

and arrange the matter. In the mean while, if I give you a cheque for the amount, Mr. Behrens, you will not present it, I suppose, before to-morrow?"

"No, not before to-morrow. Certainly not before to-morrow."

Saxon drew his cheque-book from his pocket, and laid it before him on the table.

"By the way, Mr. Behrens," he said, "I hear that you have built yourself a pretty house down at Castletowers."

"Confoundedly damp," replied the woolstapler.

"Indeed! The situation is very pleasant. Your grounds once formed a part of the Castletowers park, did they not?"

"Yes; I gave his lordship two thousand pounds for that little bit of land. It was too much—more than it was worth."

Saxon opened the cheque-book, drew the inkstand towards him, and selected a pen.

"You would not care to sell the place, I suppose, Mr. Behrens?" he said, carelessly.

"Humph! I don't know."

"If you would, I should be happy to buy it."

"The house and stables cost me two thousand five hundred pounds to build."

"And yet are damp!"

"Well, the damp is really nothing to speak of," replied Mr. Behrens, quickly.

"Let me see; I believe Lord Castletowers sold a couple of farms at the same time. Did you buy those also, Mr. Behrens?"

"No, sir. They were bought by a neighbour of mine—a Mr. Sloper. I rather think they are again in the market."

"I should be very glad to buy them, if they are."

"You wish, I see, to have a little landed property over in England, Mr. Trefalden. You are quite right, sir; and after all, you are more than half an Englishman."

"My name is English; my descent is English; and my fortune is English," replied Saxon, smiling. "I should be ungrateful if I were not proud to acknowledge it."

The woolstapler nodded approval.

"Well," he said, "I have lately bought an estate down in Worcestershire, and I have no objection to sell the Surrey place if you have a fancy to buy it. It has cost me, first and last, nearly five thousand pounds."

"I will give you that price for it with pleasure, Mr. Behrens," replied Saxon. "Shall I make out the cheque for thirty thousand pounds, and settle it at once?"

The seller laughed grimly.

"I think you had better wait till your cousin comes back, before you pay me for it, Mr. Trefalden. The bargain is made, and that's enough; but you ought not to part from your money without receiving your title-deeds in exchange."

Saxon hesitated and looked embarrassed.

"If you are afraid that I shall change my mind, you can give me fifty pounds on the bargain—will that do? People don't buy freehold estates in quite that off-hand way, you see, even though they may be as rich as the Bank of England—but one can see you are not much used to business."

"I told you I was only a farmer, you know," laughed Saxon, making out his cheque for the twenty-five thousand and fifty pounds.

"Ay—but take care you don't sling your money away, Mr. Trefalden. You're a very young man, and begging your pardon for the observation, you don't know much of the world. Money is a hard thing to manage; and you have more, I fancy, than you know what to do with."

"Perhaps I have."

"At all events, you can't do better than buy land—always remember that. I do it myself, and I advise others to do it."

"I mean to buy all I can get in my native canton."

"That's right, sir; and if you like, I will inquire about those two farms for you."

"I should be more obliged to you than I can express."

"Not in the least. I like you; and when I like people, I am glad to serve them. You wouldn't be particular to a few hundreds, I suppose?"

"I don't care what price I pay for them."

"Whew! I must not tell Sloper that. In fact, I shall not mention you at all. Your name alone would add fifty per cent to the price."

"I shall be satisfied with whatever bargain you can make for me, Mr. Behrens," said Saxon, and handed him the cheque.

The woolstapler shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"I must give you receipts for these two sums," he said; "but your cousin ought to have been present on behalf of Lord Castletowers. The whole thing is irregular. Hadn't you better wait while I send round to Chancery-lane for Mr. Keckwitch?"

But Saxon, anxious above all things to avoid a meeting with that worthy man, would not hear of this arrangement; so Mr. Behrens gave him a formal receipt in the presence of one of his clerks, pocketed the cheque, and entered Saxon's address in his note-book.

"As soon as I have any news about the farms, Mr. Trefalden, I will let you know."

With this they shook hands cordially and parted.

"I'll be bound that open-handed young fellow has lent the Earl this money," he muttered, as he locked the cheque away in his cash-box. "Confound the aristocrats! They are all either drones or hornets."

