

THE CAMERONIANS.

A Novel.

VOL. III.

BY
JAMES GRANT

Table of Contents

- CHAPTER I. NEWS AT LAST!
- CHAPTER II. THE COINCIDENCE.
- CHAPTER III. EAGLESCRAIG ONCE MORE.
- CHAPTER IV. THE DIVIDED PAIR.
- CHAPTER V. A STRANGE ACCUSATION.
- CHAPTER VI. A FATAL PROOF FOUND.
- CHAPTER VII. CECIL'S VISITOR.
- CHAPTER VIII. BAFFLED!
- CHAPTER IX. CROSS PURPOSES.
- CHAPTER X. THE TELEGRAM.
- CHAPTER XI. A DARK PREDICTION.
- CHAPTER XII. THE RECONNAISSANCE.
- CHAPTER XIII. THE WAYSIDE CHAPEL.
- CHAPTER XIV. THE BATTLE OF ZAITCHAR.
- CHAPTER XV. A RIDE FOR LIFE OR DEATH!
- CHAPTER XVI. WHAT THE 'TIMES' TOLD.
- CHAPTER XVII. MARY'S LETTER.
- CHAPTER XVIII. THE HEIGHTS OF DJUNIS.
- CHAPTER XIX. WOUNDED.
- CHAPTER XX. SAVED!
- CHAPTER XXI. 'THE END CROWNS ALL.'

THE CAMERONIANS.

CHAPTER I. NEWS AT LAST!

From such terrible episodes and scenes as those that close our last chapter, and from such a land of wild barbarity, we gladly turn homewards for a time.

It was summer; and the season had scattered its roses and their leaves lavishly over the old Scoto-French garden of Eaglescraig, for such it was, with its closely-clipped privet hedges, its long grass walks, balustraded terraces, mossy sundials, and parterres, where deep box-edging was alternated by flower borders running along the paths, and where wall-flowers, sweet-williams, and tiger lilies, with moss and Provence roses, were varied by espaliers that in the coming time would be laden with fruit.

The summer was in its glory, but there was not much brightness within the house of Eaglescraig. So Cecil, who had latterly met with such scanty kindness from Sir Piers, was actually his grandson, and the honours of the old line were perhaps neither to die out, or pass to a far-away branch, after all!

John Balderstone had proved all this, and great were the content and glee thereat among the old visitors of the mansion; there being no regrets for Hew being 'scratched,' as he called it, 'and out of the running now,' for his general bearing had rendered him obnoxious to every one.

'So the whirligig of time brings about its revenge,' said old Tunley, the butler; 'pride always goes before a fall.'

'Yes!' coincided John Balderstone, with an angry smirk on his face; 'now, Master Hew may go to Hecklebirnie!'

'Where is that?'

'Three miles beyond—well, a very warm place, as our Scots proverb has it,' added the factor, as he drained a stiff jorum in Mr. Tunley's pantry.

Mrs. Garth rejoiced openly at the change that had come to pass.

'It would have been unnatural indeed,' she said, 'that a girl so sweet and sensitive as Mary should have been mated to Hew, whose actions, nature, and habits would have jarred on her softer nature perpetually.'

And Sir Piers heard her, ever and anon, making such remarks as this, without according the angry response they would once infallibly have elicited; while to Mary the relief was inexpressible! But meantime, where was Cecil now? This question was ever in her mind, causing an aching, gnawing anxiety there, amounting to positive physical pain; and she heard it daily on the lips of all around her, Hew excepted; and once in his cups the latter expressed to John Balderstone a fierce hope that the absent heir might be——'

'Stop, sir!' cried John; 'where?'

'Oh, anywhere,' replied Hew, with an angry gloom in his bilious-looking eyes; 'I am not particular as to climate, or locality.'

So far as Mary was concerned, his occupation was gone, like his hopes of everything now; and, gentle and tender though she was, Mary, remembering all the past, could feel no pity for him.

