ceases to be objectionable. The caricaturist, who draws only caricatures, is held to be justifiable, let him take what liberties he may with a man's face and person. It is his trade, and his business calls upon him to vilify all that he touches. But

were an artist to publish a series of portraits, in which two out of a dozen were made to be hideous, he would certainly make two enemies, if not more. Mr Alf never made enemies, for he praised no one, and, as far as the expression of his newspaper went, was satisfied with nothing.

Personally, Mr Alf was a remarkable man. No one knew whence he came or what he had been. He was supposed to have been born a German Jew; and certain ladies said that they could distinguish in his tongue the slightest possible foreign accent. Nevertheless it was conceded to him that he knew England as only an Englishman can know it. During the last year or two he had 'come up' as the phrase goes, and had come up very thoroughly. He had been black-balled[13] at three or four clubs, but had effected an entrance at two or three others, and had learned a manner of speaking of those which had rejected him calculated to leave on the minds of hearers a conviction that the societies in question were antiquated, imbecile, and moribund. He was never weary of implying that not to know Mr Alf, not to be on good terms with Mr Alf, not to understand that let Mr Alf have been born where he might and how he might, he was always to be recognized as a desirable acquaintance, was to be altogether out in the dark. And that which he so constantly asserted, or implied, men and women around him began at last to believe – and Mr Alf became an acknowledged something in the different worlds of politics, letters, and fashion.

He was a good-looking man, about forty years old, but carrying himself as though he was much younger, spare, below the middle height, with dark brown hair which would have shown a tinge of grey but for the dyer's art, with well-cut features, with a smile constantly on his mouth the pleasantness of which was always belied by the sharp severity of his eyes. He dressed with the utmost simplicity, but also with the utmost care. He was unmarried, had a small house of his own close to Berkeley Square at which he gave remarkable dinner parties, kept four or five hunters in Northamptonshire, and was reputed to earn £6,000 a year out of the *Evening Pulpit*, and to spend about half of that income. He also was intimate after his fashion with Lady Carbury, whose diligence in making and fostering useful friendships had been unwearied. Her letter to Mr Alf was as follows: –

'DEAR MR ALF – Do tell me who wrote the review on Fitzgerald Barker's last poem. Only I know you won't. I remember nothing done so well. I should think the poor wretch will hardly hold his head up again before the autumn. But it was fully deserved. I have no patience with the pretensions of would-be poets who contrive by toadying and

underground influences to get their volumes placed on every drawing-room table. I know no one to whom the world has been so good-natured in this way as to Fitzgerald Barker, but I have heard of no one who has extended the good nature to the length of reading his poetry.

'Is it not singular how some men continue to obtain the reputation of popular authorship without adding a word to the literature of their country worthy of note? It is accomplished by unflagging assiduity in the system of puffing. To puff and to get one's self puffed have become different branches of a new profession. Alas, me! I wish I might find a class open in which lessons could be taken by such a poor tyro as myself. Much as I hate the thing from my very soul, and much as I admire the consistency with which the *Pulpit* has opposed it, I myself am so much in want of support for my own little efforts, and am struggling so hard honestly to make for myself a remunerative career, that I think, were the opportunity offered to me, I should pocket my honour, lay aside the high feeling which tells me that praise should be bought neither by money nor friendship, and descend among the low things, in order that I might one day have the pride of feeling that I had succeeded by my own work in providing for the needs of my children.

'But I have not as yet commenced the descent downwards; and therefore I am still bold enough to tell you that I shall look, not with concern but with a deep interest, to anything which may appear in the *Pulpit* respecting my *Criminal Queens*. I venture to think that the book – though I wrote it myself – has an importance of its own which will secure for it some notice. That my inaccuracy will be laid bare and presumption scourged I do not in the least doubt, but I think your reviewer will be able to certify that the sketches are life-like and the portraits well considered. You will not hear me told, at any rate, that I had better sit at home and darn my stockings, as you said the other day of that poor unfortunate Mrs Effington Stubbs.

