

ace
star

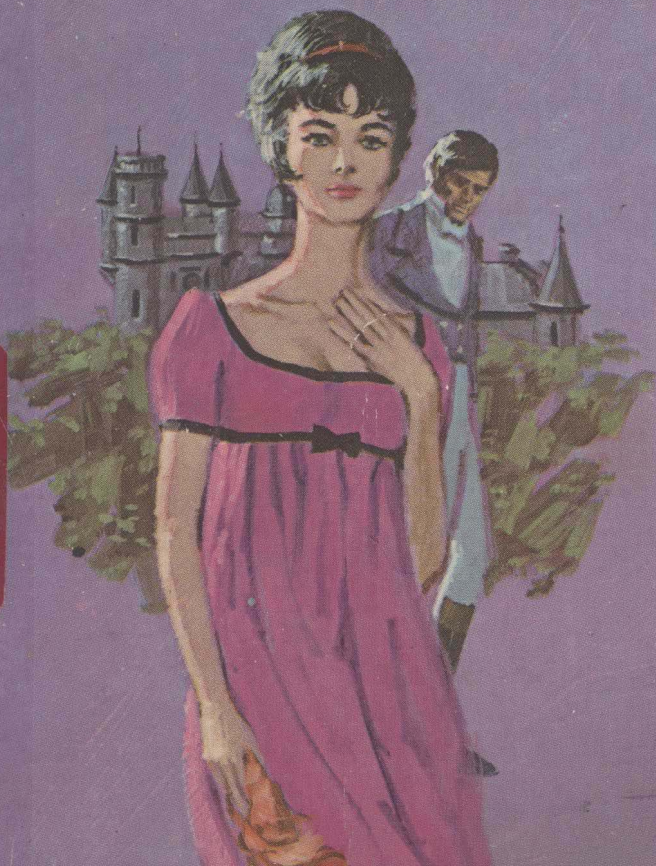
69891

75¢

Georgette Heyer

Author of *The Grand Sophy*,
Venetia, *April Lady*, *Arabella*, etc.

THE QUIET GENTLEMAN



The Earl slipped his arm behind her, and raised the hand he was still holding to his lips. "You guessed it all didn't you, you most wise and foolish Miss Morville?"

Miss Morville, finding his shoulder so invitingly close, was glad to rest her head against it. Her overstrained nerves then found relief in a burst of tears. But as the Earl chose to kiss her at this moment, she was obliged to stop crying, the merest civility compelling her to return his embrace. . . .

"Georgette Heyer is the author of some of the most amusing contributions to the comedy of manners on record. She performs, with lightly touched nimbleness, an astonishing feat of costume camouflage."

—*Chicago Sunday Tribune*

***Also by the Author:**

THE GRAND SOPHY

VENETIA

APRIL LADY

SPRIG MUSLIN

SYLVESTER, THE WICKED UNCLE

THE RELUCTANT WIDOW

ARABELLA

***Available in ACE STAR editions**

*The Quiet
Gentleman*

by

GEORGETTE HEYER

ACE BOOKS, INC.
1120 Avenue of the Americas
New York, New York 10036

First Publication, 1951

THE QUIET GENTLEMAN

Copyright © 1951 by Georgette Heyer.

All rights reserved. This book, or parts thereof, may not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher.

**An ACE STAR BOOK,
by arrangement with G. P. Putnam's Sons**

Printed in the U.S.A.