'Dear old Snarley!' she once exclaimed, catching up her pet terrier, and then talking at Hew; 'you, at least, have always loved me for myself alone—no thought have you of fortunes or acres, of rent-rolls and bank-notes; you would rather have a marrow-bone, than all—wouldn't you, my darling doggie?'

And Hew eyed her, and the dog too, viciously. He could no longer, as before, coarsely and vulgarly, taunt Mary with the obscurity of Cecil's birth, now that it was proved beyond all doubt to be superior to his own; neither could he avail himself now, as before, of the general's countenance and support, since his rival was the real heir of line and entail; while he was but a penniless dependent.

How bitterly and unwillingly, again and again, he anathematised the hour, in which that—to him—fatal packet was so inopportunately discovered by John Balderstone, and its blighting contents brought to light!

Had it only, by fate, been left forgotten, unknown in its place of concealment, for a year or so more, all might have gone well with him; but now—now—he could only curse heavily and grind his teeth in the impotency of his wrath and the deep bitterness of his disappointment.

'All the world's a stage, and the men and women only players;' but he who had played the deliberate villain in the drama of Cecil's life as yet, was still unmasked, and Hew grinned with malicious triumph as he thought of that.

The generous Sir Piers felt that he owed Hew some reparation for the loss of his Indian appointment, and the heavy blight that had fallen on all the prospects once before him; and he hoped that

if Hew would only settle down to work and study, that something—he knew not precisely what—might be done for him yet; but Hew, exasperated by the trick fortune had played him, and the humiliating change in his position, had taken heavily to the bottle of late, and his naturally savage nature became at times inflamed to the verge of madness.

Mary was inevitably lost to him now; and that which he deemed much more important—her money! But if Cecil could be removed—crushed—destroyed—thrust out of his path and of this life too—he, Hew, would again be the heir of entail—heir to Eaglescraig and the baronetcy.

But where was Cecil now?

Could he but discover him—could he but cross his path, he would not be over particular about how he got rid of him; and at such times dark and terrible thoughts possessed him.

To drown care, and as a source of excitement, he had plunged deeper into his dissipations; he had become a more frequent visitor at race-courses, where a very little of his own money went into the pockets of others, while a good deal of the money of others accrued to him, by some mysterious process. He also stuck to his card playing—*écarté* being, as of old, his favourite game; and unless each rubber thereat represented a sum larger than he deemed sufficient to give zest to the game, even *écarté* had no charms for him.

Some of his escapades drew upon him the indignation of the general, and feeling himself all but discarded, his absences from Eaglescraig became longer and more frequent; so that none there knew precisely of his haunts or whereabouts, till the portly Mr.

Tunley brought the startling intelligence one day that 'after a terrible bout of delirious trimmins, Master Hew was—or believed himself to be—dying, at the Montgomerie Arms Inn,' where he prayed the general in pity to come and see him once again.

Accompanied by a medical adviser and old John Balderstone, Sir Piers at once rode to the old posting-house indicated; and there, pale, wan, hollow cheeked, and with eyes unnaturally sunk and bloodshot, he found his once favoured protégé in a state that shocked him.

Hew was far from dying yet, as the doctor averred; and Sir Piers too—he 'had seen too much of that sort of thing up country, not to know all about it;' but, in his lowness and perturbation of spirit, Hew firmly believed that the hour of his demise was close indeed; and clinging to the hand of Sir Piers, while moaning and sobbing, he confessed how he had cheated and swindled often, and how he had maligned Cecil in many ways, and more than all, the cruel trick he had played him, on the night of the ball, by drugging his wine.

He uttered a veritable howl of dismay, and fell back in his bed, when he saw the sudden expression of horror, rage, and shame, that mingled in the face of the honourable old soldier, in whose heart there swelled up a great emotion of pity for Cecil.

He fiercely withdrew his hand from Hew's despairing and tenacious clutch, and started back a pace from the bed whereon the culprit lay.

