

From the snobbish point of view, the guests were patently superior to the hosts. The club members seemed all drawn from the working realms of commerce and finance, but many of the guests were of the idle ornamental class. One could detect on all sides the effort of the new club to lift itself by hanging upon the swallow-tails of those who stood on a higher social plane. In splendour of white waistcoats, rigidity of shirt fronts, and exotic character of the flowers in their button-holes, the hosts could not be surpassed; but in the carriage of their heads, the tones of their voices, and the careless acceptance of their good dinner, the guests excelled. Seymour, looking round, saw several men he knew—men from White's and the Guards' Club, and the Foreign Office, younger sons like himself,—all well-brushed idle dogs, more or less masterless, who will follow any whistle, and make themselves agreeable with strangers. They are well-bred, nice dogs always. Next time you whistle, they may not come; but they will never bite the hand that has fed them.

Near to Seymour Charlton a youth of this type was thorough; enjoying himself. He talked to everyone with schoolboy familiarity, and endeavoured at all hazards to pull people's legs. Without being exactly a wag, he had acquired fame as the best of good companions. He was now asking impertinent questions of the red-faced man opposite.

"Why did you come back from Mexico and South America if you liked it so much?"

"I had done my work. I came home to rest."

"How could you tear yourself away from the Spanish ladies?"

The red-faced man had been talking of the voluptuous pasha-like existence of wealthy residents in the wicked South American cities.

"Tout passe, tout lasse. I'm not as young as I used to be. All I want now is a good dinner, a good cigar, and——"

"Don't you believe him," said another man. "Sir Gregory is a terrible chap. And haven't we got pretty ladies in London? You wait till you see the ladies at my supper to-night," and he laughed with self-satisfaction.

The red-faced man was Sir Gregory Stuart. He was squat, solid, heavy, with coarse sandy hair and moustache; his strong forehead and rather tired eyes gave one an impression