CHAPTER I

IN the guide-books it figured as Stanyon Castle; on the tongues of the villagers, it was the Castle; the Polite World spoke of it as Stanyon, as it spoke of Woburn, and of Cheveley. It was situated in Lincolnshire, not very many miles from Grantham, rather nearer to Stamford: a locality considered by those who were more interested in the chase than in any particular grandeur of scenery to be admirable. It had more claim to be called a Castle than many another nobleman's seat. A mediaeval fortress, of which various not very interesting records were to be found in the muniment room, now used by Mr. Theodore Frant as an office, had previously stood upon the site; and such portions of the ancient building as had survived the passage of time had been incorporated into the Tudor manor which had succeeded the fortress. Later generations had enlarged and beautified the structure much as their fancies dictated, any difficulty of adding to the mansion being overcome by the designing of another court. The Frant who survived friendship with Bluff King Hal scandalized his generation by the lavish use of oak for wainscoting; his grandson, having enjoyed the advantages of travel, built a new wing, and embellished the old with gildings and painted ceilings; a later Frant, succumbing to the prevailing fashion, ran riot in the rococo style, created the Fountain Court, and was prevented only by death from attempting something of a still more grandiose conception; his heir, one of Mr. Walpole's more fervid adherents, reverted to the Gothick, and by the time an unlucky fall at a regular stitcher, when out with the Old Club, put a period to his career, no-

where in England could have been found such massive doors of oak, such ponderous iron latches, so many pointed, narrow windows, as at Stanyon.

The sixth Earl of St. Erth, possibly thinking that his principal seat already sprawled over too much ground, more probably prevented from adding a wing in the Palladian style by the straitened times in which he had the ill-fortune to live, contented himself with rebuilding the stables, papering a great many of the rooms, and installing a closed-stove in the enormous kitchen. This was declared by an embittered valet to be the only sign of modern civilization in the entire pile; but the head-cook, mistrusting modernity, allowed it to be used merely for the boiling of vegetables by one of his underlings, while he himself continued to preside over his furnace, with its antiquated ovens, its huge spits, and its iron cauldrons. Unaccustomed guests, wandering distractedly down ill-lit galleries, discovering stairs that led only to uncharted domestic regions, and arriving, flustered and exhausted, where they had been for long attended, had been known to express astonishment that anyone should choose to live in such a rabbit-warren when he owned two other and more convenient country residences. Neither of these, it was true, could boast of Great Halls, Minstrels' Galleries, Armouries, Towers, or Moats: on the other hand, no draughts whistled down their passages; no creeping chill arose from damp walls; and their chimneys very rarely smoked.

Neither the sixth Earl nor his second wife perceived anything amiss with Stanyon: the Earl because it was the home of his childhood, his lady because she had been bred in an even more inconvenient mansion in the bleak north, and would, in any event, have unhesitatingly bartered comfort for pomp, had she been offered a choice in the matter. The Earl's first wife had hated Stanyon. But the Earl's first wife, though admittedly a lady of birth and quite remarkable beauty, had proved herself to have been quite unworthy of the high position she was called upon to fill. Before her son was out of leading-strings, she ran away with a notorious rake. Her lord, cuckolded, betrayed, and turned into a laughing-stock, expunged her name from the family records, permitted no mention of her to be made within his walls, and scarcely thought himself avenged when he learned that she had died, three years after her flight, in conditions of distress and hardship. His steward and his housekeeper, both persons of sentiment, hoped that upon his deathbed he would remember her, and speak of her with a forgiving

tongue, for it seemed to them incredible that so gentle and lovely a lady should hold no place in his heart or memory. They even indulged their fancies by supposing that his overt dislike of his elder son was caused by the secret pangs the sight of the fair boy, who was indeed the image of his mother, caused him to feel. But if the Reverend Felix Clowne, my lord's Chaplain, was to be believed, the Earl's last coherent speech, forcibly phrased if feebly uttered, was a complaint that the wine he had commanded his valet to bring to his room was corked. He had earlier bestowed his blessing upon Martin, his younger son; he had had a kind word for Theodore, his nephew; he had taken punctilious leave of his lady; he had sent proper messages to his married daughter; but the names of his first wife and of his heir had not passed his lips. Nor had his heir arrived at Stanyon to attend his death-bed, although it was certain that Mr. Theodore Frant had sent a letter express to him in Flanders, warning him that his father's demise was imminent. Captain Viscount Desborough, as he then was styled, was at Mons, with his regiment, and it was conceivable that a high sense of his military duties had prevented him from applying for furlough at a moment when Napoleon was almost hourly expected to cross the frontier. But the seventh Earl, surviving a minor, but rather bloody, engagement at the village of Genappe, and a major engagement at Waterloo, still showed no disposition to return to the home of his ancestors. He sold out, but he remained on the Continent, reposing the fullest confidence in his cousin's ability to administer his estates. Not until twelve calendar months had passed since his father's death did his cousin, and the Dowager Countess, receive tidings from him that he was in England, and about to take possession of his inheritance. He wrote a very civil letter to his stepmother, informing her of the proposed date of his arrival at Stanyon, and enquiring in the politest way after her health, and the healths of his half-brother and sister. It was a very pretty letter, the Dowager allowed, but, she added, in unhopeful accents, his mother had had just such caressing ways, and had shown herself to be a Snake in the Bosom.