'It is well that we have all heard this confession of a crime, as black as assassination—a confession which I request you both to commit to memory, and you, John Balderstone, most carefully to

writing. As for you, sir,' he added, with a withering glance at Hew, 'I shall never look upon your face again, and now leave you with the doctor and your own conscience, if you have such a thing about you! Order my horse,' he concluded, as he rang the bell, and quitted the room without glancing again at Hew, whose wasted face was buried in the pillows, among which he was groaning heavily.

Buried in deep, anxious, and angry thoughts—angry with himself too—the general rode slowly home.

So—so—this was the secret and true character of Hew Montgomerie—a blackleg—a cheat—the perpetrator of a great villany, on an innocent man! 'When anything in which we have most believed, grows shadowy and unreal, we are apt to grow unreal to ourselves;' and the general, who had once believed greatly in Hew, now knew not what to think.

'Jealousy and avarice are the meanest of passions,' he thought, and terribly had Hew given full swing to both. 'Jealousy, I know, has driven people to incredible acts of deceit; but this act of Hew's has been, beyond all calculations, infamous!'

'It has been just as my heart foreboded!' said Mary to Mrs. Garth, when the revelation reached them, and the measure of her horror of Hew was now full. She then thanked Heaven for her wealth, that she might share it with the bruised and the fallen; but whither was he gone?

Alas! no one could find the smallest clue to it.

After the revelation, which fear of death had wrung from him, Hew recovered rapidly, and made many a solemn promise 'to

eschew horseflesh and bits of painted pasteboard;' but it was only a case of 'the devil was sick,' etc., for when well he plunged into his old bad courses, far exceeding the allowance the general so generously made to him, and then he disappeared for a time.

Autumn had come now; the crops had been gathered, and the gleaners were busy on the upland slopes and fertile braes of Cunninghame and Kyle; the last of the high-piled wains had gone homeward over the furrowed fields and through the leafy grass lanes that led to the picturesque rickyard; the fern and heath-covered wastes were in all their beauty, the great gorse-bushes in all their golden bloom, and the woodlands wore many a varied hue, from dark-green to russet-brown and pallid yellow.

Since the discovery made by John Balderstone, and the revelations of Hew, the general had been rather a changed and broken-down man; but he now clung to Mary Montgomerie more than ever, and daily she drove him in her pony-carriage—the same in which Cecil was wont to accompany her, wrapped cosily up in the skins of animals he had shot in India—handling the ribbons so prettily with her gauntleted little hands, and always comporting herself so sweetly and tenderly to him, and just as a favourite daughter would have done.

He felt that a great crime had been committed against one who was his own flesh and blood; and that, in ignorance, he had condoned that crime; and, more than all, in society had visited it with all the acrimony he deemed due and proper to the occasion.

'I have again been guilty of rash judgment—of indiscretion and of cruelty!' he said again and again to himself in secret; and his mind drew painful pictures of the ruined Cecil, a wanderer or

outcast, perhaps in penury, misery, and despair, driven, it might be, to suicide; and, remembering the real or fancied vision he had seen in time past, had a nervous and childish fear of perhaps beholding another.

Already had the father been wronged; and now, how much more deeply the son! Was a curse coming upon his race—a curse like that which blighted the Campbells of Glenlyon, and more than one other family, for some crime committed in ages past? It almost seemed so; and he had no language wherewith to express his loathing of Hew, and the cunning and cowardice of the latter.

Tidings of Cecil or how to trace him, were the daily thought of all at Eaglescraig, and the general wrote again and again, but vainly, to Leslie Fotheringhame, to Dick Freeport, Acharn, and other members of the corps on the subject; but none could afford the slightest clue to the mystery that enveloped his disappearance.

The presence of friends, if not avoided, was certainly not courted at Eaglescraig now; even the general forgot his reminiscences of India and the Cameronians in this new anxiety, and the days passed slowly, gloomily, and monotonously on, till Mary bethought her of Annabelle Erroll, who she knew had a sorrow of her own, and pressed her to visit them again.

