

THREE ETON BOYS.

BY W. E. NORRIS.

"I had the pleasure of being rather intimately acquainted with Lady Bracknell some years ago," replied Jim, grimly.

"Oh, yes, of course. Well, she'll be very glad to see you again. Come and dine with us some evening. I expect we're pretty deeply engaged just now, but I'll drop you a line."

When Jim had departed, I could not help remarking, "It must be very convenient to have such a bad memory as yours."

Bracknell was apparently preoccupied. "Bad memory? How do you mean?" he asked. "Oh, I see! But it would be more to the purpose to pity Leigh for having such a confoundedly good one, wouldn't it? He looked as sulky as a bear. I say, Maynard, will you do me a small favor?"

"That depends on what it may be," I answered.

"Oh, it isn't much of a one. You know the editor of the Piccadilly Gazette, don't you? Well, just run your eye over this paragraph that he has put into his scurrilous paper."

He drew a newspaper from his pocket and pointed to the following oracular announcement:

"A certain noble earl is not quite so enfeebled in intelligence as is sometimes supposed. Not satisfied with knowing that his son is heir presumptive to a vast estate, he is moving heaven and earth to get his daughter married to the present holder thereof; so that, in case of the advent of an heir apparent upon the scene, the property may at least remain in the family. And yet the heir presumptive is not happy, they say."

"I don't want Alf Beauchamp to read that sort of thing, you know," said Bracknell.

"I can well believe that you don't," I answered; "but how do you propose to prevent him from reading it, since it is already in print?"

"Oh, that's nothing. Very likely he won't see it; and if he does see it, the odds are that he won't understand. What I want is to stop this newspaper brute from speaking more plainly. You might be a good fellow and manage it for me. Tell him we'll invite him to dinner if he likes, and if that won't do, find out what will do. I suppose he has his price."

"Very likely he has," I answered, "and I am much flattered by your intrusting me with this delicate mission. But I am like the editor—I demand my quid pro quo, and if I do this for you, you will have to do something for me."

"With all the pleasure in life; but it isn't much that I can do for any man, except ask him to dinner."

"You can do a little more for Jim Leigh, whom I think you will admit that you have treated rather badly. First of all, you can beg his pardon. Is that too bitter a pill for you to swallow?"

"Oh, I'll beg his pardon, if it will make him any happier," answered Bracknell, laughing.

"Secondly, you must promise that you will neither ask him to play cards with you nor borrow money of him."

Bracknell opened his eyes. "Do you know, Maynard," said he, "that that is not very far removed from being an impertinent request?"

I replied that I might have said much the same thing of the request which he had addressed to me. Anyhow, I must have his promise, or I should not go to the office of the Piccadilly Gazette.

So he laughed again and gave the required pledge, and went his way, leaving me somewhat reassured as to Jim's future. Lady Bracknell, I knew, would try to make him fall in love with her again; but I was not much afraid of her succeeding. Clever as she was, she was not quite clever enough to understand that the surest way of disgracing Jim would be to show him that she was no more true to the husband whom she had chosen than she had been in days gone by to himself.

CHAPTER VIII.

One morning not long after this, Jim did me the honor to breakfast with me, and gave me an account of his first interview with Lady Bracknell, which amused me very much and contrasted favorably in point of style with his epistolary efforts.

"I thought," said he, "that I had better call and get it over; so I went to Wilton place about 8 o'clock in the afternoon, hoping that she would be in the park and that I might leave my card and retire. But as she was at home, I had to march into the drawing room, feeling a little shy and awkward, don't you know, as one does after spending such a long time out of reach of civilization. I dare say I got rather red in the face, and I was horribly conscious that my boots squeaked. There were a lot of men in the room, young fellows with bouquets in their buttonholes and very high collars—I hear you call them 'mashers' nowadays—and they all opened their eyes and mouths at me, which was like their impudence. I confess that they made me uncomfortable at first; but after a bit I recollected that if I had ordered the eldest of them to run up to the Brocas for me eight or nine years ago he would have put his best leg foremost, and that set me more at my ease. Besides, I almost forgot them from the moment that Hilda began to talk to me. My dear Harry, what an extraordinary—what a miraculous change! You never prepared me for anything of the sort."

"I told you that her hair had become debased from gold to copper," I remarked. "If I didn't prepare you for any more startling change, it was because I must own that I can't detect any."

