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# A STIFF-NECKED GENERATION!

FROM BLACKWOOD'S EDINBURGH MAGAZINE.

CHAPTER XXVIII.—Continued.

"A mile's a mile when there is no reason  
for it. I can walk as far as anybody, but  
by George! why should you do it when  
there's no object? Surely there are grooms  
and stable-boys enough about the place?  
We'll soon see if one of them can't go,"  
and he rang the bell loudly.

Lord Hartland bit his lip.  
He had never been quite played the  
host to in that room by Gilbert before.

He had seen him at home and at his ease  
there; but in the presence of his betrothed  
some sort of appeal to her had usually  
been necessary. Rosamund's absence had  
taught her cousin this new experience.  
He could not like it. He could not but  
be glad she had not seen it.

CHAPTER XXIX.

GOOD FUN AT KING'S COMMON.

The order once given, however, Har-  
land was disposed to take rather kindly  
than otherwise to the prospect before him.

His own company had become grievous  
to him by this time, and that of Lady  
Julia afforded but slight variation. He  
was dull and sad. The great interest of  
his life at this juncture lay between the  
two houses of the Abbey and King's  
Common, and of this interest he could not  
speak, and would fain not think, so that  
distraction almost of any nature was wel-  
come.

The Gilberts might not be to his taste,  
but he had been about the world enough  
to take people as he found them, and pass  
a pleasant evening in almost any company.  
The rosy, good-humoured damsels who  
appalled Mrs. Waterfield, and for whom  
indeed none of the women of his set could  
find a good word, appeared by no means  
so bad to him, and their open unsuspicious  
chatter was a positive relief to his over-  
charged spirit. With them there need be  
no anxiety, no doubts, no effort. Of late  
in his cousin's presence there had grown to  
be one continuous strain of expectation  
and apprehension—while out of it, all had  
been the feverish, fretting impatience of a  
moth to return to its candle. To be by,  
to watch, to burn with indignation, and to  
be daily and hourly more convinced of the  
truth of his conclusions,—that had been  
the consuming interest of the past few  
weeks; and debarr'd from it as he now  
was all at once, with Rosamund un-  
approachable, and nothing more to be seen  
or learned, divined or discovered—with  
the whole affair, in short, at a dead lock—  
he experienced a sudden desire to throw  
off his burden, and breathe another  
atmosphere.

"Come, we'll have a jolly evening!"  
cried Gilbert, perceiving something of this.  
"We'll have a good time. What do you  
say to billiards before dinner? The girls  
will come and look on. It is by far the  
best time of day for billiards to my mind,  
especially on these dark days when one  
has to come indoors so soon. And here's  
tea, so we shall just have a nice comfort-  
able couple of hours afterwards."

"You must not forget to speak to Miss  
Penrose, brother," Emily reminded him.  
"This is the best time—indeed the only  
time to catch her free, I think Catherine  
said."  
"Oh, what? Miss Penrose?" said he.  
"Oh, ay. I remember about Catherine.  
Oh, yes, I'll look in on our way to the  
billiard room."

"It is so very awkward for my sister  
and me being here all alone, you see, Lord  
Hartland," explained Miss Gilbert turning  
to him for further sympathy. "Being here  
without any other lady, is really very  
awkward. So Frederick is going to apply  
to the governess to have Catherine begin  
her holidays sooner than the others, in  
order that we may have her. Although  
Catherine is made such a school-girl of,  
she is really quite old enough to go about  
now, and so Etta and I have been telling  
her."

"(You have, have you?" thought Har-  
land. "Rosamund won't thank you for  
that.")

"Oh, Catherine is quite companion-  
able," subjoined Etta. "If we had  
Catherine, we should not mind at all how  
long Rosamund stayed away."—here she  
caught a scowl from Emily—"I mean of  
course, of course for our own sakes; of  
course we are dreadfully sorry for her."

"Etta always makes a muddle when-  
ever she begins to talk, Lord Hartland;  
she only means that we should not mind  
for the awkward part of it. Of course we  
miss dear Rosamund dreadfully," apolo-  
gised the elder sister.

He bowed.  
"When do you think she will be able  
to return? To-morrow, or next day?"  
Candidly, you know."

"Certainly not to-morrow, nor the next  
day."

"By the end of the week?"  
"I hardly think that either."

