

Fiction.

LOVE vs. BARONET.

CHAPTER V.

EXTRICATION.

It was the evening of July the 23rd., and of the great fancy-dress ball at the residence of Major Dunscombe, which had for some time previously been the talk of the neighbourhood and had furnished employment to every costunnier and tailor in the district in preparing the fair maidens and gallant gentlemen for the important occasion. The old family mansion was ablaze with brilliancy from tower to foundation, and in the magnificent conservatory and throughout the grounds soft fairy lights and Japanese lanterns cast their gentle radiance on flower and plant, on tree and shrub. And carriage after carriage was now driving up the leafy avenue and depositing its quota of merry-makers under the massive stone drive-way.

The affair was given in honour of Sir James Francis Ashley, Bart., and the wealth and fashion of the whole county were represented at it. Not but that persons of distinction were present from other parts of the United Kingdom, and even from foreign lands. A glance over the list of *noms célèbres* as set forth in the three column report of the function in the *Dampshire Gazette* revealed such appellations as Herr Geil Essley, the eminent mathematician, who was described as a man of medium height, with a heavy sandy moustache and beard, who had come over from the continent expressly for the ball (the professor excited great amusement by the way by his English. He was a great student of slang, and not having advanced very far in that instructive portion of the English tongue his invariable expression when surprised or incredulous was "O, you hat petter go unt die!"); then there was M. Jacques Conseil, a short busy little man who held the position of French Minister at London; there was Mr. Dougald Ebby, the wealthy merchant of Glasgow, famous as an importer of American catsup, a particular friend of the major, and at the time on a business visit to Dampshire; there were Messrs. S. Mart and Reginald Fillsoon, two gay society young men from the Metropolis; there was Col. Charles Haskellton, an Ameri-

can residing in London, a tall thin man with a long neck, a generally idiotic expression, an awkward gait, a nasal accent and a great reputation as a talker; there was Mr. Beta Kay a college man fresh from Oxford; there was Tudor Patenack, of the great publishing firm of Morse, Mc-Laster and Patenack, a man of considerable renown as an essayist and authority on the old English poets, but whose personal appearance was scarcely calculated to give one an idea of the genius within; there were Milles. de Crétonne and Watte de Caisie, just from Paris; there was Herr Lefreu, another great scholar, and many others too numerous to mention.

And still they came. By half past nine the ball was in full swing, the merriment was at its highest, and to an onlooker the scene which the ball-room presented with its brilliant lighting, the gay costumes of the makers, the soft music of the band, and the sounds of mirth on every side, was one of surpassing interest. Major Dunscombe at times seemed in good spirits and moved around among his guests with light and happy tread, but again at others his brow clouded over and he became thoughtful, as he remembered that there was one person who was not there, one who he heartily wished were there, and this somewhat dampened his usual joviality and mirth. His amiable wife was in her element at a party, and was happy, but then she, unlike her husband the Major, had no feelings of regret at the absence of young Lieut. Fairbank which kept her from fully enjoying herself and making the best of this great opportunity to consummate the engagement between her daughter and the baronet. The latter, who was attired in a rich and elegant court costume of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, which set off to perfection his dark complexion, spent the whole of the early portion of the evening in wandering slowly in and out among the crowds of maskers trying in vain to find the fair Fanny, who on the contrary was doing everything she could to avoid him. Miss Dunscombe was almost in a frenzy of despair over the non-appearance of the lieutenant, whose tardiness she found it hard to understand. She wandered impatiently from room to room in the vain hope of discovering him among the merry-makers who thronged the apartments, moving lightly in the dance, or sitting in cozy corners