

**CUTHBERT ST. ELME, M.P.,
OR, PASSAGES IN THE
LIFE OF A POLITICIAN. IN
THREE VOLUMES. VOL.III**

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Cuthbert St. Elme

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OF

A POLITICIAN.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III

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CUTHBERT ST. ELME, M.P.

CHAPTER I.

THE BEAUTY OF THE BALL.

THE great hall of the castle was thronged with a motley assemblage. Small gentry and their womankind, dressed in gorgeous colours, promenaded in groups, bent on pleasure and praising the young landlord and his hospitality. Musicians from a neighbouring town filled a gallery devoted for once to its original purpose; while clusters of minor dependants crowded the

entrance, sharing in the pleasure of their superiors.

To these latter Cuthbert specially devoted his attention. Though reserved in manner, the poor had learnt to appreciate his virtues; and they were not a little flattered that even in the midst of his equals he could appropriate some portion of his time to superintend their humbler comfort.

Lady Beaconsfield was at her post from the commencement of the festivities. Supported by Lady Elmwood and Edith, she moved from one group to another with a kind word for each, and gracefully adapting herself to the occasion.

In the country the part of a hostess is by no means without its cares. There guests are captious, and require peculiar attention. It is not enough to provide the entertainment. Partners are to be

obtained, jealousies to be conciliated, and the giver of the feast must also fulfil the duties of a master of the ceremonies.

The three ladies played their part to perfection. Edith, apparently undaunted by fatigue, danced with the most assiduous. The young gentlemen were servile to her smile, and the young ladies not envious of her superiority. The blooming blue-eyed Irish girls regarded her as being from a superior sphere. Their lovers even in their wildest dreams could never aspire to her favour; and they themselves could adopt the fashion of her dress without any sacrifice of dignity, such as would be involved in following the lead of an indigenous rival.

Neither were the gentlemen negligent of their duties. Edward, with heavy care and anxiety at his heart, forced his spirits to the utmost. He drank, not un-

willingly, with the men. He lavished compliments that brought pleased blushes to the cheeks of his lovely neighbours; while Burney, prevented by his lameness from taking part in the diversions of the ball room, presided at a round game established by some elderly spinsters in the library.

And Dawnay assumed the part best suited to his position. Avoiding all communication with his hosts, he retired with the two agents and Father Dennis to a whist table. From his countenance none could have divined the feelings that agitated his mind. But his partner was more than once astonished that a gentleman whose skill was so well known could be capable of such serious blunders.

It was late ere Norah appeared. Cuthbert was walking with Mrs. Burton on his arm as, after a moment's silence, a murmur

of admiration ran through the assembly. He stopped with his partner and turned his eyes towards the principal entrance. A lane was formed by the crowd that filled the ample doorway, and Norah entered resplendent in her beauty.

Her dress was magnificent. A rich dark sweeping velvet dress, relieved only by a fall of priceless lace, served to show her brilliant complexion. Jewels sparkled on her bosom and her head, interspersed with costly hothouse flowers. She walked majestically, bent on conquest. Her eyes shone with an unusual lustre. Her cheek was suffused with a colour that in the daylight would have appeared unnatural. "How very, very beautiful!" murmured Mrs. Burton.

With a shudder Cuthbert turned away.

"What is the matter?" asked anxiously his companion.

“Don't you see that hideous, ghastly face behind her? She may come to that some day.”

The clergyman's wife glanced to the doorway. Mrs. Tooley was there looking with hatred at the passing figure.