SONS AND DAUGHTERS

A NOVEL

BY

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Table of Contents

CHAPTER I.
CHAPTER II.
CHAPTER III.
CHAPTER IV.
CHAPTER V.
CHAPTER VI.
CHAPTER VII.
CHAPTER VIII.
CHAPTER IX.
CHAPTER X.

SONS AND DAUGHTERS.

CHAPTER I.

"THEN you will not take the share in the business which I have offered you?"

"No, I think not, sir. I don't like it. I don't like the way in which it is worked. It would be entirely out of accordance with all my training."

"So much the worse for your training—and for you," said Mr Burton, hastily.

"Well, sir, perhaps so. I feel it's ungenerous to say that the training was your own choice, not mine. I think it, of course, the best training in the world."

"So it is—so it was when I selected it for you. There's no harm in the training. Few boys come out of it with your ridiculous prejudices against their bread and butter. It's not the training, it's you—that are a fool, Gervase."

"Perhaps so, sir," said the young man with great gravity. "I can offer no opinion on that subject."

The father and son were seated together in a well-furnished library in a large house in Harley Street—not fashionable, but extremely comfortable, spacious, expensive, and dignified. It was a library in the truest sense of the word, and not merely the "gentleman's room" in which the male portion of a family takes refuge. There was an excellent collection of books on the shelves that lined the walls, a few good pictures, a bust or two placed high on the tops of the bookcases. It bore signs, besides, of constant

occupation, and of being, in short, the room in which its present occupants lived—which was the fact. They were all their family. Mrs Burton had died years before, and her husband had after her death lived only for his boy and—his business. The latter devotion kept everything that was sentimental out of the former. He was very kind and indulgent to Gervase, and gave him the ideal English education—the education of an English gentleman: five or six years at Eton, three or four at Oxford. He intended to do, and did, his son "every justice." Expense had never been spared in any way. Though he did not himself care for shooting, he had taken a moor in the Highlands for several successive seasons, in order that his boy should be familiar with that habit of the higher classes. Though he hated travelling, he had gone abroad for the same purpose. Gervase had never been stinted in anything: he had a good allowance, rooms handsomely furnished, horses at his disposal, everything that heart could desire. And he on his part had done all that could be desired or expected from a young man. If he had not electrified his tutors and masters, he had not disappointed them. He had done very well all round. His father had no reason to be otherwise than proud of his son. Both at school and college he had done well; he had got into no scrapes. He had even acquired a little distinction; not much, not enough to spoil him either for business or society—yet something, enough to enable people to say, "He did very well at Oxford." And he had made some good friends, which perhaps was what his father prized most. One or two scions of noble houses came to Harley Street to see him; he had invitations from a few fine people for their country houses, and ladies of note who had a number of daughters were disposed to smile upon the merchant's son. All these things pleased Mr Burton much, and he had been quite willing to assent to his son's wish that he should end and complete his experiences by a visit to America,

before beginning the work which had always been his final destination. He had now just returned from that expedition, and it had been intended that he should step at once into his place in the business—that business which was as good as, nay, much better than, an estate. Up to this time the young man had made no objection to the plan, which he was perfectly acquainted with. So far as his father knew, he was as well disposed towards that plan as Mr Burton himself, and looked forward to it with as much satisfaction. It may therefore be supposed that it was with no small consternation, with displeasure, disappointment, and indignation, one greater than the other, that the father had sat and listened to the sudden and astounding protest of the son. Not go into the business! It was to Mr Burton as if a man had refused to go to heaven; indeed it was less reasonable by far: for though going to heaven is supposed to be the height of everybody's desire, even the most pious of clergymen has been known to say "God forbid!" when he has been warned that he stands on the brink of another world. One would wish generally to postpone that highest of consummations; but to refuse to go into the business was a thing incredible. Mr Burton had raged and stormed, but afterwards he had been brought into partial calm through the evident impossibility of treating his son in any other way. To scold Gervase was practically impossible. To treat him like a child or a fool was a thing that could not be done. His own composure naturally affected all who had to do with him, and his father among the rest. That passionate speaking or abuse, or violence of any kind, should fall dumb before his easy and immovable quiet, was inevitable. He had waited till the outburst was over, and then he had gone on.

"And what else then, if not in my office, do you mean to do?" Mr Burton now said.

“I suppose, sir,” said Gervase, “I am right in believing, as everybody does, that you are a rich man?”

“Well; and what then?” said the merchant, with a wave of his hand.

“And I am your only child.”

“Of that, at least, there can be no doubt. But I repeat, what then?”