"I should perhaps warn you, ma'am, that my cousin will not relish animadversions upon the character of his mother," said Mr. Theodore Frant, a little tight-lipped. "In his presence, such remarks should be spared."

"My dear Theo," responded the Dowager, "it would be odd indeed if I were to be obliged to consult you on the observances of civility!" He bowed, and, because she cher-

ished no ill-will towards him, she said graciously: "Or anyone else, I am sure! In *this* house, Desborough—or, as I must learn to call him, St. Erth—may be sure of every attention called for by his consequence."

"Just so, ma'am," Mr. Frant said, bowing again.

"Providence has decreed that he should succeed to his dear father's honours," pronounced the Dowager, thinking poorly of Providence. "One might have supposed that military service in the Peninsula—a very unhealthy locality, I understand, setting aside the chances of Violent Death in an engagement, which cannot be altogether precluded—might have rendered the present occasion unnecessary. But it was not to be! Had my advice been sought, I should have considered myself bound to state that a military career, for one whom I should have had no hesitation in declaring to be far from robust, could be little short of Fatal! That, my dear Theo, I must have said, for, whatever must be my maternal feelings, if there be *one* thing upon which I pride myself it is my observance of my duty as a Christian! Happily, as it then seemed (though, according to the workings of an inscrutable fate, it now appears to be a circumstance of little moment), my advice was *not* sought. Since Lady Penistone chose to interest herself so particularly in her grandson, and my dear husband saw nothing objectionable in the connection, it was not for me to raise my voice. On her head, I said at the time, be the outcome! No doubt her ladyship is a good enough sort of a woman in her way: I do her the justice to acknowledge that she did *not*, as one might have feared she would, from the incurable levity of her behaviour, condone her unhappy daughter's misconduct: but if she petted and indulged Desborough from any other motive than a malicious desire to tease my poor husband I shall own myself astonished! A spiritless boy, I always thought him, with too much reserve to be pleasing. His career at Eton, you know, was quite undistinguished: a very odd sort of a soldier he must have been!"

"It is some years since you have seen my cousin, ma'am," Mr. Frant interposed, in a measured tone.

"I hope," said the Dowager, "I am not to be blamed for that! If Lady Penistone chose to invite the boy to stay with her during his school-vacations, and my lord to acquiesce in the arrangement, I take heaven to witness that it was by no expressed wish of mine that Desborough ceased to regard Stanyon as his natural home! On every head my conscience is easy: while he was a child I did my duty towards him; and I am determined now that as no word

of censure for his conduct in absenting himself from a beloved parent's obsequies shall be permitted to pass my lips, so also no mark of the respect due to the Head of the Family shall be unobserved. I shall receive him in the Hall."