'I have not seen you for the last three weeks. I have a few friends every Tuesday evening; – pray come next week or the week following. And pray believe that no amount of editorial or critical severity shall make me receive you otherwise than with a smile.

'Most sincerely yours,
'MATILDA CARBURY.'

Lady Carbury, having finished her third letter, threw herself back in her chair, and for a moment or two closed her eyes, as though about to

rest. But she soon remembered that the activity of her life did not admit of such rest. She therefore seized her pen and began scribbling further notes.

CHAPTER 2

The Carbury Family

Something of herself and condition Lady Carbury has told the reader in the letters given in the former chapter, but more must be added. She has declared she had been cruelly slandered; but she has also shown that she was not a woman whose words about herself could be taken with much confidence. If the reader does not understand so much from her letters to the three editors they have been written in vain. She has been made to say that her object in work was to provide for the needs of her children, and that with that noble purpose before her she was struggling to make for herself a career in literature. Detestably false as had been her letters to the editors, absolutely and abominably foul as was the entire system by which she was endeavouring to achieve success, far away from honour and honesty as she had been carried by her ready subserviency to the dirty things among which she had lately fallen, nevertheless her statements about herself were substantially true. She had been ill-treated. She had been slandered. She was true to her children – especially devoted to one of them – and was ready to work her nails off if by doing so she could advance their interests.

She was the widow of one Sir Patrick Carbury, who many years since had done great things as a soldier in India, and had been thereupon created a baronet. He had married a young wife late in life, and having found out when too late that he had made a mistake, had occasionally spoilt his darling and occasionally ill-used her. In doing each he had done it abundantly. Among Lady Carbury's faults had never been that of even incipient – not even of sentimental infidelity to her husband. When as a very lovely and penniless girl of eighteen she had consented to marry a man of forty-four who had the spending of a large income, she had made up her mind to abandon all hope of that sort of love which poets describe and which young people generally desire to experience. Sir Patrick at the time of his marriage was red-faced, stout,

bald, very choleric, generous in money, suspicious in temper, and intelligent. He knew how to govern men. He could read and understand a book. There was nothing mean about him. He had his attractive qualities. He was a man who might be loved – but he was hardly a man for love. The young Lady Carbury had understood her position and had determined to do her duty. She had resolved before she went to the altar that she would never allow herself to flirt, and she had never flirted. For fifteen years things had gone tolerably well with her – by which it is intended that the reader should understand that they had so gone that she had been able to tolerate them. They had been home in England for three or four years, and then Sir Patrick had returned with some new and higher appointment. For fifteen years, though he had been passionate, imperious, and often cruel, he had never been jealous. A boy and a girl had been born to them, to whom both father and mother had been over indulgent – but the mother, according to her lights, had endeavoured to do her duty by them. But from the commencement of her life she had been educated in deceit, and her married life had seemed to make the practice of deceit necessary to her. Her mother had run away from her father, and she had been tossed to and fro between this and that protector, sometimes being in danger of wanting any one to care for her, till she had been made sharp, incredulous, and untrustworthy by the difficulties of her position. But she was clever, and had picked up an education and good manners amidst the difficulties of her childhood – and had been beautiful to look at. To marry and have the command of money, to do her duty correctly, to live in a big house and be respected, had been her ambition – and during the first fifteen years of her married life she was successful amidst great difficulties. She would smile within five minutes of violent ill-usage. Her husband would even strike her – and the first effort of her mind would be given to conceal the fact from all the world. In latter years he drank too much, and she struggled hard first to prevent the evil, and then to prevent and to hide the ill-effects of the evil. But in doing all this she schemed, and lied, and lived a life of manoeuvres. Then, at last, when she felt that she was no longer quite a young woman, she allowed herself to attempt to form friendships for herself, and among her friends was one of the other sex. If fidelity in a wife be compatible with such friendship, if the married state does not exact from a woman the necessity of debarring herself from all friendly intercourse with any man except her lord, Lady Carbury was not faithless. But Sir Patrick Carbury became jealous, spoke words which even she could not endure, did things which drove

even her beyond the calculations of her prudence – and she left him. But even this she did in so guarded a way that, as to every step she took, she could prove her innocence. Her life at that period is of little moment to our story, except that it is essential that the reader should know in what she had been slandered. For a month or two all hard words had been said against her by her husband's friends, and even by Sir Patrick himself. But gradually the truth was known, and after a year's separation they came again together and she remained the mistress of his house till he died. She brought him home to England, but during the short period left to him of life in his old country he had been a worn-out, dying invalid. But the scandal of her great misfortune had followed her, and some people were never tired of reminding others that in the course of her married life Lady Carbury had run away from her husband, and had been taken back again by the kind-hearted old gentleman.