“I may be wrong,” said Gervase, ingenuously, “but at least everybody says—that every means of making an income is pursued by crowds of people, more than can ever hope to make an income by it. I may not state the facts so clearly as I wish.”

“There are more men wanting work than there is work to give them. I suppose that’s what you mean.”

“Far better said than I could say it. In that case, my dear father,” said Gervase, with a look of imperturbable reason and candour, “why should I, who have no need to work and no desire for it, help to crowd the already overcrowded field?”

Mr Burton gave a start like an excited horse, and evidently had to make an effort to restrain the corresponding burst of utterance. But the conviction that these impatient outbursts did more harm than good restrained him. He said with simulated calm—

“I am not aware that there is any crowd—at my gates, to force an entrance into *my* business—to the place which I have naturally reserved for my son.”

“My dear father,” Gervase repeated, with an almost caressing frankness and appeal to his superior judgment, “there are hundreds

who could do it much better than your son. There is Wickham's son——"

"Try not to drive me beyond the bounds of patience," cried the merchant, with suppressed excitement. "Wickham's son—my old clerk——"

"Who has served you most faithfully for years. And Charlie Wickham is worth twenty of me—in all that concerns business——"

"That's not saying very much," cried Mr Burton, with a snort of rage.

"I am sorry you should say that, sir—for, of course, it shows that you thought I would be a mere cipher in the business; whereas I am sure Charlie——"

"Look here, Gervase," cried his father. "Let's understand each other. You are free to come in and prepare yourself to take my place, which would be the course of nature; but if you don't think fit to do this, I have no desire for your advice. I don't believe in your advice. Keep your suggestions to yourself. As for your Wickhams—— If I bring in anybody in your place, I'll bring in new blood. I'll bring in more money. I'll——" He felt himself getting hot and excited—and the calm and slightly wondering countenance of his son, although seen through a mist of irritation, and apt to send any man dancing with fury, yet held him in as with a bridle, so strong was the superiority of the calm to the excitement. "Try not to drive me beyond the bounds of patience," he said.

"Well, sir?" replied Gervase, spreading out his hands and slightly elevating his shoulders. The gesture was French, which

irritated Mr Burton more and more: but he said nothing further; and it was not till he had taken up the ‘St James’s Gazette’ which lay on the table, and read through two of those soothing articles on nothing particular with which that journal abounds, and which the merchant in his anger read from beginning to end without the slightest idea what they were about, that he allowed himself to speak again. He was then preternaturally tranquil, with a quietude like that of an anchorite in his voice.

“I suppose,” he said, “that you have taken everything into account in making this decision—Miss Thursley, for instance—and given up all idea of marriage, or anything of that kind?”

Gervase’s quiet looks became slightly disturbed. He looked up with a certain eagerness. “Given up?——” he said.

“Of course,” said Mr Burton, delighted to have got the mastery, “you can’t marry—a girl accustomed to every luxury—on your boy’s allowance. Five hundred a-year is not much—it might do for her pin-money, with a little perhaps to the good for your button-holes. But what you would live upon, in the more serious sense of the words, I don’t know.”

The young man’s composure had completely disappeared during this speech. Astonishment, irritation, and dismay came into his face. He did not seem able, however, to believe what was said to him. “I thought—that you were in every way pleased with—the connection,” he said.

“Certainly I am—a better business connection could not be, for a young man seriously entering into commercial life. A *dilettante* is a different pair of shoes——”

"A *dilettante*—I don't object to the name," said Gervase, with a faint smile.

"Madeline is a *dilettante* too. She has some money of her own. And I feel sure she would agree with me."

"In setting her father at defiance, and marrying upon nothing——?"

"Father," said Gervase, distressed, "I had no intention of setting you at defiance. I have certain opinions—of my own—which are new. Business—is not congenial to me. Some of its methods seem—— But I need not explain. I never meant, however, to set you at defiance. I thought that in myself I—had some claims upon you apart from the business——"

"What claims? I am the author of your being, as the old books say, and I've responded to that claim by giving you everything that a king's son could have had. You have been just as well off as the Prince of Wales. What more do you want? I think my claims are better founded than yours. It is I who have a right to something in return, not you."

Gervase's countenance was a sight to see; it changed altogether from the calm certainty of superior right which had been in it. The first astonishment did not pass away, but other sentiments came in. Doubt—slow conviction that there was something in what his father said—a strong feeling, nevertheless, that it was impossible he could himself be altogether in the wrong. All these warring sentiments rose upon the clear and calm conviction of his earlier state, and blurred that spotless firmament. He drew a long breath.