This momentous decision being faithfully adhered to, a chilly afternoon in spring saw five persons assembled in what had once been the Great Hall of the Castle. The artistic energies of several generations had largely obliterated most of its original features, but the hammer-beams in its lofty roof remained, and a vast fireplace, made to accommodate the better part of several tree-trunks. The carved screens, having been discovered to have become worm-eaten, had been removed in a previous age, the apartment being thrown open to the vestibule, or entrance-hall, situated at right-angles to it. From this smaller apartment the Grand Staircase, erected in the latter half of the seventeenth century on a scale designed to allow some dozen persons to walk up it abreast, rose in one imposing flight to a broad half-landing, whence it branched to right and left, thus attaining the main gallery of the Castle. Several massive doors strengthened by applied iron-straps, besides the great front-door opposite to the staircase, opened on to the vestibule, a circumstance which added nothing to the comfort of the Hall, in itself a passage to a series of saloons beyond it. The heat thrown out by the logs burning in the fireplace was considerable, but was unavailing to prevent the draughts sweeping through the room. These seemed to come from all quarters, even the heavy curtains which had been drawn across the windows composing almost the entire long wall opposite the fireplace being continually stirred by them. It was dusk, and candles had been lit in the sconces as well as in the several candelabra which stood on the various tables. The little tongues of flame flickered continually, causing the wax to melt unevenly, and making it impossible for one of the persons assembled in the Hall to set the stitches in her embroidery with any degree of accuracy. Having twice changed her seat to no purpose, she folded the work, and replaced it in a tapestry-bag, drawing forth, in its stead, a prosaic piece of knitting, with which she proceeded to occupy herself, in the manner of one prepared to make the best, without comment, of adverse conditions.

The furnishings of the Hall might have been taken as an example of the heterogeneous nature of the whole Castle, few of the pieces which it contained having been chosen with any nicety of judgment. A fine refectory table, pushed

under the windows, and several carved oak chairs with wooden seats, were the only objects which bore any particular relation to their surroundings, the rest of the furniture consisting of pieces representative of every age and style, and including a modern and very ugly side-table, with a marble top, supported by brazen gryphons' heads. Two suits of armour of the surcoatless period guarded the entrance, and several shields, pikes, halberds, and gisarmes were arranged upon the wall above the high plaster mantel-piece. These were flanked by a full-length portrait of the late Earl, leaning negligently with one leg crossed over the other, against the shoulder of his horse; and a fine Battle-piece, of which the most noticeable features were the arresting figure of the commanding officer in the foreground, and the smoke issuing in woolly balls from the mouths of innumerable cannons.

Only one of the five persons gathered round the fireplace in expectation of the Earl's arrival seemed to be conscious of the discomfort of her situation, and she made no complaint, merely shifting her chair so that the leaping flames should not scorch her face, and pinning her shawl securely across her shoulders to protect them from the cold blast from the vestibule. The Dowager Countess, regally enthroned in a wing-chair, with her feet upon a stool, was indifferent to draughts; neither her son, Martin, moodily standing before the fire, and kicking at a smouldering log, nor Mr. Theodore Frant, engaged in snuffing a candle in the branch set in the centre of the refectory table, was aware of any unusual chilliness; and the Chaplain, seated at her ladyship's left hand, had long since become inured to the Spartan conditions prevailing at Stanyon, and had pronounced the gathering to be very snugly placed. This tribute earned him a gracious smile from the Dowager, who said that it had frequently been remarked that few fires gave out so fierce a heat as this one. She then desired Miss Morville, in a voice of mingled civility and condescension, to be so good as to run up to the Crimson Saloon, and to fetch from it a little hand-screen. Miss Morville at once laid aside her knitting, and departed on her errand; and, as though her absence released him from constraint, Martin looked up from his scowling scrutiny of the fire, and exclaimed: "This is a curst business! I wish it were well over! Why must we kick our heels here, waiting on *his* pleasure? The lord knows we don't want him! I have a very good mind to ride over to eat my mutton with Barnyl"

His cousin looked frowningly at him for a moment, but

said nothing. Another candle needed attention, and he dealt with it methodically. He was a powerfully built man, nearing his thirtieth birthday, with a resolute, rather square countenance, and a good deal of reserve in his manner. The cast of his features bore a certain resemblance to that of his young cousin's, but the likeness existed merely in the aquiline trend of the nose, the slightly heavy line of the jaw, and the set of the eyes under brows which overhung them enough to give a forbidding look to the face. The colour of his eyes was a clear, light gray, as cool and as inexpressive as lake-water; his mouth, with its firmly closed lips, betrayed no secrets, but seemed to show that its owner, besides possessing resolution of character, knew how to keep his own counsel. His address was good, and his manner had all the quiet assurance of his breeding.