The curiously and mysteriously worded advertisements inserted by John Balderstone in the second column of the *Times*, concerning Cecil, and seeking some knowledge of his whereabouts, never reached him by the banks of the Morava, or beyond the slopes of the Balkan mountains; and fears began to gather in the hearts of those who loved him, that if not gone to the Antipodes, he must be dead!

'I am breaking up, John,' he would say querulously to his old friend, 'and am about as much use now as a Scotch M.P. or a third wheel to a field-piece!'

Yet, as we are all creatures of habit, he adhered to his old ways mechanically. As an Indian veteran, accustomed to be up at gun-fire and when the cantonment ghurries clanged, he was always wont to be abroad early; and there was one morning, which he never forgot, when he was up and about earlier than usual.

He had been through the stables with Pate Pastern, the groom, and seen the carriage-horses, his own roadster, Mary's pad and her ponies; he had been with old Dibble, the gardener, about potting the flowers, though he scarcely knew a daffodil from a rhododendron; had seen the shepherd off to look after the cattle, and now came the postman with the letters and papers; but he tossed them all aside and muttered:

'What can interest me now?'

But Mary always had the power of rousing and interesting him, and, breakfast over, she began to read the morning paper aloud, as she often did, for he loved to hear her silvery voice. She turned, as was her wont with him, to the Indian news, though many a hearty laugh he had at her haphazard pronunciation of Hindostanee names and words; and, after giving him all the news from Simla, Calcutta, and so forth, her eyes fell on those from the Danubian provinces and the East; and she was in the act of reading, when her voice broke; as a swelling came into her throat she stopped, and, while tightly clutching her paper, fell back in her chair, with her face deadly pale.

'Mary, my darling, you are ill; what is the matter?' exclaimed Sir Piers, starting from his easy-chair and ringing the bell furiously.

'News of Cecil!' she replied, faintly.

'News of Cecil—when—how?'

'See, see! oh, heavens!' she exclaimed, smoothing out the paper and then pushing back her hair from her temples.

It was the special correspondent's detailed account of the battle by the Morava, and the singular gallantry of 'the British volunteer, Mr. Cecil Falconer,' in rescuing and remounting General Tchernaiëff, after a brigade of Cossacks had given way; of his promotion and decoration with the Takova cross, and all that the reader already knows.

Tremulously the general read the notice again and again, with a glow of pride and joy in his old face—joy in which Mary did not fully share, for dread of the perils surrounding the absent one was her immediate second thought; but all suspense—all uncertainty were ended now. The absent, the wronged, and the lost one was discovered, but oh how far away!

'My boy's boy! my boy's boy!' muttered Sir Piers, wiping his spectacles, which had become covered with moisture. 'Tunley, call Mrs. Garth—the chief of my household staff—she must hear of this at once. Quick, she is in the compound!' he added, referring to the garden, as an Anglo-Indian never rids himself of his old associations. And motherly old Mrs. Garth, who was looking just as we saw her last, with her grey hair thick and soft, and with keen bright eyes under a pair of shrewd Scotch eyebrows, heard with

genuine joy the sudden tidings of Cecil, for whom she had always had the strongest regard.

The day was passed in surmises and plans for the future, and Mary hurried away to her own room, to find perfect seclusion at last—away from all! She locked her door; threw off her dress as if it stifled her; donned her robe de toilette; let down the masses of her hair for coolness, threw them over her shoulders, and sat down with her dimpled chin resting in the pinky palm of her left hand, to think—think—think it all out.

What should she do! Write!

She threw open her desk and blotting-pad; but her brain was too excited—her poor heart beat too fast and too painfully to permit her to steady her thoughts, and she paced to and fro, so wearily.

'Thank heaven, dear Annabelle is coming!' she exclaimed more than once.

This battle by the Morava had been fought, by the date given, more than a month ago. A whole month! What might not have happened since then? In what fresh perils might not Cecil have been plunged? And much had happened, such as the gentle mind of Mary could not have conceived, or deemed possible, in this age of the world.

Now the news of the Servian war—a war to her hitherto unknown or devoid of interest—became suddenly invested with a new and terrible importance.

