

**DULCIE
CARLYON**

A Novel

VOL. I

**BY
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DULCIE CARLYON.

CHAPTER I. IN THE HOWE OF THE MEARNS.

'This will end in a scene, Fettercairn, and you know how I hate scenes.'

'So do I, they are such deuced bad form.'

'I shall need all my self-possession to get over the *esclandre* this affair may cause,' exclaimed the lady, fanning herself violently.

'Well, life is made up of getting over things,' responded her husband.

'But not things so disgraceful as this, Fettercairn!'

'Is this son of yours in his senses?'

'Who is that loves? it has been asked,' said the culprit referred to.

'A marriage between you and a penniless girl in her rank of life is not to be thought of, Lennard.'

'Her rank of life, father?'

'Yes!'

'Her father's rank was superior to that of the first of our family, when life began with him.'

'What is that to you or to me now?'

'Much to me.'

'Too much, it would seem.'

The excited speakers were a Peer, Cosmo, Lord Fettercairn, his wife, the Lady thereof, and their youngest son, Lennard Melfort, a captain of the line, home on leave from India, who had been somewhat timidly venturing to break—knowing the inordinate family vanity of his parents—we say to break the news of his love for a girl possessed of more beauty than this world's goods; and, in his excitement and indignation, his lordship's usual easy, indolent, and drawling way was forgotten now when addressing his son.

Cosmo, Lord Fettercairn of that Ilk (and Strathfinella in the Mearns) was by nature a proud, cold, selfish, and calculating man, whose chief passion in life was a combined spirit of enormous vanity and acquisitiveness, which he inherited from his predecessors, whom he resembled in political caution and selfishness, and also in personal appearance, to judge from the portraits of three generations, by Sir John de Medina, Aikman, and Raeburn, adorning the walls of the stately room in the house of Craigengowan, where this rather stormy interview took place.

Tall and thin in figure, with flat square shoulders and sandy-coloured hair, cold grey eyes, and irregular features, he was altogether a contrast to his son Lennard, who inherited his slightly aquiline nose and perfect face from his mother, but his firm dark eyes and rich brown hair from a previous generation; and these, together with an olive complexion, rendered more dusky by five years' exposure to an Indian sun, made his aspect a very striking one.

My Lady Fettercairn's birth and breeding were, as Sir Bernard Burke had recorded, irrefragable, and she certainly seemed a

grande dame to the tips of her long slender fingers. She was about forty-five years of age, but looked ten younger. The upper part of her aristocratic face was strikingly handsome; but the lower, with its proud and firm lips, was less pleasant to look at. Her complexion was almost colourless, her hair of the lightest brown, like her eyebrows and lashes; while her eyes were clear and blue as an Alpine sky, and, as Lennard often thought with a sigh, they seemed quite as—cold.

Her manner was always calm, assured, and self-possessed. She would smile, but that smile never degenerated into honest laughter, while her pale and impressive face was without a line—especially on her forehead—that seemed to indicate either thought or reflection, and certainly she had never known care or sorrow or even annoyance until now.

'She is beautiful, mother,' urged the young man, breaking an ominous silence, with reference to the object of his love.

'Perhaps; but she is not one of us,' exclaimed Lady Fettercairn, cresting up her handsome head haughtily, and a whole volume of intense pride and hauteur was centred in the last word she spoke.

'Who is this Flora MacIan, as she calls herself?' asked his father in a similar tone; 'but I need not ask. You have already told us she is the governess in a house you have been recently visiting—that of Lady Drumshoddy—a governess, with all her beauty, poor and obscure.'

'Not so obscure,' said Lennard, a wave of red passing under the tan of his olive cheek; 'her father was a gallant old officer of the Ross-shire Buffs, who earned his V.C. at the battle of Khooshab, in Persia, and her only brother and support fell when leading on his

Grenadiers at the storming of Lucknow. The old captain was, as his name imports, a cadet of the Macdonalds of Glencoe.'

'With a pedigree of his family, no doubt, from the grounding of the Ark to the battle of Culloden,' sneered his father.

'Then his family would end soon after ours began,' retorted the son, becoming greatly ruffled now. 'You know, father, we can't count much beyond three generations ourselves.'