With Martin, it was otherwise. Every change of mood was reflected in his eyes, so dark a brown as to appear almost black, and in the sensitive curves of his full mouth. Six years younger than his cousin, he had not altogether thrown off the boy; and, from having been the idol of his mother and the pet of his father, he was a good deal spoiled, impatient of restraint, thrown into the sulks by trifling causes, and into wild rages by obstacles to his plans. Treated from his earliest youth as though he, and not his half-brother, had been his father's heir, it was not to be expected that he could face with equanimity the succession of the seventh Earl. A vague belief that his brother would not survive the rigours of the campaign in Spain had fostered in him the unexplored thought that he would one day step into his father's shoes; the emergence of the seventh Earl, unscathed, from the war found him unprepared, and filled him, when his first shocked incredulity had passed, with a sense of burning resentment. He had only a slight recollection of the brother seven years his senior, his memory retaining little beyond the impression of a fair, quiet boy, with a gentle manner, and a very soft voice; but he was sure that he would dislike him. He said, with a defiant glance cast in the direction of his impassive cousin: "I dare-say it is past six o'clock already! When are we to dine? If he thinks to bring townways to Stanyon, I for one won't bear it!"

"Do not put yourself about, my dear!" recommended his parent. "Dinner must for this once await his convenience, but with all his faults his disposition was always compliant. I assure you, I do not expect to find our style of living overset by any fashionable nonsense which he may have

learnt in Lady Penistone's establishment. *That* would not suit me at all, and I am not quite nobody at Stanyon, I believe!"

This announcement, being plainly in the nature of a pleasantry, caused Mr. Clowne to laugh a little, and to say: "Indeed your ladyship is not nobody! Such a whimsical fancy must really quite startle anyone unacquainted with those flashes of wit *we* know so well!" He encountered a sardonic look from Theodore, and added hastily: "How many years it is since I have had the pleasure of meeting his lordship! How much he will have to tell us of his experiences! I am sure we shall all hang upon his lips!"

"Hang upon his lips!" exclaimed Martin, with one of his fiery looks. "Ay! toad-eat him to the top of his bent! I shall not do so! I wish he were underground!"

"Take care what you say!" interposed his cousin sternly.

Martin flushed, looking a little conscious, but said in a sullen tone: "Well, I do wish it, but of course I don't mean anything! You need not be so quick to take me up!"

"Military anecdotes are never acceptable to me," said the Dowager, as though the brief interchange between the cousins had not occurred. "I have no intention of encouraging Desborough to enlarge upon his experiences in Spain. The reflections of a General must always be of value—though I fancy we have heard enough of the late war: those of a junior officer can only weary his auditors."

"You need feel no alarm on that score, ma'am," said Theodore. "My cousin has not altered so much!"

This was uttered so dryly that the Chaplain felt himself impelled to step into a possible breach. "Ah, Mr. Theodore, you remind us that you are the only one amongst us who can claim to know his lordship! *You* have frequently been meeting him, while *we*—"

"I have met him occasionally," interrupted Theodore. "His employment abroad has not made *frequent* meetings possible."

"Just so—precisely as I was about to remark! But you know him well enough to have a kindness for him!"

"I have always had a great kindness for him, sir."

The reappearance of Miss Morville, bearing a small fire-screen set upon an ebony stick, which she handed to the Dowager, created a timely diversion. The Dowager bestowed a smile upon her, saying that she was very much obliged to her. "I do not know how I shall bear to relinquish you to your worthy parents when they return from the Lakes, for I am sure I shall miss you excessively. My

daughter—Lady Grampound, you know—is for ever advising me to employ some genteel person to bear me company, and to run my little errands for me. If ever I should decide to do so I shall offer the post to *you*, I promise you!”