"Can't detect any? Do you mean to tell me that Lady Bracknell is the same woman as Hilda Turner? Oh, I know what you are grinning at; you think the change is in me, and that there never was any such person as the Hilda whom I was in love with. Perhaps you are right; but for all that, she has transformed herself into something very unlike what she used to be. She doesn't look a day older, and speaking impartially—as I can now—I should say that she is prettier, if anything; but oh, dear! I didn't like her ways of going on at all. She is quite the modern great lady; she has all the fashionable slang at the tip of her tongue; and she

said things which—which—well, I hate to hear ladies say such things. And it struck me that the mashers were anything but respectful to her. As I listened to her, I wondered how I could ever have been such an idiot—but no matter! You said she wouldn't fascinate me, and most certainly she didn't. I am quite cured. Harry, and

I suppose I ought to be very glad, but when one has nursed a complaint for years, it makes one feel rather queer to lose it all of a sudden. The sensation is something like having a double tooth out. It's a good riddance, of course; but it seems to leave an enormous gap behind it. Well, those young swells took themselves off, one by one, until she and I were left alone, and then—do you know what she did then?"

"To be sure I do," I replied. "She drew her chair close up to yours, put her head a little on one side, gazed pensively at you, and presently gave you to understand that you were the only man whom she had ever loved with pure affection."

"Oh, no; she didn't go quite that length; though I must say—However, perhaps I ought not to tell you."

"I do not see the use of having a tried and trusted friend if he is not to be let into your confidence. I think you decidedly ought to tell me what she did," said I. For I wanted to know.

"Well," Jim continued, "she began by abusing Bracknell—said he was a drunkard and a spendthrift, and that he ill treated her, and I don't know what all. Fancy a woman speaking about her husband like that!"

Evidently this was a new and distasteful experience to Jim. "Perhaps it was true, though," I suggested.

"If it was, she ought to have been the last person to say so," returned that hard-hearted Jim. "But, between ourselves, I don't believe it was true. She has told me untruths before now, and why shouldn't she tell them again? I tried to stop her; but it wasn't a bit of good. She went on about her marriage having been a mistake, and about her having been drawn into it and having repented when it was too late, and so forth. Do you suppose she says that sort of thing to everybody?"

I replied that I really didn't know; but that probably she endeavored to suit her conversation to her auditor.

"Her conversation didn't suit me, at all events," returned Jim, emphatically. And then he told me how Bracknell had begged his pardon in a very frank and manly way for the wrong that he had done him six years before.

"I went to call at Portman square the next day," he continued. "Poor old Lord Staines was always kind to me when I was a boy, and I think it amused him to hear all about my adventures. He wanted to know whether I had seen little Sunning yet, and began to brag about the boy and his pluck and his beauty very much as he used to brag about Bracknell long ago. Poor old fellow! It was rather sad to hear him say that. He said, 'I hope you and Bracknell have made it up,' and when I told him that we had, he muttered, 'That's right—that's right. Old friends oughtn't to quarrel about a woman. Women aren't worth quarreling about.' After which he pushed his chair back and made a little bow to Lady Mildred. 'I don't mean you, my dear,' he said; 'you're worth your weight in gold, as everybody knows. I remember your mother used always to be telling me that Lady Mildred was perfection, but somehow I never noticed in those days how pretty she was. I suppose I had only eyes for one person then. Ah! well, times are changed. I'd very much rather talk to Lady Mildred than to Lady Bracknell now. I had a long chat with her while her father dozed over the newspaper. It was pleasant to find that she hadn't forgotten me at all, though she said she would hardly have known me with my beard, which she didn't consider an improvement."

"Is that why you have shaved it off?" I inquired; for indeed Jim's long thin face had been deprived of that ornament.

"Oh, well, one doesn't want to look more like a backwoodsman than one can help, you know," he answered. "As I was saying, Lady Mildred and I had a good talk and discussed you all, and enjoyed ourselves very much, until one of Lady Bracknell's mashers came in and interrupted us. A fellow called Beauchamp; do you know anything of him?"

"Alfred Beauchamp," I replied, "is a young man whom everybody knows something about, by reason of his being quite in the front rank of eligible bachelors. His rent roll is said to exceed £40,000 a year; also he has coal mines, which, I believe, are expected to go on increasing in value. He is the only surviving son of the late Lady Staines' brother, and in the event of his dying without issue, the whole of his property would pass to Bracknell. As it would be dangerous to count upon his doing anything so obliging as that, the family have decided to marry him to Lady Mildred; only I imagine they haven't ventured to tell him so, because, of course, he is his own master, and he might insist upon his right to choose a wife for himself. Did Lady Mildred receive him well?"

"I don't know what you call receiving him well," answered Jim, looking a little displeased. "She was civil to him, but I didn't stay long after he came in. I must say he struck me as being rather a young fool and certainly not good enough for her. Do you suppose that she wants to marry him?"

