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WHICH IS HE ?

BARONET OR BUTLER.

ROMANCE OF THE DAY.

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CHAPTER IV.

AFTER DINNER.

"I love the twilight—your eyes grow softer then."

DINNER was over at the Hall, and the dining-room, in its lining of dark oak, glistened in the light of the wax candles that shone upon the polished walls and twinkled on the plate-adorned table.

The table groaned beneath the weight of silver and gold cups, and flagons, and various articles of plate; the boar's head, the family crest, graven on each. Sir Harry was particular about what he ate and drank, too, and was wont to enquire minutely into the turn of a plover's egg, or the browning of a *pate fois de gras*.

As for Roderick, a plain joint would please him as well as anything, and he would send his plate up for another cut off the huge ribs of beef with the greatest hardihood, and declining the messes with an air that had a great deal of John-Bull-contempt for French flimsies in it.

Sir Harry talked little, and Lady Mary not very much, so that the whole conversation fell between Rod and Ida Valor, who ate little, and seemed more interested in the flowers that rose beside her plate, than in the dinner, or the slight conversation that fluttered wearily between Roderick and his father.

Sir Harry's anger had somewhat blown over since the morning, but there was a slight stiffness in his manner and a curtness in his speech which showed that the fire was not extinguished, but smouldering.

Rod talked as usual. He was quick to forget, and his wildness had but little vice in it, and was patient of reproof. He had quite forgotten the mare.

When Lady Mary rose, and Roderick opened the door to allow the two ladies to pass into their elysium, the drawing room, Sir Harry settled himself in his chair, uttered the magic words—

"The port, Wilson," and, looking up, said, "Roderick, drink a glass of wine with me to-night, will you? I wish to speak with you."

"With pleasure, sir," replied Roderick, re-seating himself.

Sir Harry filled his glass, pushed the bottle to his son, and motioned the butler from the room.

"Roderick," he commenced, "some time ago you expressed a wish to go into the army."

Roderick nodded, and sipped his port attentively.

"Have you still that wish?"

Roderick looked up enquiringly.

"Well, I don't know, sir," he said, hesitatingly, leaning back in his chair, and eyeing the epergne thoughtfully.

"You don't know?" retorted Sir Harry, sharply. "Have you altered your mind, may I ask?"

"Scarcely," replied Roderick. "I have not thought about it at all since I expressed that wish. I should like to go into the army as well as anywhere else, I think," he said carelessly.

"That is all right, then," said Sir Harry, shortly. "I have purchased you a commission."

Roderick looked up with some surprise.

"How long ago, sir?" he asked.

"Well, I am wrong, perhaps, in saying that I have already obtained one. The fact is, Sir Robert has gone to London to see after it."

"Then I may have to leave Edgewcombe immediately, sir?" asked Roderick, with a slight frown.

"I can't say," said Sir Harry. "How can I? You will not be sorry to go, I suppose? There has been very little amusement for you, except that which you have made," and his lips curled into a sneer, that Roderick saw and resented.

"I shall be sorry to leave the Hall, sir," he said, quietly, "but I shall be ready to join a regiment whenever it is necessary."

"That is well," said Sir Harry, taking no notice of the first part of his reply. "I shall allow you what I consider a liberal income for a young man, and you will not find me unjust in the matter of any necessary extra expense, but—I will have no bills, remember, or any pieces of extravagance like these lately brought before my notice. Edgewcombe has had too many spendthrifts, and wild, free fools already, without your adding to the list."

Roderick's face clouded, and his brows bent, but he said nothing, and Sir Harry replenished his glass, and pushed the bottle again.

"When did you hear from Arthur Thussington last?" he said.

"About a month since, sir," Roderick replied.

Arthur Thussington stood next to Rod as regards the Edgewcombe estate.