

**FIELDING; OR, SOCIETY.
ATTICUS; OR, THE RETIRED
STATESMAN; AND ST.
LAWRENCE. IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. II**

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Fielding; Or, Society. Atticus; Or, The Retired Statesman; And St. Lawrence. In Three Volumes.
Vol. II by R. Plumer Ward

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R. PLUMER WARD

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FIELDING;

OR,

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OR,

THE RETIRED STATESMAN;

AND

ST. LAWRENCE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"TREMINE" AND "DE VERE."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

PHILADELPHIA:

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1837.

FIELDING;

OR,

SOCIETY.

SECTION XIII.

FIELDING GOES TO A COUNTY BALL.

"I delight in masque and revels sometimes altogether."

TWELFTH NIGHT.

"They bid us to the English dancing school,
And teach lavoltas, high and swift corantos."

HENRY V.

THE evening came; the ball opened, and every heart beat high. Yes! D— House, or Carlton House, or Almacks may hold their heads up as high as they please! Neither grandeur, beauty, nobility, nor London elegance, can with all their charms equal the interest, and therefore the pleasure, kindled by a county ball. O! the dreams of partners; the bales of ribands and gauzes; the tailors and mantua makers; the sweetmeats and cold meats; the cooks and fiddlers; the purveyors and perfumers put in requisition! The innkeepers already counting their gains; the dancing-masters drilling their pupils; the universal agitation among the towns-people, particularly as to what set they may get into, and whether the country

families will be courteous, and not herd by themselves: all this, for a fortnight together, make the happy town, which is to be the scene of so much glory, one of the most instructive, as well as pleasant fields for a practical philosopher that can be imagined. The universality and equality of rights in the parties that are to meet, which can be controlled by no conventional obstructions, privileges of caste, or self-conferred importance, render the race open to all who choose to run. It comes but once a year; it is almost a Saturnalia. Hence, there is no room for disguise; the great appear in an undress; the little are little better for dressing; (I speak of their minds, not their bodies;)—and thus all is nature and genuine feeling. The touchstone of such a scene of action is finer than even May Fair can supply.

To begin with the higher orders, as in duty bound. They receive all the incense that is paid them as their due. They are worshipped *at first*; they sit under canopies, and on cloths of state; or for want of those an exclusive sofa does as well. They bend or unbend with or without affability, as the case may require, or the whim prompt: they get together and talk, or are silent and thought fine; or for a moment mix, and are gracious. At any rate they are observed of all, and look strange or look kind, and encourage or depress the gazing throng, who look upon them as superior beings. But all this, as I observed, *only at first*. Sooner or later, (sometimes very soon) the enchantment breaks, and having perused them, and got by heart every feature of their faces, every fold of their dress, and every turn of their carriage, the gazers are satisfied as to curiosity, and perhaps not a little as to self-love, at finding that my Lord, or my Lady, or Sir Harry, are very little different, and certainly very little better than themselves.

Dancing begins; the ceremonial among the great is interrupted; more equality is introduced; the youthful high are even criticised by the youthful low, who think themselves almost as good. Mr. Kitt, the fown dancing-master, is breathless in observing Lady Wilhelmina Grandborough's motions, and comparing her with Miss Amelia Nebbs, his favourite pupil, who has spread her

own and his fame beyond the purlieus of the town. At first he is struck with a certain *tournure*, and some new steps of Lady Wilhelmina, which he has not before witnessed. Then he begins to wonder if her ladyship was one of Monsieur Vestris' best scholars; and at last really begins to believe that Miss Amelia Nebbs is quite equal to Lady Wilhelmina in a gallopade, though, perhaps, inferior in a waltz!

But supper is announced. Alas! the high table is bespoke, occupied; each chair guarded by Lady Grandborough's footmen till the great personage shall arrive. But there have been other great personages all the while in the room, equal in rank, equal in importance, equal in following,—Lord and Lady Drelincourt! They will not mix with the Grandboroughs. The Lords are of opposite politics, and rivals for the county; the Ladies hate one another, because the Countess of Drelincourt feels herself better born, and thinks herself better ton than the Lady Grandborough; and the Lady Grandborough believes herself far handsomer than the Countess of Drelincourt.