"Lady Mildred is a dutiful daughter," I replied, "and Lord Staines is notoriously in embarrassed circumstances. I can't say for certain what she may want, but I think I can form a pretty shrewd guess at what she will have to do. She is not so very much to be pitied, after all. There are very few girls in London who would refuse Alfred Beauchamp, I can tell you."

"Ah, you're just what you used to be!" exclaimed Jim, impatiently. "Why should you always take such a delight in representing that everybody is selfish and sordid?"

I pointed out that I had made no such general arraignment; and that so far as Lady Mildred was concerned, I had meant to imply that, if she married her cousin, she would probably do so from motives of filial and disinterested affection; but Jim did not seem disposed to listen to me.

"I dare say you know more about it than I do," he interrupted. "Anyhow, it's no business of mine."

I did not tell him that I had reason to doubt whether poor Lady Mildred would be happy with Beauchamp. My mother still maintained that the girl's heart had been given past recalling to Jim; but it would have been a pity to hint at such a state of things; because he was evidently a little smitten with her, and it was quite certain that she could not now accept him, whether he wore a beard or not. So I agreed with him that these projected marriages in high life did not concern humble individuals like ourselves, and suggested, by way of changing the subject, that we should drive up to Lord's to see the Eton and Harrow match, as we had previously arranged to do.

Jim and I threaded our way, grumbling, through the deep fringe of spectators, whose persons and vehicles effectually prevented us from catching a glimpse of the game, and, having been provided with tickets by a member, were about to turn these to account when we were arrested by hearing our names called out in a high, clear voice which was familiar to both of us. From the open carriage in which she

was sitting, surrounded, as usual, by fashionable frontiers, Lady Bracknell beckoned us to approach, and we could not do otherwise than obey her orders. Her ladyship was clad in Eton blue from the crown of her head to the sole of her foot, and very becoming the color was to her. She attacked Jim at once.

"Come and talk to me," she said; "I have a thousand things to ask you. You don't want to look at that stupid cricket, do you?"

Jim, with a self-assertion for which I should not have given him credit, replied, "Well, I came here for that purpose." But probably the reluctance of the fly acts as an agreeable stimulus upon the spider.

"You shall go and look at it presently," Hilda said, and signed to him to get in the carriage beside her.

So I left them together and strolled on, feeling truly sorry for poor Jim, because I am sure that it must be a most unpleasant thing to be obliged to talk to a woman with whom you have once been madly in love and whom you love no longer.

I had not proceeded very far before I came upon the Staines party—old Lord Staines lying back in his carriage, propped up by cushions which kept slipping down and demanded careful watching on the part of Lady Mildred; little Lord Sunning, standing upon his grandfather's knee to get a better view of the game; and Alfred Beauchamp, leaning over the carriage door and blowing cigarette smoke into his cousin's face.

I stopped to speak to them, and Lord Staines said, "So your friend Leigh is back again at last, is he?—back at last, eh? Stupid fellow! If he had stayed at home, he'd have got over his disappointment sooner and thanked Heaven for it. I see more than that young woman fancies—more than she fancies by a long way."

The old gentleman had contracted a disquieting habit of thinking aloud. He went on muttering to himself now, and I dare say that if his remarks had been audible, they would have been found to be uncomplimentary to his daughter-in-law, whom he detested; but who, nevertheless, had reduced him to a state of tolerably complete subjection. Lady Mildred looked a little nervous, I thought, and went on talking very fast to Beauchamp, a fair complexioned young man, whose conversational powers were not brilliant, yet who was by no means such a fool as Jim had hastily assumed him to be. It struck me that he was bringing his mind to bear upon the thought that it might be a good thing if he were to marry his cousin and that he was succeeding very fairly well.

However, his attentions, if such they were, were soon interrupted. Little Sunning, who was rather a friend of mine, had clambered from his grandfather's knee on to my shoulder and had just dealt a resounding blow upon the top of my hat, by way of applause to a retiring batsman, when a vision of sky blue flitted before my eyes, and a high pitched voice (I forget whether I have mentioned that Hilda's voice had a metallic ring which no efforts on her part availed to soften) said: "You are a nice sort of a person to make appointments with, Mr. Beauchamp! May I ask whether you remember begging me to bring you here to-day? And are you aware that I kept the carriage waiting for you three-quarters of an hour?"

And then I heard Beauchamp murmuring excuses from the background. "By Jove! Lady Bracknell, I'm so awfully sorry. What an idiot I am! Can't think how I came to forget it!"