Lord Fettercairn, wounded thus in his sorest point, grew white with anger.

'We always suspected you of having some secret, Lennard,' said his mother severely.

'Ah, mother, unfortunately, as some one says, a secret is like a hole in your coat—the more you try to hide it, the more it is seen.'

'An aphorism, and consequently vulgar; does *she* teach you this style of thing?' asked the haughty lady, while Lennard reddened again with annoyance, and gave his dark moustache a vicious twist, but sighed and strove to keep his temper.

'I have found and felt it very bitter, father, to live under false colours,' said he gently and appealingly, 'and to keep that a secret from you both, which should be no secret at all.'

'We would rather not have heard this secret,' replied Lord Fettercairn sternly, while tugging at his sandy-coloured mutton-chop whiskers.

'Then would you have preferred that I should be deceitful to you, and false to the dear girl who loves and trusts me?'

'I do not choose to consider *her*,' was the cold reply.

'But I do, and must, now!'

'Why?'

'Because we are already married—she is my wife,' was the steady response.

'Married!' exclaimed his father and mother with one accord, as they started from their chairs together, and another ominous silence of a minute ensued.

'My poor, lost boy—the prey of an artful minx!' said Lady Fettercairn, looking as if she would like to weep; but tears were rather strangers to her cold blue eyes.

'Mother, dear mother, if you only knew her, you would not talk thus of Flora,' urged Lennard almost piteously. 'If we had it in our power to give love and to withhold it, easy indeed would our progress be through life.'

'Love—nonsense!'

'Save to the two most interested, who are judges of it,' said Lennard. 'Surely you loved my father, and he you.'

'Our case was very different,' replied Lady Fettercairn, in her anger actually forgetting herself so far as to bite feathers off her fan with her firm white teeth.

'How, mother dear?'

'In rank and wealth we were equal.'

Lennard sighed, and said:

'I little thought that you, who loved me so, would prove all but one of the mothers of Society.'

'What do you mean, sir?' demanded his father.

'What a writer says.'

'And what the devil does he say?'

'That "love seems such a poor and contemptible thing in their eyes in comparison with settlements. Perhaps they forget their own youth; one does, they say, when he outlives romance. And I suppose bread and butter is better than poetry any day."'

'I should think so.'

'We had other and brilliant views for you,' said his mother in a tone of intense mortification, 'but now——'

'Leave us and begone, and let us look upon your face no more,' interrupted his father in a voice of indescribable sternness, almost hoarse with passion, as he pointed to the door.

'Mother!' said Lennard appealingly, 'oh, mother!' But she averted her face, cold as a woman of ice, and said, 'Go!'

'So be it,' replied Lennard, gravely and sadly, as he drew himself up to the full height of his five feet ten inches, and a handsome and comely fellow he looked as he turned away and left the room.

'Thank God, his elder brother, Cosmo, is yet left to us!' exclaimed Lady Fettercairn earnestly.

It was the last time in this life he ever heard his mother's voice, and he quitted the house. On the terrace without, carefully he knocked the ashes out of his cherished briar-root, put it with equal care into its velvet-lined case, put the case into his pocket, and walked slowly off with a grim and resolute expression in his fine young face, upon which from that day forth his father and mother never looked again.

Then he was thinking chiefly of the sweet face of the young girl who had united her fortunes with his, and who was anxiously awaiting the result of the interview we have described.

Sorrow, mortification, and no small indignation were in the heart of Lennard Melfort at the result of the late interview.

'I have been rash,' he thought, 'in marrying poor Flora without their permission, but that they would never have accorded, even had they seen her; and none fairer or more beautiful ever came as a bride to Craigengowan.'

Pausing, he gave a long and farewell look at the house so named—the home of his boyhood.

It stands at some distance from the Valley of the Dee (which forms the natural communication between the central Highlands and the fertile Lowlands) in the Hollow or Howe of the Mearns. Situated amid luxuriant woods, glimpses of Craigengowan obtained from the highway only excite curiosity without gratifying it, but a nearer approach reveals its picturesque architectural features.

