THE DUKE'S DAUGHTER
AND
THE FUGITIVES

VOL. II.

BY

MRS OLIPHANT

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“Lady, you come hither to be married to this count?”
“I do.”
—*Much Ado about Nothing.*

THE DUKE’S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER XI.

A NEW AGENT.

THE reader accustomed to the amenities of the highest social circles, such as those which we are now compelled temporarily to leave, will no doubt sensibly feel the shock of the descent from the mansion of the Duke, and his sublime society, to a sphere and condition of life far removed from these summits of existence. It is seldom that life can be carried on solely upon those high levels; the necessities of every day call for the aid of the more humbly born and placed, so that not even dukes can suffice to themselves. We must then, without further apology, proceed at once to a room as different as it is possible to conceive from the halls of Billings—a small sitting-room in a small rectory-house in the heart of London, belonging to one of the old parish churches which have been abandoned there by the tide of habitation and life. The church was close by, a fine one in its way, one of Wren's churches, adapted for a large Protestant congregation more solicitous about the sermon than is usual nowadays—but left now without any congregation at all. The rectory, a house of very moderate dimensions, jammed in among warehouses and offices, had little air and less light in the gloomy November days. The Rector and his wife had just returned from their yearly holiday, and it was not a cheerful thing to come back to the fog, and the damp, and the gas-lamps, and all the din of the great carts that lumbered round the corner continually, and loaded and unloaded themselves within two steps of the clergyman's door. How was he to write his sermons or meditate over his work in the midst of these noises? his wife often asked indignantly. But, to be sure, the fifty people or so who quite crowded St Alban's when they all turned out, were not very critical.

Down in these regions there is not a Little Bethel always handy, and the inhabitants must take what they can get and be thankful: which it would be a good thing, Mrs Marston thought, if they could be oftener obliged in other places to do.

Mr Marston was in his study. It was a small room on one side of the door, chosen for its handiness that the parish people might be introduced without trouble, to the Rector: but there were but few that ever troubled him. At the present moment his verger had just brought him the parish news, with an intimation of the fact that a marriage was to take place to-morrow at eleven o'clock, at which Mr Sayers, who had taken the duty in his absence, hoped the Rector himself would officiate. The one parish duty that was occasionally necessary in St Alban's was to perform marriages, and accordingly the Rector was not surprised. He had the gas lighted, though it was still early in the afternoon, that he might look at the book in which the notice of the banns was kept, in order to make sure that all had been done in order. The gas was lighted, but the blind was not drawn down, and the upper part of the window was full of a grey and dingy London sky, without colour in it at all, a sort of paleness merely, against which the leafless branches of the poor little tree which flourished in the little grass-plot stood out with a desolate distinction. Inside the room was unpleasantly warm. The Rector sat with his back to the fire; he read the entry of the banns in the book, and saw that all was right. Then after he had closed the book and put it away, a sudden thought struck him, and he opened it again. Where had he seen that name before? It was a strange name, a name not at all like the parish of St Alban's, E.C. What could she want here, a person with a name like that? He put down the book the second time, but again turned back and opened it once more. Pendragon Plantagenet Fitz-

Merlin Altamont! One does not often hear such names strung one after another. Was it perhaps some player-lady keeping the fine names of her *rôles* in the theatre? Or was it—could it be?—— Mr Marston could not shake off the impression thus made upon him. He had two churchings to-morrow which ought to have occupied him still more, for new members of the congregation were the most interesting things in the world to the Rector. But he was haunted by the other intimation, and the churchings sank into insignificance. He pondered for a long time, disturbed by the questions which arose in his mind, and at length, not feeling capable of containing them longer, he took the book in his hand and went across the hall, which was still in the afternoon gloom, to his wife, whose little drawing-room on the other side was lighted by the flickering firelight, and not much more. She was very glad to see him come in. "Did you think it was tea-time?" she said. "I am sure I don't wonder, but it's only three o'clock. Dear, dear, to think of the fine sunset we were looking at an hour later than this yesterday. But London is getting worse and worse."

"Why don't you have the gas lighted?" the Rector asked in a querulous tone. "I have brought something to show you, but there is no light to see it by."

"You shall have the light in a moment," cried Mrs Marston; "that is the one good thing of gas. It spoils your picture-frames and kills your flowers; but you can have it instantly, and always clean and no trouble. There!"

The gas leaping up dazzled them for a moment, and then Mr Marston opened his book and pointed his finger to the entry. "Look here, Mary—look at that; did you ever see a name like that before? What do you suppose it can mean?"

