



THE TROLLOPE SOCIETY TRIP TO BRUSSELS AND BRUGES

Friday 29th August – Tuesday 2nd September

The Eustace Diamonds Chapter 52 Mrs Carbuncle goes to the theatre

From July 1871 to February 1873 there ran serially in *The Fortnightly Review* that admirable tale *The Eustace Diamonds*. The novel was published in three volumes at the end of 1872, and far on in the second volume occur the following passages:

"... Mrs. Carbuncle was very fond of the play and made herself acquainted with every new piece as it came out. Every actor and actress of note on the stage was known to her, and she dealt freely in criticisms on their respective merits. The three ladies had a box at the Haymarket taken for this very evening, at which a new piece, 'The Noble Jilt,' from the hand of a very eminent author, was to be produced. Mrs. Carbuncle had talked a great deal about 'The Noble Jilt,' and could boast that she had discussed the merits of the two chief characters with the actor and actress who were to undertake them. Miss Talbot has assured her that Margaret was altogether impracticable, and Mrs. Carbuncle was quite of the same opinion. And as for the hero, Steinmark,—it was a part that no man could play so as to obtain the sympathy of an audience. There was a second hero,—a Flemish Count,—tame as rain-water, Mrs. Carbuncle said. She was very anxious for the success of the piece, which, as she said, had its merits; but she was sure that it wouldn't do. . . .

"Lucinda, also, was quite determined that she would see the new piece. She declared to her aunt, in Lizzie's presence, without a vestige of a smile, that it might be well to see how a jilt could behave herself, so as to do her work of jilting in any noble fashion. . . . She had no desire to stay at home in order that she might see Sir Griffin. 'I daresay the play may be very bad,' she said, 'but it can hardly be so bad as real life'

"The play, as a play, was a failure; at least so said Mrs. Carbuncle. The critics, on the next morning, were somewhat divided—not only in judgment but as to facts. Three or four of the papers declared that the audience were not only eulogistic but enthusiastic. One or two others averred that the piece fell very flatly. As it was not acted above four or five dozen times consecutively, it must be regarded as a failure. On their way home Mrs. Carbuncle declared that Minnie Talbot had done her very best with such a part as Margaret, but that the character afforded no scope for sympathy. 'A noble jilt, my dears,' said Mrs. Carbuncle eloquently, 'is a contradiction in terms. There can be no such thing. A woman, when she has once said the

word, is bound to stick to it. The delicacy of the female character should not admit of hesitation between two men. The idea is quite revolting.'

" ' But may not one have an idea of no man at all? ' asked Lucinda. ' Must that be revolting also?'

" 'Of course a young woman may entertain such an idea; though for my part I look upon it as unnatural.' . . .

" 'If she finds that she had made a mistake?' said Lucinda fiercely. ' Why shouldn't a young woman make a mistake as well as an old woman?'

" ' My dear, such mistakes, as you call them, always arise from fantastic notions. Look at this piece. Why does the lady jilt her lover? Not because she doesn't like him. She's just as fond of him as ever.'

" ' He's a stupid sort of fellow, and I think she was quite right,' said Lizzie. . . ."

In this way and more than twenty years after Bartley's letter was written, Trollope thought fit to introduce into a story almost the very words used by the old actor in condemning a play, whose existence could only have been known to half a dozen persons.

Michael Sadlier