"Oh! what? Not by the end of the  
week?" put in Gilbert, with his cup half-  
way to his lips. "Lord! you don't mean

that Makin says that? Why, bless my  
soul! how very—what an awful pity!  
How beastly unfortunate! Well"—after  
a long drink, and a careful wiping of his  
heavy moustache—"well, we must put up  
with it I suppose, and do our best to get  
along without her. But—" and he  
set down his cup on the tray ruefully.

"There is one thing," said Lord Har-  
land, with considerable hesitation, "that  
Lady Julia wished me to speak about.  
She was sure that you would agree with  
her as to the advisability of saying as little  
about this as possible. We do not want  
every one to be talking and gossiping  
about Rosamund—"

"To be sure not. Keep it dark,  
certainly, or we shall have the poor girl  
bothered to death," assented her betrothed,  
readily.

"And, perhaps—perhaps for that reason  
—my aunt thought"—stammered Har-  
land, disliking his commission intensely—  
"she thought it might be as well for you  
not to be seen coming over to the Abbey  
every day. You see," he added, as the  
faces of all betrayed surprise, "it might get  
wind, and give rise to suspicion that the  
illness was more serious than it is."

"But I don't understand. I may go  
surely, if the girls don't," said Gilbert.  
"Considering how we stand to each other,  
and everybody knows about it by this  
time, I—upon my word—I can't see why  
my going should bear that interpretation."

"You would not go if she had a mere  
cold, or headache?"  
"Well, I don't know," replied Gilbert,  
laughing, while his bronzed face coloured  
with a lover's shame-faceness, which be-  
came him well—"I am afraid I—should  
be very much inclined to."

Lord Hartland rose and walked to the  
window. It was hard on him to have this  
just then—just when he wanted to find in  
Rosamund's betrothed only the jolly,  
rollicking, underbred good fellow, and to  
forget all that it was inconvenient to re-  
member of anything else. When apart  
from the lovers, and more especially when  
in Lady Julia's company, he could almost  
persuade himself that a man of Gilbert's  
temperament, with no refined feelings nor  
acute perceptions, could not in the nature  
of things appreciate his cousin, and it need  
not therefore be feared that more than his  
importance and his self-complacency  
would suffer were she to give him up.

In the depths of his own heart, to be  
sure, confidence would occasionally falter;  
but he liked to hear his aunt say as much,  
and could, at times, almost work upon  
himself to agree with her. Then would  
come some little word, or acknowledgement  
such as the above, to undo all, and  
cause a moment or two of acute agony.  
He would not show his face during such a  
moment.

"Since the facts are adverse, I suppose  
I must give in however," quoth Gilbert,  
presently. "There's no fighting against  
fate; and of course I would not be such  
a selfish brute as to do anything to worry  
Rosamund. I daresay she is best left alone  
—only I thought that perhaps she—she  
won't fancy I am neglecting her, will she?"

"Certainly not. I will take care of  
that," replied her cousin, steadying his  
voice as best he could, with all Lady Julia's  
assurances and asseverations ringing in his  
ears. "And I really think, Gilbert—I  
really think that she is better left undis-  
turbed, and that it is her own wish to be  
so. Invalids, you know, have their  
fancies," still painfully evasive of Gilbert's  
eye, "and Rosamund is undoubtedly far  
from well. The doctor told me so him-  
self. He said these nervous attacks were  
not to be trifled with."

"To be sure they are not. I have no  
doubt the doctor knows best, and will  
bring her round all right presently," re-  
plied the disconsolate lover, endeavouring  
to recover himself. "I am thankful to  
say I don't know what nerves are. There  
are no such things as nerves in our family,  
are there, girls?"

"No, indeed," laughed they.  
"I wonder what our old mother would  
say to a girl of eighteen having nervous  
attacks," proceeded their brother. "I say  
you two, we must keep it dark from her  
about this, mind."

"I had thought of that already brother,"  
replied Emily, "and though I wrote home  
this morning, I said nothing about it.  
Mother wouldn't understand; except that,  
of course Lady Caroline's death—"

"To be sure, yes; we must make the  
most of Lady Caroline's death," assented  
he, cheerfully. "Now, if every one's  
done, we'll go to the billiard-room. Come  
girls, I say, you two, it's like old times  
to have you hanging about one again,"  
and he tucked an arm through that of  
each sister, and led the way.

He played well, as he did most things.  
His swift, clean canons, straight hazards,  
and the manner in which he left his balls  
disposed for the succeeding stroke, speedily  
showed him a much greater proficient than  
his opponent, who scored his highest

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