Mrs Marston had to put on her spectacles first, and they had always to be looked for before they could be put on. She had just adopted spectacles, and did not like them, nor to have to make, even to herself, the confession that she wanted them: and they were always out of the way. The Rector was short-sighted, and had the exemption which such persons enjoy. He looked upon the magnifying spectacles of his wife with contempt, and it was always irritating to him to see her hunting about, saying, "Where have I put my glasses?" as was her wont. "Can't you tie them round your neck," he said, "or keep them in your pocket—or something?" When, however, they were found at last, he spread the book out upon the table and, with his finger on the place, waited while she read. Their two heads stooping over the book under the gas, with the pale sky looking in at the window, made a curious picture, he eager, she still fumbling a little to get on her spectacles without further comment. "'Reginald Winton,'" she read hesitating, "'bachelor, of this parish.' I never certainly heard of any one of that name in this parish: stay, it might be the new care-taker perhaps at Mullins and Makings—or——"

"That's not the name," cried the Rector. He would have liked to pinch her, but refrained. "This is no care-taker, you may be sure; but it is the other name—look at the other name. Where have you seen it before? and what is the meaning of it?" Mr Marston cried with excitement. He had worked himself up to this pitch, and he forgot that she was quite unprepared. She read, stumbling a little, for the handwriting was crabbed, "'Jane Angela Pendragon Plantagenet Fitz-Merlin Altamont, spinster, of the parish of Billings.' Dear, dear," was good Mrs Marston's first comment—"I hope she has names enough and syllables enough for one person."

"And is that all that strikes you?" her husband said.

“Well—it is an odd name—is that what you mean, William? Very silly, I think, to give a girl all that to sign. I suppose if she uses it all, it will be only in initials. She will sign, you know, Jane Angela, or very likely only Angela, which is much prettier than Jane; Angela P. P. F.—or F. M.—Altamont, that is how it will be. Angela Altamont; it is like a name in a novel.”

“Ah, now we are coming to it at last!” cried the Rector; “names in novels, when they are founded on anything, generally follow the names of the aristocracy. Now here’s the question: Is this a secret marriage, and the bride some poor young lady who doesn’t know what she is doing, some girl running away with her brother’s tutor or some fiddler or other, to her own ruin, poor thing, without knowing what she is about?”

“Dear me, William! what an imagination you have got!” said Mrs Marston, and she sat down in her surprise and drew the book towards her; but then she added, “Why should they come to St Alban’s in that case? There are no musicians living in this parish. And poor people do give their children such grand names nowadays. That poor shirtmaker in Cotton Lane, don’t you remember? her baby is Ethel Sybil Celestine Constantia—you recollect how we laughed?”

“Family Herald,” said the Rector with a careless wave of his hand, “and all Christian names, which makes a great difference. It was her last batch of heroines, poor soul; but do you think a poor needlewoman would think of Pendragon and Plantagenet? No; mark my words, Mary, this is some great person; this is some poor deceived girl, throwing away everything for what she thinks love. Poor thing, poor thing! and all the formalities complied with, so that I have no right to stop it. Sayers is an idiot!” cried Mr Marston.

“I should have inquired into it at once had I been at home, with a name before my eyes like that.”

“Dear me!” said Mrs Marston; there is not much in it, but she repeated the exclamation several times. “After all,” she said, “it must be true love, or she would not go that length; and who knows, William, whether that is not better than all their grandeur? Dear, dear me! I wish we knew a little about the circumstances. If the gentleman is of this parish couldn’t you send for him and inquire into it?” The Rector was pacing up and down the room in very unusual agitation. It was such a crisis as in his peaceful clerical life had never happened to him before.

“You know very well he is not of this parish,” Mr Marston said. “I suppose he must have slept here the requisite number of nights; and besides, he knows I have no right to interfere. The banns are all in order. I can’t refuse to marry them, and what right have I to send for the man or to question him? No doubt he would have some plausible story. It is not to be expected, especially if it is the sort of thing I think it is, that he should tell me.”

“Dear, dear!” repeated Mrs Marston. “A clergyman should have more power; what is the good of being a clergyman if you cannot stop a marriage in your own church? I call that tyranny. Do you mean to tell me you will be compelled to marry them, whether you approve of it or not?”

“Well, Mary, it is not usual to ask the clergyman’s consent, is it?” he said with a laugh, momentarily tickled by the suggestion. But this did not throw any light upon what was to be done, or upon the question whether anything was to be done; and with a mind quite unsatisfied he retired again to the study, seeing that it was out