These are the elements common to most northern mansions that are built in the old Scottish style—a multitude of conical

turrets, steep crowstepped gables and dormer gablets, encrusted with the monograms and armorial bearings of the race who were its lords when the family of Fettercairn were hewers of wood and drawers of water.

The turrets rise into kindred forms in the towers and gables, and are the gradual accumulation of additions made at various times on the original old square tower, rather than a part of the original design, but the effect of the whole is extremely rich and picturesque.

In the old Scottish garden was an ancient sun and moon dial, mossy and grey, by which many a lover had reckoned the time in the days of other years.

Of old, Craigengowan belonged to an exiled and attainted Jacobite family, from whom it passed readily enough into the hands of the second Lord Fettercairn, a greedy and unscrupulous Commissioner on the forfeited estates of the unfortunate loyalists. It had now many modern comforts and appliances; the entrance-hall was a marble-paved apartment, off which the principal sitting-rooms opened, and now a handsome staircase led to the upper chambers, whilom the abode of barons who ate the beef and mutton their neighbours fed in the valley of the Dee.

The grounds were extensive and beautiful, and Lord Fettercairn's flower gardens and conservatories were renowned throughout Angus and the Mearns.

To the bitter storm that existed in his own breast, and that which he had left in those of his parents, how peaceful by contrast looked the old house and the summer scenery to Lennard—the place on which he probably would never gaze again.

There was a breeze that rustled the green leaves in the thickets, but no wind. Beautiful and soft white clouds floated lazily in the deep blue sky, and a recent shower had freshened up every tree, meadow, and hedgerow. The full-eared wheat grew red or golden by the banks of the Bervie, and the voice of the cushat dove came from the autumn woods from time to time as with a sigh Lennard Melfort turned his back on Craigengowan for ever, cursing, as he went, the pride of his family, for, though not an old one, by title or territory, they were as proud as they were unscrupulous in politics.

The first prominent member of the family, Lennard Melfort, had been a Commissioner for the Mearns in the Scottish Parliament, and for political services had been raised to the peerage by Queen Anne as Lord Fettercairn and Strathfinella, and was famous for nothing but selling his Union vote for the same sum as my Lord Abercairn, £500, and for having afterwards 'a rug at the compensation,' as the English equivalent money was called. After the battle of Sheriffmuir saw half the old peerages of Scotland attained, he obtained Craigengowan, and was one 'who,' as the minister of Inverbervie said, 'wad sell his soul to the deil for a crackit saxpence.'

With the ex-Commissioner the talent—such as it was—of the race ended, and for three generations the Lords of Fettercairn had been neither better nor worse than peers of Scotland generally; that is, they were totally oblivious of the political interests of that country, and of everything but their own self-aggrandisement by marriage or otherwise.

Lennard Melfort seemed the first of the family that proved untrue to its old instincts.

'And I had made up my mind that he should marry Lady Drumshoddy's daughter—she has a splendid fortune!' wailed Lady Fettercairn.

'Married my governess—the girl MacIan!' snorted my Lady Drumshoddy when she heard of the dreadful *mésalliance*. 'Why marry the creature? He might love her, of course—all men are alike weak—but to marry her—oh, no!'

And my Lady Drumshoddy was a very moral woman according to her standard, and carried her head very high.

When tidings were bruited abroad of what happened, and the split in the family circle at Craigenowan, there were equal sorrow and indignation expressed in the servants' hall, the gamekeepers' lodges, and the home farm, for joyous and boyish Captain Melfort was a favourite with all on the Fettercairn estates; and Mrs. Prim, his mother's maid, actually shed many tears over the untoward fate he had brought upon himself.

CHAPTER II. WEDDED.

'And you will love me still, Flora, in spite of this bitter affront to which you are subjected for my sake?' said Lennard.

'Yes,' said the girl passionately, 'I love you, Lennard—love you so much,' she added, while her soft voice broke and her blossom-like lips quivered, 'that were I to lose you I would die!'

'My darling, you cannot lose me now,' he responded, while tenderly caressing her.

'Are we foolish to talk in this fashion, Lennard?'

'Foolish?'

'Yes—or rash. I have heard that it is not lucky for people to love each other so much as we do.'

'Could we love each other less?'