Miss Morville, not so swift as Mr. Clowne to recognize her ladyship’s wit, replied to this pleasantry in a practical spirit. “Well, it is very kind in you to think you would like to have me to live with you, ma’am,” she said, “but I do not think it would suit me, for I should not have nearly enough to do.”

“You like to be very busy, don’t you?” Theodore said, smiling at her in some amusement.

“Yes,” she replied, seating herself again in her chair, and resuming her knitting. She added thoughtfully: “It is to be hoped that I shall never be obliged to seek such a post, for my disposition is *not* meek, and would render me ineligible for any post but that, perhaps, of housekeeper.”

This prosaic observation appeared to daunt the company. A silence fell, which was broken by the ubiquitous Mr. Clowne, who said archly: “What do you think of, Miss Morville, while your hands are so busy? Or must we not seek to know?”

She looked rather surprised, but replied with the utmost readiness: “I was wondering whether I should not, after all, make the foot a little longer. When they are washed at home, you know, they don’t shrink; but it is sadly different at Cambridge! I should think the washerwomen there ought to be ashamed of themselves!”

Finding that this reflection evoked no response from the assembled company, she again applied herself to her work, and continued to be absorbed in it until Martin, who had quick ears, jerked up his head, and ejaculated: “A carriage! At last!”

At the same moment, an added draught informed the initiated that the door beyond the Grand Staircase had been opened; there was a subdued noise of bustle in the vestibule, and the sound of trampling hooves in the carriage-drive. Miss Morville finished knitting her row, folded the sock, and bestowed it neatly in the tapestry-bag. Though Martin nervously fingered his cravat, the Dowager betrayed by no sign that she had heard the sounds of an arrival. Mr. Clowne, taking his cue from her, lent a spuriously eager ear to the platitude which fell from her lips; and Theodore, glancing from one to the other, seemed to hesitate to put himself forward.

A murmur of voices from the vestibule indicated that

Abney, the butler, had thrown open the doors to receive his new master. Several persons, including the Steward, and a couple of footmen, were bowing, and falling back obsequiously; and in another instant a slim figure came into view. Only Miss Morville, seated in a chair with its back turned to the vestibule, was denied this first glimpse of the seventh Earl. Either from motives of good manners, or from lack of interest, she refrained from peeping round the back of her chair; and the Dowager, to mark her approbation, addressed another of her majestic platitudes to her.

All that could at first be seen of the seventh Earl was a classic profile, under the brim of a high-crowned beaver; a pair of gleaming Hessians, and a drab coat of many capes and graceful folds, which enveloped him from chin to ankle. His voice was heard: a soft voice, saying to the butler: "Thank you! Yes, I remember you very well: you are Abney. And you, I think, must be my steward. Perran, is it not? I am very glad to see you again."

He turned, as though aware of the eyes which watched him, and stood foursquare to the Hall, seeing his step-mother, her imposing form gowned in purple satin, a turban set upon her gray locks, her Roman nose elevated; his half-brother, standing scowling before the fireplace, one hand gripping the high mantelshelf, the other dug into the pocket of his satin breeches; his cousin, standing a little in the background, and slightly smiling at him; his Chaplain, torn between curiosity and his allegiance to the Dowager. He regarded them thoughtfully, while with one hand he removed the beaver from his head, and held it out, and with the other he relinquished his gloves and his cane into the care of a footman. His hat was reverently taken from him by Abney, who murmured: "Your coat, my lord!"

"My coat, yes: in a moment!" the Earl said, moving unhurriedly towards the Hall.

An instant Theodore hesitated, waiting for the Dowager or for Martin to make some sign; then he strode forward, with his hands held out, exclaiming: "Gervase, my dear fellow! Welcome!"

Martin, his affronted stare taking in the number of the capes of that drab coat, the high polish on the Hessian boots, the extravagant points of a shirt-collar, and the ordered waves of guinea-gold hair above a white brow, muttered audibly: "Good God! the fellow's nothing but a curst *dandy*!"