Sir Patrick had left behind him a moderate fortune, though by no means great wealth. To his son, who was now Sir Felix Carbury, he had left £1,000 a year; and to his widow as much, with a provision that after her death the latter sum should be divided between his son and daughter. It therefore came to pass that the young man, who had already entered the army when his father died, and upon whom devolved no necessity of keeping a house, and who in fact not unfrequently lived in his mother's house, had an income equal to that with which his mother and his sister were obliged to maintain a roof over their heads. Now Lady Carbury, when she was released from her thraldom at the age of forty, had no idea at all of passing her future life amidst the ordinary penances of widowhood. She had hitherto endeavoured to do her duty, knowing that in accepting her position she was bound to take the good and the bad together. She had certainly encountered hitherto much that was bad. To be scolded, watched, beaten, and sworn at by a choleric old man till she was at last driven out of her house by the violence of his ill-usage; to be taken back as a favour with the assurance that her name would for the remainder of her life be unjustly tarnished; to have her flight constantly thrown in her face; and then at last to become for a year or two the nurse of a dying debauchee, was a high price to pay for such good things as she had hitherto enjoyed. Now at length had come to her a period of relaxation – her reward, her freedom, her chance of happiness. She thought much about herself, and resolved on one or two things. The time for love had gone by, and she would have nothing to do with it. Nor would she marry again for convenience. But she would

have friends – real friends; friends who could help her – and whom possibly she might help. She would, too, make some career for herself, so that life might not be without an interest to her. She would live in London, and would become somebody at any rate in some circle. Accident at first rather than choice had thrown her among literary people, but that accident had, during the last two years, been supported and corroborated by the desire which had fallen upon her of earning money. She had known from the first that economy would be necessary to her – not chiefly or perhaps not at all from a feeling that she and her daughter could not live comfortably together on a thousand a year – but on behalf of her son. She wanted no luxury but a house so placed that people might conceive of her that she lived in a proper part of the town. Of her daughter's prudence she was as well convinced as of her own. She could trust Henrietta in everything. But her son, Sir Felix, was not very trustworthy. And yet Sir Felix was the darling of her heart.

At the time of the writing of the three letters, at which our story is supposed to begin, she was driven very hard for money. Sir Felix was then twenty-five, had been in a fashionable regiment for four years, had already sold out,[1] and, to own the truth at once, had altogether wasted the property which his father had left him. So much the mother knew – and knew, therefore, that with her limited income she must maintain not only herself and daughter, but also the baronet. She did not know, however, the amount of the baronet's obligations – nor, indeed, did he, or any one else. A baronet, holding a commission in the Guards, and known to have had a fortune left him by his father, may go very far in getting into debt; and Sir Felix had made full use of all his privileges. His life had been in every way bad. He had become a burden on his mother so heavy – and on his sister also – that their life had become one of unavoidable embarrassments. But not for a moment had either of them ever quarrelled with him. Henrietta had been taught by the conduct of both father and mother that every vice might be forgiven in a man and in a son, though every virtue was expected from a woman, and especially from a daughter. The lesson had come to her so early in life that she had learned it without the feeling of any grievance. She lamented her brother's evil conduct as it affected him, but she pardoned it altogether as it affected herself. That all her interests in life should be made subservient to him was natural to her; and when she found that her little comforts were discontinued, and her moderate expenses curtailed because he, having eaten up all that was his own, was now eating

up also all that was his mother's, she never complained. Henrietta had been taught to think that men in that rank of life in which she had been born always did eat up everything.