"It is quite true," he said—"quite true all you say. You have given me everything—and I—have had nothing to give in return. Still——" All nature was in that word—all the certainty of youth that it has a claim never to be ignored—that its mere existence is response enough; and all the traditions of family custom, which make the wellbeing of the child the first object of the father; and the unconscious assumption which every child instinctively makes, that, after all, its predecessors are passing away, and itself the permanent interest—an assumption which it is quite possible to hold along with the most anxious and affectionate care for these predecessors, and desire to retain them in life and enjoyment. All these things were in Gervase's mind, and quite naturally so. The difficulty was, perhaps, that these old-world relations are scarcely compatible with the calm and highly reasonable level of equality on which the young man of the period conceives it possible to treat with his father, claiming a boundless right of independent judgment, and the serene satisfaction of taking a higher view, and being absolutely in the right whoever may be wrong. Gervase fell a little from that: his reason being appealed to, could not refuse to allow that there was a great deal in what Mr Burton said. Still, when all was done, was not the boy aware that he was his father's pride—that it was he alone who could continue and renew his father's house and reputation, and satisfy that desire of continuance which is in almost every mind? And this was an impression which it was impossible to resist, which was the very voice of nature. "Still——" Gervase looked up almost wistfully into his father's face. Strong as that feeling was, it was one that required a grant, an admission, on the other side: it could not be put forth with calm assurance, as he made his other propositions, in full certainty of reason as between man and man.

“I know what you mean,” said Mr Burton, with that sense of power that makes a man often brutal in the distinctness of both words and deeds. “You think, because you are my son, and perhaps a finer fellow than I ever was, that I’m bound to provide for all your caprices. Not at all. That’s not in the bond. It’s conceded by civilisation that a man should bring up his son according to his position, and help him to make the best of himself; but no more. Man to man, you’ve had all you had any right to from me, Gervase. You’ve too much good sense not to see that. I offer you a way of doing for yourself, and you reject it. Well—you’re a man, you say, and have a right to your choice. I don’t deny your right; but you can’t exercise that and have me to fall back upon too.”

There was a pause. Mr Burton leant back in his chair with a mind satisfied, even triumphant. Either he had convinced his son, who would return to a consideration of the business part of the question with very different feelings; or else he had shaken off (decently, affectionately, kindly, but still shaken off) those claims which Gervase had made so undoubtingly, as if his father was bound to accept all his vagaries. In either way the position was very different from that of an hour ago, when the father had not even been able to let off the rage that possessed him, for fear of the calm and philosophic countenance, unsympathetic, and disapproving of any such vulgar outbursts, which Gervase had turned upon him. The young man’s troubled face was balm to his father’s soul.

CHAPTER II.

THE Thursleys lived only a little way off, at the other end of Harley Street, in another large, spacious, old-fashioned, luxurious house, where a great deal of money was spent without very much show for it, and the best dinners, wines, beds, and conveniences of all sorts, that could be had for money, were to be found. The difference between the two houses was not very great—not nearly so great as might be found between two houses in Mayfair or Belgravia (though, thanks to Liberty, and Burnet, and a few other æsthetic tradespeople, the difference between even the most artistic houses is much less than formerly). But the merchant style has a kind of distinction of its own. Both the Burtons and the Thursleys had large furniture, big side-boards, chiffoniers, sofas on which a family could have been put to bed, tables of a substantial size, easy-chairs which would comfortably engulf the largest mercantile gentleman. The houses had a certain masculine air altogether, as if the head of the establishment had ordered everything without consideration of any such ephemeral matter as a woman's tastes—which indeed was what had been done. They had given the order to their upholsterers largely, strongly, with no sparing of expense. The new improvements that had crept in since, had been in the way of spring-mattresses instead of the old economy of feather-beds, which was an improvement that did not show; but otherwise the old Turkey carpets, the heavy curtains, the big pieces of furniture, had not been changed, at least in fashion, for thirty years. There was one difference, however, between the Burton house and that of the Thursleys. The former centred in the library, which was a sign that there were no ladies in the house—the latter in the drawing-

room; and it was there that Gervase, entering about an hour later, found his Madeline, who had opened one of the big windows, though it was a cold evening, in order that she might hear his step. He had already seen her since his return this morning; but it had been agreed between them, that though it was his duty to dine with his father, he might afterwards come in for an hour's talk and consultation with the lady of his love.

