

you. His statement of the business has been read to you. It shows, what no other theory of the case could show, how the thing was really done. Lastly, it shows the absolute and complete innocence of my brother and of George. —Have you anything more to say, Sir Samuel ?

‘Nothing—except that I was misled by a statement concerning a profligate life among low companions, without which no suspicion could have fallen upon either of you gentlemen. It was’—he pointed to the unhappy Checkley—‘a vile and malignant falsehood. Do you hear, sir ? Vile and malignant. It only remains for us all to make such reparation as we may—nothing would suffice, I know, but such reparation as we can—by the expression of the shame and regret that we all feel.’

‘Athelstan,’ said his mother, ‘what can I say ? Oh ! what can I say ?’

Athelstan rose—during the long business he had sat motionless in the clients’ chair, his head in his hand. Now he rose and stepped over to his mother. ‘Hush !’ he said. ‘Not a word. It is all forgotten—all forgiven.’

But Hilda sank upon her knees and caught his hands.

‘George,’ said Sir Samuel, ‘forgive me. The case looked black against you at one time. It did indeed. Forgive me.’ He held out his hand.

Then there was great hand-shaking, embracing, and many tears. As for Checkley, he crept out and vanished in the retreat of his own room. ‘It is all over,’ he murmured—‘all over. I’ve lost four hundred pounds a year. That’s gone. All over—all over !’

Mr. Edmund Gray looked on this happy scene of family reconciliation with benevolence and smiles.

Family reconciliations must not be prolonged ; you cannot sit over a family reconciliation as over a bottle of port. It must be quickly despatched. Sir Samuel whispered to Hilda that they had better go.

‘Come,’ said Lady Dering. ‘We will all meet again this evening at Pembroke Square—and to-morrow evening—and on Wednesday afternoon.—Elsie, you are a witch and a sorceress and a wise woman. You said that Athelstan should give you away, and he will.—Brother, come with us. Leave Elsie to George.—Oh ! how handsome you are looking, my poor ill-used brother. Try to forgive us if you can.’