The mother's feeling was less noble – or perhaps, it might be better be said, more open to censure. The boy, who had been beautiful as a star, had ever been the cynosure[2] of her eyes, the one thing on which her heart had riveted itself. Even during the career of his folly she had hardly ventured to say a word to him with the purport of stopping him on his road to ruin. In everything she had spoilt him as a boy, and in everything she still spoilt him as a man. She was almost proud of his vices, and had taken delight in hearing of doings which if not vicious of themselves had been ruinous from their extravagance. She had so indulged him that even in her own presence he was never ashamed of his own selfishness or apparently conscious of the injustice which he did to others.

From all this it had come to pass that that dabbling in literature which had been commenced partly perhaps from a sense of pleasure in the work, partly as a passport into society, had been converted into hard work by which money if possible might be earned. So that Lady Carbury when she wrote to her friends, the editors, of her struggles, was speaking the truth. Tidings had reached her of this and the other man's success, and – coming nearer to her still – of this and that other woman's earnings in literature. And it had seemed to her that, within moderate limits, she might give a wide field to her hopes. Why should she not add a thousand a year to her income, so that Felix might again live like a gentleman and marry that heiress who, in Lady Carbury's look-out into the future, was destined to make all things straight! Who was so handsome as her son? Who could make himself more agreeable? Who had more of that audacity which is the chief thing necessary to the winning of heiresses? And then he could make his wife Lady Carbury. If only enough money might be earned to tide over the present evil day, all might be well.

The one most essential obstacle to the chance of success in all this was probably Lady Carbury's conviction that her end was to be obtained not by producing good books, but by inducing certain people to say that her books were good. She did work hard at what she wrote – hard enough at any rate to cover her pages quickly; and was, by nature, a clever woman. She could write after a glib, commonplace, sprightly fashion, and had already acquired the knack of spreading all she knew very thin, so that it might cover a vast surface. She had no ambition to write a good book, but

was painfully anxious to write a book that the critics should say was good. Had Mr Broune, in his closet, told her that her book was absolutely trash, but had undertaken at the same time to have it violently praised in the *Breakfast Table* it may be doubted whether the critic's own opinion would have even wounded her vanity. The woman was false from head to foot, but there was much of good in her, false though she was.

Whether Sir Felix, her son, had become what he was solely by bad training, or whether he had been born bad, who shall say? It is hardly possible that he should not have been better had he been taken away as an infant and subjected to moral training by moral teachers. And yet again it is hardly possible that any training or want of training should have produced a heart so utterly incapable of feeling for others as was his. He could not even feel his own misfortunes unless they touched the outward comforts of the moment. It seemed that he lacked sufficient imagination to realize future misery though the futurity to be considered was divided from the present but by a single month, a single week – but by a single night. He liked to be kindly treated, to be praised and petted, to be well fed and caressed; and they who so treated him were his chosen friends. He had in this the instincts of a horse, not approaching the higher sympathies of a dog. But it cannot be said of him that he had ever loved any one to the extent of denying himself a moment's gratification on that loved one's behalf. His heart was a stone. But he was beautiful to look at, ready-witted, and intelligent. He was very dark, with that soft olive complexion which so generally gives to young men an appearance of aristocratic breeding. His hair, which was never allowed to become long, was nearly black, and was soft and silky without that taint of grease which is so common with silken-headed darlings. His eyes were long, brown in colour, and were made beautiful by the perfect arch of the perfect eyebrow. But perhaps the glory of the face was due more to the finished moulding and fine symmetry of the nose and mouth than to his other features. On his short upper lip he had a moustache as well formed as his eyebrows, but he wore no other beard. The form of his chin too was perfect, but it lacked that sweetness and softness of expression, indicative of softness of heart, which a dimple conveys. He was about five feet nine in height, and was as excellent in figure as in face. It was admitted by men and clamorously asserted by women that no man had ever been more handsome than Felix Carbury, and it was admitted also that he never showed consciousness of his beauty. He had given himself airs on many scores – on the score of his