CHAPTER II

THE flicker of a quizzical look, cast in Martin's direction, betrayed that his half-brother had heard his involuntary exclamation. Before the ready flush had surged up to the roots of his hair, Gervase was no longer looking at him, but was shaking his cousin's hand, smiling at him, and saying: "How do you do, Theo? You see I *do* keep my promises: I have come!"

Theo held his slender hand an instant longer, pressing it slightly. "One year past! You are a villain!"

"Ah, yes, but you see I must have gone into black gloves, and really I could not bring myself to do so!" He drew his hand away, and advanced into the Hall, towards his stepmother's chair.

She did not rise, but she extended her hand to him. "Well, and so you have come at last, St. Erth! I am happy to see you here, though, to be sure, I scarcely expected ever to do so! I do not know why you could not have come before, but you were always a strange, whimsical creature, and I daresay I shall not find that you have changed."

"Dear ma'am, believe me, it is the greatest satisfaction to me to be able to perceive, at a glance, that *you* have not changed—not by so much as a hairsbreadth!" Gervase responded, bowing over her hand.

So sweetly were the words uttered, that everyone, except the Dowager, was left in doubt of their exact significance. The Dowager, who would have found it hard to believe that she could be the object of satire, was unmoved. "No, I fancy I do not alter," she said complacently. "No doubt, however, you see a great change in your brother."

"A great change," agreed Gervase, holding out his hand to Martin, and scanning him out of his smiling, blue eyes. "Can you be my little brother? It seems so unlikely! I should not have recognized you." He turned, offering hand and smile to the Chaplain. "But Mr. Clowne I must certainly have known anywhere! How do you do?"

The Chaplain, who, from the moment of the Earl's handing his hat to Abney, had stood staring at him as though he could not drag his eyes from his face, seemed to be a trifle shaken, and answered with much less than his usual

urbanity: "And I you, my lord! For one moment it was as though—Your lordship must forgive me! Memory serves one some strange tricks."

"You mean, I think, that I am very like my mother," said Gervase. "I am glad—though it is a resemblance which has brought upon me in the past much that I wish to forget."

"It has frequently been remarked," stated the Dowager, "that Martin is the very likeness of all the Frants."

"You are too severe, ma'am," said Gervase gently.

"Let me tell you, St. Erth, that if I favour the Frants I am devilish glad to hear it!" said Martin.

"Tell me anything you wish, my dear Martin!" said Gervase encouragingly.

His young relative was not unnaturally smitten to silence, and stood glaring at him. The Dowager said in a voice of displeasure: "I have the greatest dislike of such trifling talk as this. I shall make you known to Miss Morville, St. Erth."

Bows were exchanged; the Earl murmured that he was happy to make Miss Morville's acquaintance; and Miss Morville, accepting the civility with equanimity, pointed out to him, in a helpful spirit, that Abney was still waiting to relieve him of his driving-coat.

"Of course—yes!" said Gervase, allowing the butler to help him out of his coat, and standing revealed in all the fashionable elegance of dove-coloured pantaloons, and a silver-buttoned coat of blue superfine. A quizzing-glass hung on a black riband round his neck, and he raised this to one eye, seeming to observe, for the first time, the knee-breeches worn by his brother and his cousin, and the glory of his stepmother's low-cut gown of purple satin. "Oh, I am afraid I have kept you waiting for me!" he said apologetically. "Now what is to be done? Will you permit me, ma'am, to sit down to dinner in all my dirt, or shall I change my clothes while your dinner spoils?"

"It would take you an hour, I daresay!" Martin remarked, with a curling lip.

"Oh, more than that!" replied Gervase gravely.

"I am not, in general, an advocate for a man's sitting down to dine in his walking-dress," announced the Dowager. "I consider such a practice slovenly, and slovenliness I abhor! In certain cases it may be thought, however, to be allowable. We will dine immediately, Abney."

The Earl, taking up a position before the fire, beside his brother, drew a Sèvres snuff-box from his pocket, and,