

CHAPTER LXII

THE RECOMPENSE

YOU have seen, perhaps, a man whose heart was weighted by a great woe. You have seen the eye darken, the soul sag, and the spirit congeal under the breath of an icy disaster. At ten-thirty of this particular evening Cowperwood, sitting alone in the library of his Michigan Avenue house, was brought face to face with the fact that he had lost. He had built so much on the cast of this single die. It was useless to say to himself that he could go into the council a week later with a modified ordinance or could wait until the storm had died out. He refused himself these consolations. Already he had battled so long and so vigorously, by every resource and subtlety which his mind had been able to devise. All week long on divers occasions he had stood in the council-chamber where the committee had been conducting its hearings. Small comfort to know that by suits, injunctions, appeals, and writs to intervene he could tie up this transit situation and leave it for years and years the prey of lawyers, the despair of the city, a hopeless muddle which would not be unraveled until he and his enemies should long be dead. This contest had been so long in the brewing, he had gone about it with such care years before. And now the enemy had been heartened by a great victory. His aldermen, powerful, hungry, fighting men all—like those picked soldiers of the ancient Roman emperors—ruthless, conscienceless, as desperate as himself, had in their last redoubt of personal privilege fallen, weakened, yielded. How could he hearten them to another struggle—how face the blazing wrath of a mighty populace that had once learned how to win? Others might enter here—Haeckelheimer, Fishel, any one of a half-dozen Eastern giants—and smooth out the ruffled surface of the angry sea that he had blown to