money, poor fool, while it lasted; on the score of his title; on the score of his army standing till he lost it; and especially on the score of superiority in fashionable intellect. But he had been clever enough to dress himself always with simplicity and to avoid the appearance of thought about his outward man. As yet the little world of his associates had hardly found out how callous were his affections – or rather how devoid he was of affection. His airs and his appearance, joined with some cleverness, had carried him through even the viciousness of his life. In one matter he had marred his name, and by a moment's weakness had injured his character among his friends more than he had done by the folly of three years. There had been a quarrel between him and a brother officer, in which he had been the aggressor; and, when the moment came in which a man's heart should have produced manly conduct, he had first threatened and had then shown the white feather.[3] That was now a year since, and he had partly outlived the evil – but some men still remember that Felix Carbury had been cowed, and had cowered.

It was now his business to marry an heiress. He was well aware that it was so, and was quite prepared to face his destiny. But he lacked something in the art of making love. He was beautiful, had the manners of a gentleman, could talk well, lacked nothing of audacity, and had no feeling of repugnance at declaring a passion which he did not feel. But he knew so little of the passion, that he could hardly make even a young girl believe that he felt it. When he talked of love, he not only thought that he was talking nonsense, but showed that he thought so. From this fault he had already failed with one young lady reputed to have £40,000, who had refused him because, as she naïvely said, she knew 'he did not really care'. 'How can I show that I care more than by wishing to make you my wife?' he had asked. 'I don't know that you can, but all the same you don't care,' she said. And so that young lady escaped the pit-fall. Now there was another young lady, to whom the reader shall be introduced in time, whom Sir Felix was instigated to pursue with unremitting diligence. Her wealth was not defined, as had been the £40,000 of her predecessor, but was known to be very much greater than that. It was, indeed, generally supposed to be fathomless, bottomless, endless. It was said that in regard to money for ordinary expenditure, money for houses, servants, horses, jewels, and the like, one sum was the same as another to the father of this young lady. He had great concerns; – concerns so great that the payment of ten or twenty thousand pounds upon any trifle was the same thing to him – as to men who are comfortable in their circumstances it matters

little whether they pay sixpence or ninepence for their mutton chops. Such a man may be ruined at any time; but there was no doubt that to any one marrying his daughter during the present season of his outrageous prosperity he could give a very large fortune indeed. Lady Carbury, who had known the rock on which her son had been once wrecked, was very anxious that Sir Felix should at once make a proper use of the intimacy which he had effected in the house of this topping Croesus[4] of the day.

And now there must be a few words said about Henrietta Carbury. Of course she was of infinitely less importance than her brother, who was a baronet, the head of that branch of the Carburys, and her mother's darling; and, therefore, a few words should suffice. She also was very lovely, being like her brother; but somewhat less dark and with features less absolutely regular. But she had in her countenance a full measure of that sweetness of expression which seems to imply that consideration of self is subordinated to consideration for others. This sweetness was altogether lacking to her brother. And her face was a true index of her character. Again, who shall say why brother and sister had become so opposite to each other; whether they would have been thus different had both been taken away as infants from their father's and mother's training, or whether the girl's virtues were owing altogether to the lower place which she had held in her parents' heart. She, at any rate, had not been spoilt by a title, by the command of money, and by the temptations of too early acquaintance with the world. At the present time she was barely twenty-one years old, and had not seen much of London society. Her mother did not frequent balls, and during the last two years there had grown upon them a necessity for economy which was inimical to many gloves and costly dresses. Sir Felix went out of course, but Hetta Carbury spent most of her time at home with her mother in Welbeck Street. Occasionally the world saw her, and when the world did see her the world declared that she was a charming girl. The world was so far right.

But for Henrietta Carbury the romance of life had already commenced in real earnest. There was another branch of the Carburys, the head branch, which was now represented by one Roger Carbury, of Carbury Hall. Roger Carbury was a gentleman of whom much will have to be said, but here, at this moment, it need only be told that he was passionately in love with his cousin Henrietta. He was, however, nearly forty years old, and there was one Paul Montague whom Henrietta had seen.