The regiment, of course, heard betimes of Cecil's exploit and the honours awarded him; and, as may readily be supposed, the mess had quite an ovation in consequence.

For certain cogent reasons of his own, Hew Montgomerie heard the tidings with unmixed satisfaction.

'In Servia—fighting in Servia, of all places in the world!' he muttered; 'if he only gets knocked on the head, I may find my old place at Eaglescraig again! But he may escape and come safely home. Why should I not go to Servia, and mar his future in some fashion?' he added, as a dark and cruel expression stole into his shifty eyes; 'but how to get there—and where the devil is Servia?'

Hew's ideas on geography were decidedly vague, and even Bradshaw failed to show how he could get there; but, intent on his diabolical thoughts nevertheless, he continued to think and to mutter:

'Fighting, is he! A bullet may rid me of him—rid me all the sooner that, no doubt, he sets little store upon his life now. Anyway, I should like it soon to be settled whether I am to have Eaglescraig after all!'

And he began to consider intently how he could reach Servia before Cecil could hear of his changed fortune; in what capacity he could act when there; what was the language spoken; where was the money to come from with which he was to travel? And for some days he resolved himself into a species of committee of ways and means, combined with many dark, cruel and malignant thoughts.

CHAPTER II. THE COINCIDENCE.

On her way to Eaglescraig, Annabelle Erroll proceeded by way of Glasgow, and had barely taken her seat in the compartment of a first-class railway carriage, when a gentleman entered, and took his place at an opposite corner. Then the train glided out of the station; smoky Tradeston on the right, and the dense masses of the ancient Gorbals on the left, were quickly far behind, and the view on either side became more open, as it sped on its way; and ere long Annabelle forgot all about her companion, in watching the estuary of the Clyde, the rock of Dumbarton, the mighty blue mass of Ben Lomond, and the glorious panorama of the hills of Argyle.

Her companion had leisurely opened a courier bag, and taken therefrom various serials, without offering one to her, as she sat with averted face, intent on the scenery. He seemed one of those composed travellers who can hear unmoved the scream and whistle of any number of engines; the startling shout of 'Change here!' as the train pulled up at some confusing junction, from where travellers branched off in all directions—some the right, but many the wrong; and where leisurely and indolent porters spent the stirring yet monotonous day in cramming passengers and portmanteaus into carriages, to get rid of them as fast as possible for the next batch of portmanteaus and passengers, without caring whither they went or what became of them.

He could see, by furtive glances over the top of his paper, that his companion was a tall and elegant girl, faultlessly attired in a rich sealskin, with gold ornaments; with feet and hands which—

when the latter left her tiny muff—were well-shaped and small. There was a haughty grace in the carriage of her handsome head; she wore a smart hat, and a thick black veil tied over her face effectually concealed her features. He took in all this at a glance as he settled himself to his newspaper, while she scarcely dared to breathe, as in him she had now recognised Leslie Fotheringhame!

Where was he going—what was he doing here, in 'mufti' too? The calm, high-bred face, to which the dark eyebrows and thick, black, heavy moustache imparted so much character—the face that was ever dwelling in her memory was before her again. In repose, she thought it seemed older than it should have been, or was wont to be; and when eventually he did venture to address her, when he smiled, it grew young and bright again, like the face she remembered in the pleasant time beside the Tay, and the last season at Edinburgh.

She saw that he had still at his watch-chain a tiny gold locket, which she remembered well; for it had been her gift to him, and contained a microscopic likeness of herself on one side, and a lock of her golden hair on the other—or *had* done so, when she saw it last.

Did it contain them now, or had they given place to memorials of—of that other woman—a hateful and humiliating thought!

How she longed for an excuse or opportunity to get into another carriage, or for other passengers to come in, ere he recognised her; but the train was an express one, and no addition could be made to their number for some time to come.

Secure, as yet, behind the mask of her veil, she watched him, while her heart beat with lightning-speed, and swelled with

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