'I don't think so,' said she simply and sweetly, as he laid her cheek on his breast with her upturned eyes gazing into his.

The girl was slight and slender, yet perfect was every curve of her shapely figure, which was destitute of any straight line; even her nose was, in the slightest degree, aquiline. Her beautifully arched mouth, the scarlet line of her upper lip, and the full round of the nether one were parted in a tender smile, just enough to show her teeth, defied all criticism; her complexion was pure and soft, and her eyes were of the most liquid hazel, with almost black

lashes. Her hair was of the same tint, and Flora seemed a lady to perfection, especially by the whiteness and delicacy of her beautifully shaped little hands.

When she walked she did so gracefully, as all Highland women do, and like them held her head poised on her slender neck so airily and prettily that her nurse, Madelon, called her 'the swan.'

'How I trembled, Lennard,' said she, after a pause, 'as I thought of the *mauvais quart d'heure* you were undergoing at Craigengowan.'

'It was a *mauvais* hour and more, darling.'

'And ever and anon I felt that strange chill, or shudder, which Nurse Madelon says people feel when some one crosses the place where their grave is to be. How can your parents be so cruel to you?'

'And to you, Flora!'

'Ah, that is different,' she replied, with her eyes full of unshed tears, and in a pained voice. 'Doubtless they consider me a very designing girl; but in spite of that, you will always care for me as much as you do now?'

'Why such fears? Ever and always—ever and always, my darling,' said Lennard Melfort, stopping her questioning lips most effectually for a time.

'Oh, if you should ever come to regret, and with regret to love me less!' said she, in a low voice, with her eyes for a moment fixed on vacancy.

'Why that boding thought, Flora?'

'Because, surely, such great love never lasts.'

He kissed her again as the readiest response.

But the sequel proved that his great love outlasted her own life, poor girl!

Then they sat long silent, hand locked in hand, while the gloaming deepened round them, for words seem poor and feeble when the heart is very full.

'How long will they continue to despise me?' said Flora suddenly, while across her soft cheeks there rushed the hot blood of a long and gallant line of Celtic ancestors.

An exclamation of bitterness—almost impatience, escaped Lennard.

'Let us forget them—father, mother, all!' said he.

The girl looked passionately into the face of her lover-husband—the husband of a month; and never did her bright hazel eyes seem more tender and soft than now, with all the fire of love and pride sparkling in their depths, for her Highland spirit and nature revolted at the affront to which she was subjected.

The bearing of Lennard Melfort and the poise of his close-shorn head told that he was a soldier, and a well-drilled one; and the style of his light grey suit showed how thoroughly he was a gentleman; and to Flora's loving and partial eye he was every-way a model man.

They had been married just a month, we have said, a month that very day, and Lennard had brought his bride to the little burgh town, within a short distance of Craigengowan, and left her in their

apartments while he sought with his father and mother the bootless interview just narrated.

For three days before he had the courage to bring it about, they had spent the time together, full of hopeful thoughts, strolling along the banks of the pretty Bervie, from the blue current of which ever and anon the bull-trout and the salmon rise to the flies; or in the deep and leafy recesses of the adjacent woods, and climbing the rugged coast, against which the waves of the German Sea were rolling in golden foam; or ascending Craig David, so called from David II. of Scotland—a landmark from the sea for fifteen leagues—for both had a true and warm appreciation and artistic love of Nature in all her moods and aspects.

The sounds of autumn were about them now; the hum of insects and the song of the few birds that yet sang; the fragrance of the golden broom and the sweet briar, with a score of other sweet and indefinable scents and balmy breaths. All around them was scenic beauty and peace, and yet with all their great love for each other, their hearts were heavy at the prospect of their future, which must be a life of banishment in India, and to the heaviness of Lennard was added indignation and sorrow. But he could scarcely accuse himself of having acted rashly in the matter of his marriage, for to that his family would never have consented; and he often thought could his mother but see Flora in her beauty and brightness, looking so charming in her smart sealskin and bewitching cap and feather, and long skirt of golden-brown silk that matched her hair and eyes—every way a most piquante-looking girl!

Young though he was, and though a second son, Lennard Melfort had been a favourite with more than one Belgravian belle and her mamma, and there were few who had not something

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