of all reason to ring the bell at half-past three for tea. He drew down his blind with a sigh as he went back to his room, shutting out the colourless paleness which did duty for sky, and resigning himself to the close little room though it was too warm. Mr Marston tried his best to compose himself, to take up his work, such as it was, to put away from his mind the remembrance of a world which was not wrapt in fog, and where wholesome breezes were blowing. St Alban's was a good living; it had endowments enough to furnish two or three churches, and to get it had been a wonderful thing for him; but sometimes he asked himself whether two hundred a-year and a country parish with cottages in it instead of warehouses would not have been better. However, all that was folly, and here was something exciting to amuse his mind with, which was always an advantage. He had laid down his book (for he thought it right to keep up his reading) for the fourth or fifth time, to ask himself whether sending for the bridegroom, as his wife suggested, or going out in search of him, might not be worth his while, when Mrs Marston came suddenly bursting into the study with, in her turn, a big volume in her arms. The Rector looked up in surprise and put away his theology. She came in, he said to himself, like a whirlwind; which was not, however, a metaphor at all adapted to describe the movements of a stout and comfortable person of fifty, with a great respect for her furniture. But she did enter with an assured, not to say triumphant air, carrying her book, which she plumped down before him on the table, sweeping away some of his papers. "There!" she cried, breathless and excited. The page was blazoned with a big coat of arms. It was in irregular lines like poetry, and ah, how much dearer than poetry to many a British soul! It was, need we say, a Peerage, an old Peerage, without any of the recent information, but still not too old for the purpose. "There!" said Mrs Marston, again flourishing her forefinger. The

Rector, bewildered, looked and read. He read and he grew pale with awe and alarm. He looked up in his wife's face with a gasp of excitement. He was too much impressed even to say, "I told you so," for, to be sure, a duke's daughter was a splendour he had not conceived. But his wife was more demonstrative in the delight of her discovery. "There!" she cried, for the third time. "I felt sure, of course, it must be in the Peerage, if it was what you thought; and there it is at full length, 'Lady Jane Angela Pendragon Plantagenet Fitz-Merlin Altamont.' It fairly took away my breath. To think you should have made such a good guess! and me talking about Mrs Singer's baby! Why, I suppose it is one of the greatest families in the country," Mrs Marston said.

"There is no doubt about that," said the Rector. "I have heard the present Duke was not rich, but that would make it all the worse. Poor young lady! poor misguided—for of course she can know nothing about life nor what she is doing. And I wonder who the man is. He must be a scoundrel," said Mr Marston, hotly, "to take advantage of the ignorance of a girl."

"My dear," said Mrs Marston, "all that may be quite true that you say, but if you reckon up you will see that she must be twenty-eight. Twenty-eight is not such a girl. And Reginald Winton is quite a nice name."

"Just the sort of name for a tutor, or a music-master, or something of that sort," said the Rector, contemptuously. He had been a tutor himself in his day, but that did not occur to him at the moment. He got up from his chair and would have paced about the room as he did in his wife's quarters had the study been big enough; but failing in this, he planted himself before the fire, to the great danger of his coat-tails and increase of his temperature, but in

his excitement he paid no attention to that. “And now the question is, what is to be done?” he said.

“I thought you told me there was nothing to be done. I shall come to church myself to-morrow, William, and if you think I could speak to the poor young lady——: perhaps if she had a woman to talk to—most likely she has no mother. That’s such an old book, one can’t tell; but I don’t think a girl would do this who had a mother. Poor thing! Do you think if I were there a little before the hour and were to talk to her, and try to get into her confidence, and say how wrong it was——”

“Talk to a bride at the altar!” said the Rector; the indecorum of the idea shocked him beyond description. “No, no, something must be done at once—there is no time to be lost. I must write to the Duke.”

“To the Duke!” This suggestion took away Mrs Marston’s breath.

“I hope,” said her husband, raising his head, “that we both know a duke is but a man: and I am a clergyman, and I want nothing from him, but to do him a service. It would be wicked to hesitate. The question is, where is he to be found, and how can we reach him in time? He is not likely to be in town at this time of the year; nobody is in town I suppose except you and me, and a few millions more, Mary; but that doesn’t help us—the question is, where is he likely to be? Thank heaven there is still time for the post!” Mr Marston cried, and threw himself upon his chair, and pulled his best note-paper out of his drawer.

But, alas! the question of where the Duke was puzzled them both. Grosvenor Square; Billings Castle, ——shire; Hungerford

Place, in the West Riding; Cooling, N.B.; Caerpylcher, North Wales. As his wife read them out one after another, with a little hesitation about the pronunciation, the Rector wrung his hands. The consultation which the anxious pair held on the subject ran on to the very limits of the post-hour, and would take too long to record. Now that it had come to this, Mrs Marston was inclined to hold her husband back. “After all, if it was a real attachment,” she said, between the moments of discussing whether it was in his seat in Scotland, or in Wales, or at his chief and most ducal of residences that a duke in November was likely to be. “After all, it might be really for her happiness—and what a dreadful shock for them, poor things, if they came to be married, thinking they had settled everything so nicely, and walked into the arms of her father!” Her heart melted more and more as she thought of it. No doubt, poor girl, she had been deprived early of a mother’s care; and, on the other hand, at twenty-eight a girl ought to know her own mind. She could not be expected to give in to her father for ever. And if it should be that this was a real attachment, and the poor young lady’s happiness was concerned——