There was an indistinct rejoinder, followed by a gradual dying away of both voices, from which I concluded that her ladyship had taken the young man by the ear and led him off. Having persuaded Sunning that he would be more comfortable, and that I should be cooler, if he got up on to the box, and having thus regained the power of turning my head round, I perceived that Jim had taken Beauchamp's place and was conversing with Lady Mildred, whose eyes had grown perceptibly brighter during the last few minutes. She certainly looked very pretty in her white dress, and I could not wonder at the satisfaction which Jim obviously derived from gazing at her; but it was unlucky, to say the least of it, that he should have taken such a long time to discover her beauty. Six years before, when Alfred Beauchamp had had a father and an elder brother living, there might have been some hope for him; but his chance was now represented by a zero of a type so clear that one could only hope he might be enough of a reasonable being to see it. Reasonableness, however, was not his distinguishing characteristic.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

Never Falls.

Rev. PRINCE—The tide waits for no man, my young friend.
Merritt—So they say. Still, when one lies down on the sands, it seems to wait till he's asleep.—Life.

A Practical Test.

"Mamma, dear, do you know you've got twenty-nine pins in the back of your dress?"
"Good gracious, child, how do you know?"
"Why, I've just pulled them out."—Pick-Me-Up.

HE FIGURES IN FICTION.

The Original of Dickens' Inspector Bucket Still Alive.

James Tuckett, formerly inspector of the detective department of Scotland Yard, London, has been making a long visit to friends in San Sualto, Cal. The ex-inspector, who is now eighty-two years of age, rose from the ranks as an ordinary constable to the position which he afterward held. His work was so good that he was repeatedly promoted, and he became one of the famous "Bow street runners" before the special department of detective police was established at Scotland Yard.

Mr. Tuckett was one of the characters in Dickens' famous story "Bleak House," where he figures as Inspector Bucket.

In a pleasant chat with a San Francisco Chronicle reporter he said: "My happiest reminiscences are connected with my association with the famous novelist, who at the time I first made his acquaintance was writing his 'Sketches by Boz.' The first time I saw him he was prowling around Golden square, Soho, in a suspicious manner, and I followed him and asked his business. He said he was in search of material for newspaper stories, and he thought no wider or more prolific field could be found than in the great metropolis. He was a quiet, unassuming young man then, but he interested me very much by his flashes of wit and the evident acquaintance which he had with the substrata of London life.

"For years after our first meeting, and until I became inspector at Scotland Yard, he regularly met me at the station or left word where I could meet him, and together we have visited every quarter of London, from Connaught square to the slums of Limehouse hole and Ratcliffe highway, and every den and hole on the river side. At times we would enter the dens of thieves and evil characters of all kinds, and the early morning dawn would find us at my post to report, with scarcely a word said between us; but all the time, furtively glancing at his face, I could see how profoundly he was impressed by all that we both saw and heard, and I knew instinctively that he was quietly gathering material and storing it away for future use in those wonderful novels of his which have made his undying fame.

"To most men he was silent, but with me, after a tramp of eight or ten miles, when I was released from duty he, accompanying me to my home in the old Kent road, would make my flesh creep with his vivid epitome of what we had seen. Our friendship grew very strong as the years rolled on, and when fame and fortune came to him and I had ceased active duty and was a welcome guest at Gad's Hill, we would together revisit the old haunts and recall earlier days.

"The last time we were together on a tour of this kind was when he was writing the unfinished story of 'Edwin Drood,' and then he confined himself entirely to the Thames shore, on the north and south sides, below Waterloo bridge. On Wednesdays I was always relieved from duty early in the evening, and it was a custom for my good wife to have 'tripe and trotters' for supper, of which dish Dickens was particularly fond. He invariably dropped in just as the meal was ready and sat at the table with us. His pet was my little daughter Emily, now married and living in Australia."

Out of Work.

At a rough estimate 12,000 young women were thrown out of employment the last of the year from the retail dry goods stores of New York city. One firm alone dismissed 1,109 women and girls and another 700. These unfortunate little martyrs of commerce and circumstances were for the most part "extras," hired in November and December for the holiday trade at salaries that barely paid for car fare, lunches and the wear and tear of clothing. One manager, when approached on the subject, said: "I was ashamed to tell a girl who wanted an engagement the wages, and so dismissed her. It was less than her living would cost. And yet, what can I do? If women offer to come here to clerk for fifty cents a day why should I offer her \$1?"

The trouble is women do not properly value themselves. They are alone in the world, dependent on their own energies; they want a chance, a footing, an opening—anything that will enable a beginning. In their desperation they will work for almost nothing, and once in a position, have not the bravery to assert themselves by properly valuing their services. Time goes on, the starvation wages are accepted, and not only does the individual suffer, but the whole community of labor is affected by the lower standard of resulting prices.