The drawing-room had three large windows, all draped in curtains of dark-coloured satin, behind the centre set of which Madeline, in her white dress, had been hidden while she watched for his coming. There was a resplendent fire shining from the midst of brilliant steel and brass, which reflected and heightened the effect of its great and glowing blaze. Comfort reigned everywhere: your foot was inaudible on the mossy carpets, you sank into the luxurious arms of the chairs. A number of pictures solidly framed were on the walls; great and costly china vases, reflected in a huge mirror, completed the effect of the dazzling circle of the fire. The mistress of all this was a young lady, very pleasant to behold if not beautiful, with a trim figure, pretty hair, pretty eyes, a not too perfect mouth. The pretty eyes were full of expression, good sense, and good feeling. She was dressed quite simply in a white cashmere gown, it being winter and cold, with few ornaments and no finery of any description—a nice girl dressed for house and comfort, and looking the very symbol of both. But in this great room, and amid all these many appliances, she was alone. Her mother had died some three or four years before. She had neither brother nor sister. Mr Thursley had remained, as he generally did after dinner, down-stairs. Madeline and Gervase were alike in being the only children of their fathers.

They resumed with eagerness the interrupted conversation of the afternoon, when he had not told her, nor she elicited, by a hundred questions, half there was to say after a three months' absence, especially as all his impressions of America, what he thought of that wonderful New World, what friends he had met and made, were among the things he had to tell. It must be said, however, that it was she who resumed that talk, saying quickly, "Come now and tell me all about it. You left off just when you were leaving New York."

"Yes," he said, not at all eagerly on his part. "How long was that ago?"

"How long? Why, Gervase, have *you* taken to absence of mind? I suppose it must have been about eight or nine weeks ago."

"I told you everything in my letters, Madeline."

"Yes, yes, I know. Letters are very nice when you are away; but when you are here it is so different. I want it all by word of mouth."

"Maddie, when I say how long was it, I mean how long since I came back, since I was last here."

"Gervase!"

"I have not gone mad, dear. I have only had a long talk with my father, and had the earth cut from under my feet. I don't know where I am—floundering somewhere in mid-air."

She grasped his hand, which was holding hers in a loose and languid clasp, tightly, suddenly, and said in a quick, almost

imperative tone, “You are here, Gervase, by my side—tell me what you mean.”

“So I am,” he said, looking at her with a startled air; “a very definite place, which nobody but myself has any right to. Thank you, my dearest, for recalling me. I will tell you—not what I, but what my father means.”

He repeated to her the conversation which had terminated only half an hour before—or at least the gist of it—with tolerable faithfulness. He scarcely, perhaps, conveyed to her mind the sensation of astonishment with which it had burst upon his own, that to his father he was not all in all, or the possibility which had arisen that he might not get everything he wanted. He perhaps a little slurred over these revelations, but he said enough to reveal to her that his father had not been “kind,” that the conversation had not been a pleasant one, and that Gervase for the moment was not at all certain what might be going to happen—that he had, in short, received a check, which was a thing to which her existence as well as his recorded no parallel. Madeline was more surprised than alarmed.

“Of course,” she said, “he has always calculated on having you in the business. I don’t wonder that he was disappointed; even I,” she added with much gravity, “did not know that you were so set against it, Gervase—I wonder why?”

“You need not wonder, Madeline. I have told you often I loathe it from beginning to end. Buying in the cheapest market and selling in the dearest is not an axiom for me. And I think, perhaps, I hate trade more since I have seen it on the other side. They don’t care there for our decent veils. Profit is the visible god. The means

by which they pursue him and his rites, are more candid than among us. It was uncongenial before—it is antipathetic now."

"And yet we have always been business people since we were—anybody," she said. "Do you think we've been doing wrong all the time? All this comes of trade—every penny we have. If it is so bad that you will not follow it, shouldn't we give up all that we have? for it has all been purchased in the same way."

This speech startled Gervase not a little. "I have always heard," he said, with a sort of admiring dismay, "that women carried a conclusion further than men, being less artificial, less complicated——"

"That is the kind of praise that means contempt."

"Oh no, far from contempt; but I don't go so far. I think the methods of trade were very likely better when our money was made. Our grandfathers did things in a better way. They did not make such haste to be rich—they were honourable, straightforward——"

"Gervase!"

"What have I said wrong?"

"You spoke as if papa, my father——"

"No, no, no," he said. "I was thinking of my own, who is as honourable a man as any one. But only—they don't think it necessary to carry that into trade, Madeline. I don't mean to say anything I oughtn't to say. I suppose they don't go into every detail. They leave a great deal to—clerks and people. Every transaction is not carried on as it would be between two men—of the same social