The Rector made short work of these arguments. He pooh-poohed the real attachment in a way which made Mrs Marston angry. What could she know of poverty? he asked; and how was a duke’s daughter to scramble for herself in the world? As for love, it was great nonsense in most cases. The French system was just as good as the English. People got to like each other by living together, and by having the same tastes and habits. How could a fiddler or a tutor have the same habits as Lady Jane, “or Lady Angela, if you like it better?” He went on, as Mrs Marston said, like this, till she could have boxed his ears for him. And the fact was that he had to pay an extra penny on each of his letters to get

them off by the post; for he wrote several letters—to Billings, to Hungerford, and to Grosvenor Square. Scotland and Wales were hopeless; there was no chance whatever that from either of these places his Grace could arrive in time. Indeed, it would be something very like a miracle if he arrived now. But the Rector felt that he had done his duty, which is always a consolation. He retired to rest late and full of excitement, feeling that no one could tell what the morrow might bring forth—a sentiment, no doubt, which is always true, but which commends itself more to the mind in a season when out-of-the-way events are likely. Mrs Marston had been a little cool towards him all the evening, resenting much that he had said. But it was not till all modes of communicating with the outer world were hopeless that she took her revenge and planted a thorn in his pillow. "If you had not been so disagreeable," she said, "I would have advised you not to trust to the post, but to telegraph. I dare say the Duke would have paid you back the few shillings; then he would have been sure to get the news in time. At present I think it very unlikely. And I am sure, for the young people's sake, I should be sorry. But I should have telegraphed," Mrs Marston said. And the Rector, strange to say, had never thought of that.

CHAPTER XII.

HALF-MARRIED.

NEXT morning everything was in movement early in St Alban's, E.C. Orders had been sent to the verger to have special sweepings-out and settings in order, a thing which took that functionary much by surprise. For the marriage: but then marriages were not so uncommon at St Alban's—less uncommon than anything else. Churchings were more rare events, and demanded more consideration: for probably the married pair once united would never trouble St Alban's more; whereas there was always a chance that babies born in the neighbourhood might grow up in it, and promote the good works of the parish, or be candidates for its charities, which was also very desirable—for the charities were large and the qualified applicants few. But it was for the marriage that all this fuss was to be made. "It must be a swell wedding," the verger said to his wife. "You had better put on your Sunday bonnet and hang about. Sometimes they want a witness to sign the book, and there's half-crowns going." Accordingly all was expectation in the neighbourhood of the church. The best altar-cloth was displayed, and the pinafores taken off the cushions in the pulpit and reading-desk, and the warming apparatus lighted, though this was an expense. Mr Marston felt justly that when there was a possibility of a duke and a certainty of a duke's daughter, extra preparations were called for. He came over himself early to see that all was ready. There was no concealing his excitement. "Has any one been here?" he asked, almost before he was within hearing of the verger. Simms answered "No"—but added, "Them churchings, Rector. You'll take 'em after the wedding, sir?" "Oh, the churchings," said the Rector: "are the women here?—oh, after

the wedding, of course." But then a sudden thought struck him. "Now I think of it, Simms," he said, "perhaps we'd better have them first—at least, keep them handy, ready to begin, if necessary—for there is some one coming to the marriage who—may be perhaps a little late——" "Oh, if you knows the parties, sir," said the verger. And just at that moment Mrs Marston came in, in her best bonnet and a white shawl. She came in by the vestry door, which she had a way of doing, though it was uncanonical, and she darted a look at her husband as she passed through and went into her own pew, which was quite in the front, near to the reading-desk. The white shawl convinced Simms without further words. Unless she knew the parties Mrs Marston never would have appeared like this. Respectability was thus given to the whole business, which beforehand had looked, Simms thought, of a doubtful description; for certainly there was nobody in the parish of the name of Winton, even if the bridegroom had not looked "too swell" to suit the locality. But if they were the Rector's friends!

They arrived a few moments after eleven o'clock, in two very private, quiet-looking carriages, of which nobody could be quite sure whether they were humble broughams, of the kind which can be hired, or private property. The bridegroom was first, with one man accompanying him, who looked even more "swell" than himself. The bride came a little after in the charge of a respectable elderly woman-servant, and one other lady whose dress and looks were such as had never been seen before in St Alban's. Mrs Simms was not learned in dress, but she knew enough to know that the simplicity of this lady's costume was a kind of simplicity more costly and grand than the greatest finery that had ever been seen within the parish of St Alban's. The bride herself was wrapped in a large all-enveloping grey cloak. The maid who was with her even