“Non nostrum est inter vos;” but what shall prevent all these little strivings in the upper regions (though conducted with perfect good breeding,) from spreading among the lower with not quite so much good-humour? In fact, the whole evening through, rivalry of all kinds prevailed:—rivalry in beauty, rivalry in love, rivalry in dress, taste, accomplishments; rivalry in notice of the higher orders, and be sure in politics. This last, indeed, was pointedly visible in the great leaders of the assembly themselves; and many a smile, or attempt at one, was interrupted or turned into a frown, on the increase or decrease of the respective followings which each party had. The extraordinary condescensions of the Drelincourts to persons, though of little degree, who were influential at elections, was most amusing. The Earl waltzed himself out of breath with an “eminent” maltster's wife; while, on the other hand, the smart son of as “eminent” a clothier, was permitted to go *half down* a country dance with Lady Wilhelmina Grandborough, when the Lady declared she was so fatigued that she

could go no farther. Mem. Nevertheless, she afterwards stood up with a Mr. Fawknor, one of her own party, of whom more anon; and Mr. Kitt declared she was, in activity, almost equal to Miss Amelia Nebbs herself.

Was not this worth a journey from London to see? and shall any one say there is but one world in Great Britain? Notwithstanding, however, some heart burnings, and many dissimulations, there was, upon the whole, much nature, and a great deal, if not of happiness, at least of excitement. The county members were in high request, of course, almost equalling the two Earls; and their wives were in glory, for they were almost courted by the two Countesses. The latter even shared their sofas with them; and one, *it was said* (but this was never proved,) was overheard to say something about visiting town.

Being known by these extremely high people, I was exceeding well received by every body else, and thus was let a good deal into the play of all ranks, with much profit to my speculation; in which I was glad to see that the scale of happiness greatly preponderated. An ascetic, or stoic, might indeed say a great deal to show that it *ought not* to have done so; as the Memphian physician in *Zadig* wrote a book to prove that his eye *ought not* to have got well; but I was perfectly content with the fact, whatever its *morale*. Whether the happiness continued or not the next day, when all behaviours, looks, words, and deeds were reviewed and examined, I did not venture to inquire.

SECTION XIV.

A MAN OF FASHION IN THE COUNTRY.

"Seest thou not, I say, what a deformed thief this Fashion is! How giddily he turns about all the hot bloods between fourteen and five-and-twenty!

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

ONE character I met with unexpectedly at the ball, which I had indeed often contemplated before, and generally with surprise. Nor was it lessened upon the present occasion, when I beheld in close attendance upon Lady Grandborough's party, my old acquaintance William Fawknor. This was a man whom I always thought was made for better things, though he chose not to think so himself. He was a person indeed of merit, though of much higher degree in his own opinion, and perhaps in that of others, than his family, or original position in the world, whatever his aspirations, warranted him to expect. He had abilities; much polish; was imbued with literature enough to elevate him above commonplace; and tact enough to know where and when to display it to best advantage. His manners were soft and insinuating to his superiors; distant and high, and perhaps bordering upon dandyism, among his equals;—which was not at all the worse for his great and almost only object—high society. The highest and best that London could supply, was not too good for him. To do him justice, it was not mere title, nor the amplest wealth, if attended with vulgarity, that attracted him; but fashion, reputation, celebrity, refined luxury, and elegance. These were the deities of his idolatry.

As I lived much with him in London, and was even

in his confidence, I knew him, if not well, at least as well as one London idler knows another; and having witnessed many of his attainments, and what I thought his powers of mind when drawn out by accident (for nothing else could do it), I have been perfectly astonished to see how he could throw them all aside, considered as means of happiness, in order to pursue the bubble reputation, not as a leader of soldiers in the field, but of exclusives in a drawing-room. Whether the particular zest of this consisted in his having accomplished it with such slender natural means—being in effect one of a family scarcely ranking with gentlemen, and having little but a very moderate fortune; or whether there is in us a natural propensity, like other ruling passions, to prefer being eminent for what is called fashion, to the distinctions of arts or arms, learning or eloquence; certain it is, that Fawknor, not without merit, and having, from a certain quiet reserve of manners, been selected for his friend at College, by a nobleman of the first rank, suffered himself willingly to be transplanted into a soil where he originally had little business, but where he took root and flourished luxuriantly in appearance, though with little or no fruit.

With the fair though not imposing talents I have mentioned, he was to his country and his family absolutely lost. His original design of pursuing the bar, which just lasted long enough to make it too late to pursue the army, was given up without trial; his small capital was sunk, in order to enlarge his small income, so as to defray the expense (and barely so) of the life he had chosen.

To be the Duke of ——'s friend (he would have shuddered to be called his hanger on) contented his warmest ambition; because through it he enjoyed the gratifying privilege annexed to it (richer than gold,) of moving in the first circles. It was thus, and without blemish, except as to his total uselessness, that he passed, or lost the best ten years of life.

Had it not therefore been for the party he was in, a county ball was the last place in which I could have expected to meet him; but the fooling he was upon