

COUSIN PHILIP

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Cousin Philip by Mrs. Humphry Ward

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MRS. HUMPHRY WARD

COUSIN PHILIP

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Hope Mirrieus

OVER & ABOVE

J. E. Gurdon

THE PLAIN GIRL'S TALE

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TRUE LOVE

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COUSIN PHILIP

by

MRS HUMPHRY WARD

Author of 'Missing' etc.



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CHAPTER I

'I DON'T care a hang about the Middle Classes!' said Lord Buntingford, resting his head on his hand, and slowly drawing a pen over a printed sheet that lay before him. The sheet was headed, 'Middle Class Defence League,' and was an appeal to whom it might concern to join the founders of the league in an attempt to curb the growing rapacity of the working-classes. 'Why should we be snuffed out without a struggle,' said the circular. 'We are fewer, no doubt, but we are better educated. Our home traditions are infinitely superior. It is on the Middle Classes that the greatness of England depends.'

'Does it?' thought Lord Buntingford irritably. 'I wonder.'

He rose and began to pace his library, a shabby, comfortable room which he loved. The room, however, had distinction, like its master. The distinction came, perhaps, from its few pictures, of no great value, but witnessing to a certain taste and knowledge on the part of the persons, long since dead, who hung them there; from one or two cases of old Nankin; from its old books; and from a faded but enchanting piece of tapestry behind the cases of china, which seemed to represent a forest. The tapestry, which covered the whole of the end wall of the room, was faded and out of repair, but Lord Buntingford, who was a person of artistic sensibilities, was very fond of it, and had never

been able to make up his mind to spare it long enough to have it sent to the School of Art Needlework for mending. His cousin, Lady Cynthia Welwyn, scolded him periodically for his negligence in the matter. But after all it was he, and not Cynthia, who had to live in the room. She had something to do with the School, and of course wanted jobs for her workers.

'I hope that good woman's train will be punctual,' he thought to himself, presently, as he went to a window and drew up a blind. 'Otherwise I shall have no time to look at her before Helena arrives.'

He stood a while absently surveying the prospect outside. There was first of all a garden with some pleasant terraces, and flights of stone steps, planned originally in the grand style, but now rather dilapidated and ill-kept, suggesting either a general shortage of gardeners, or a shortage of pelf on the part of the owner—or perhaps mere neglect and indifference. Beyond the garden stretched a green rim of park, with a gleam of water in the middle distance which seemed to mean either a river or a pond, many fine scattered trees, and, girdling the whole, a line of wooded hill. Just such a view as any county—almost—in this beautiful England can produce. It was one of the first warm days of a belated spring. A fortnight before, park and hills and garden had been deep in snow. Now Nature, eager, and one might think ashamed, was rushing at her neglected work, determined to set the full spring going in a minimum of hours. The grass seemed to be growing, and the trees leafing, under the spectator's eyes. There was already a din of cuckoos in the park, and the nesting birds were busy.

The scene was both familiar and unfamiliar to Lord

Buntingford. He had been brought up in it as a child. But he had only inherited the Beechmark property from his uncle just before the war, and during almost the whole of the war he had been so hard at work, as a volunteer in the Admiralty, that he had never been able to do more than run down once or twice a year to see his agent, go over his home farm, and settle what timber was to be cut before the Government commandeered it. He was not yet demobilised, as his naval uniform showed. There was a good deal of work still to do in his particular office, and he was more than willing to do it. But in a few months' time, at any rate—he was just now taking a fortnight's leave—he would be once more at a loose end. That condition of things must be altered as soon as possible. When he looked back over the years of driving work through which he had just passed to years of semi-occupation before them, he shrank from those old conditions in disgust. Something must be found to which he could enslave himself again. Liberty was the great delusion—at least, for him.

Politics? Well, there was the House of Lords, and the possibility of some minor office, when his Admiralty work was done. And the whole post-war situation was only too breathless. But for a man who, as soon as he had said Yes, was immediately seized with an insensate desire to look once more at all the reasons which might have induced him to say No, there was no great temptation in politics. Work was what the nation wanted—not talk.

Agriculture and the Simple Life? Hardly! Five years of life in London, four of them under war conditions, had spoilt any taste for the country he had ever

possessed. He meant to do his duty by his estate, and by the miscellaneous crowd of people, returned soldiers and others, who seemed to wish to settle upon it. But to take the plunge seriously, to go in heart and soul for intensive culture or scientific dairy-farming, to spend lonely winters in the country with his bailiffs and tenants for company—it was no good talking about it—he knew it could not be done.

And—finally—what was the good of making plans at all?—with these new responsibilities which friendship and pity and weakness of will had lately led him to take upon himself? For two years at least he would not be able to plan his life in complete freedom.

His thoughts went dismally off in the new direction. As he turned away from the window, a long Venetian mirror close by reflected the image of a tall man in naval uniform, with a head and face that were striking rather than handsome—black curly hair just dusted with gray, a slight, chronic frown, remarkable blue eyes, and a short, silky beard. There was a slight foreign look about both the man and his beard. His legs were slender in proportion to the breadth of his shoulders, and inadequate in relation to the dignity of the head. One of them also was slightly—very slightly—lame.

He wandered restlessly round the room again, stopping every now and then with his hands in his pockets, to look at the books on the shelves. Generally, he did not take in what he was looking at, but in a moment less absent-minded than others, he happened to notice the name of a stately octavo volume just opposite his eyes—

‘Davison on Prophecy.’

‘Damn Davison!’ he said to himself, with sudden