What the working girls of New York need is less poetry, less kitchen gardening, less aestheticism, less patronage, and a regular lecture on business tactics. She has no library, she does not take a newspaper, and if she is to know her worth the value of honest, earnest labor and the relation her skill and industry bear to capital, she must be instructed by sermon, speech or address. As it is, she is groping in the dark and growing the plant of experience for herself, but it is sad gardening, for there are thorns instead of fruit, and in the leaves is poison.—New York World.

Avoiding a Shock.

"Come, Slowpay," said one of his creditors appealingly, "why don't you pay me that little bill you have owed for the last five years?"

"Simply out of consideration for you, my dear fellow," said Slowpay. "Your family physician told me years ago that you were subject to heart disease."—Somerville Journal.

Qualified.

"Hello, Lamb, are you still striking it rich in Wall street?"
"No, in fact, I lost all I had there!"
"I'm sorry for that. What are you doing now?"

"Just now I'm writing 'Tips for Speculators' for the daily press."—Life.

An Intelligent but Predatory Cow.

I once lived in a village where one-half the inhabitants kept cows, and expected them to forage their living off the other half. Finding the usual gate fastenings of no avail, I added a bolt, and slept that night secure. The next morning every cow in the village was in my garden, and so full of cabbages that cost me two dollars a head to raise that they could not go through the gate, and I had to knock down a panel of fence to let them out. That night I added a log chain and a patent padlock, and set up in company with a double barreled gun to watch the proceedings.

An old brindle she pirate came up and surveyed the house to make sure we were abed. Then she shook the gate and again surveyed the house. Next she went to work on the bolt with her tongue. In five minutes she had it drawn and started to come in. She looked surprised to find herself still on the outside. Half a dozen of her companions came up and surveyed the new jewelry. Then brindle broke a horn trying to lift the gate off its hinges.

They appeared to hold a council of war; then an old spotted gormand inserted a horn under the chain, lifted it over the post and the whole drove marched inside. I gave it up and took the gate off its hinges. I now raise all my vegetables at the market.—Exchange.

Maurice de Guerin and His Sister.

Five years before the volume containing the journal, letters and poems of Maurice de Guerin was published, the public had learned to know his sister Eugenie and delight in her wonderful letters. Indeed, Sainte-Beuve thought her genius equal, if not superior, to her brother's; but Matthew Arnold, to whom the English speaking world is indebted for a first introduction to the brother, says:

No one has a more profound respect for M. Sainte-Beuve's critical judgments than I have; but it seems to me that this particular judgment needs to be a little explained and guarded. In Maurice's special talent, which was a talent for interpreting nature, for finding words which incomparably render the subtlest impression which nature makes upon us, which brings the intimate life of nature wonderfully near to us, it seems to me that his sister was by no means his equal. She never, indeed, expresses herself without grace and intelligence; but her words, when she speaks of the life and appearances of nature, are in general but intellectual signs—they are not like her brother's—symbols equivalent with the thing symbolized.—Scribner's.

Use the Snakes to Bind the Sheaves.

Several parties were telling snake stories. Each one tried to tell a better snake story than the other, until finally the rivalry became so great that some of the story tellers began to diverge a little from the line of truth. Alex Barr was taking it all in, and when he thought the thing had gone about far enough he said:

"I'll never forget the year the rattlesnakes were so bad down in Clarion county. It was awful. I remember one day a number of us were harvesting wheat, and as the men went along with their cradles they cut the heads off of two or three rattlers at every stroke."

"Great heavens!" exclaimed a bystander. "I would have thought that the stench of so many dead snakes lying around would have given everybody the cholera. What did you do with the carcasses?"

"Well," replied Mr. Barr, "we used the snakes to bind the sheaves with, and when thrashing time came we took them off, rendered the fat out and sold it for soap grease."

That concluded the snake stories for the day.—Punxsutawney Spirit.

Cleared by Opening a Grave.

A gentleman who had lived for a considerable time out of the country died apparently a few days after his return. It was alleged that his decease had followed suspiciously near the eating of a pudding prepared by his stepmother. She was hence arrested and charged with his murder. The grave was opened for the purpose of making an analysis of the contents of the man's stomach. It was then discovered that the man had turned completely over in his coffin and was lying on his face. He had been buried alive. This evidence of the cause of death was of course conclusive, and the woman was released.—Yankee Blade.

Never mix pansies with other flowers, they are a thousand times more lovely by themselves; indeed most flowers are.

A German geologist estimates the Dead sea will be one mass of salt within less than 500 years.