In the mean while, Saxon was tearing along Cheapside on his way to Austin-Friars, eager to secure Signor Nazzari's services while the Stock Exchange was yet open, and full of joy in the knowledge that he had saved his friend from ruin.

About two hours later, as he was walking slowly across the open space in front of the Exchange, having just left the Bank of England, where he had found all his worst fears confirmed in regard to the stock sold out by his cousin in virtue of the power of attorney granted by himself five months before, the young man was suddenly brought to a pause by a hand upon his sleeve, and a panting voice calling upon his name.

"Mr. Saxon Trefalden—beg pardon, sir—one half minute, if you please!"

It was Mr. Keckwitch, breathless, pallid, streaming with perspiration.

"One of our clerks, sir," he gasped, "'appened to catch sight of you—gettin' out of a cab—top of Broad-street. I've been followin' you—ever since he came back. M. Behrens directed me to Austin-Friars—from Austin-Friars sent on—to Bank. And here I am!"

Saxon frowned; for his cousin's head clerk was precisely the one person whom he had least wished to meet.

"I am sorry, Mr. Keckwitch," he said, "that you have put yourself to so much inconvenience."

"Bless you, sir, I don't regard the inconvenience. The point is, have you learned anything of the missing man?"

Saxon was so unused to dissemble, that after a moment's hesitation he could think of no better expedient than to ask a question in return.

"Have none of your emissaries learned anything, Mr. Keckwitch?"

"No, sir, not at present. I've had three telegrams this mornin'; one from Liverpool, one from Southampton, and one from Glasgow, all telling the same tale—no success. As for Mr. Kidd, he has taken the London Docks for his line; but he's done no better than other folks, up to this time. If, however, you have made any way, sir, why then we can't do better than follow your lead."

They were close under the equestrian statue of the Duke, when Saxon stopped short, and, looking the head clerk full in the face, replied:

"Yes, Mr. Keckwitch, I do know something of my cousin's movements, but it is my intention to keep that knowledge to myself. You can put a stop to all these useless inquiries. I shall now retain this matter in my own hands."

"Not excludin' me from assistin' you, sir, I hope?" exclaimed Keckwitch, anxiously. "Of course, if you have found a clue and it's your pleasure to follow it yourself, that's only what you've a right to do; but I'm a man of experience, and I've done so much already to—"

"I am obliged, Mr. Keckwitch, by what you have done," said Saxon, "and shall make a point of recompensing you for your trouble; but I have no further need of your services."

"But, sir—but, Mr. Saxon Trefalden, you can't mean to give me the go-by in this way? It ain't fair, sir."

"Not fair, Mr. Keckwitch?"

"After my toilin' all the summer through as I have toiled—after all the trouble I've taken, and all the money I've spent, workin' out the secrets of your cousin's ways—you'd never have known even so much as where he lived, but for me!"

"Mr. Keckwitch," said the young man, sternly, "whatever you may have done, was done to please yourself, I presume—to satisfy your own curiosity, or to serve your own ends. It was certainly not done for me. I do not consider that you have any claim upon my confidence, nor even upon my purse. However, as I said before, I shall recompense you by-and-by as I see fit."

And with this, he hailed a cab, desired to be driven to his chambers, and speedily vanished in the throng of westward-bound vehicles, leaving the head clerk boiling with rage and disappointment.

"Well, I'm cursed if that isn't a specimen of ingratitude," muttered he. "Here's a purse-proud upstart for you, to step in and rob an honest man of his fair vengeance. Recompense, indeed! Curse his recompense, and himself too. I hate him. I wish he was dead. I hate the whole tribe of Trefaldens. I wish they were all dead, and that I had the buryin' of 'em."

Mr. Keckwitch repeated this agreeable valediction to himself over and over again as he went along.

CHAPTER XC. AT FAULT.

Up and down, up and down, till his eyes wearied of the shipping and his feet of the parvé, Saxon wandered along the quays of the grand old city of Bordeaux, seeking vainly for any definite news of the Daughter of Ocean. He had lost much precious time by the way—a night in Bristol, a day in London, another night in Bordeaux; but for this there had been absolutely no help. The early train that took him from Bristol to London arrived too late for the morning mail to Paris, and the express from Paris to Bordeaux brought him into the antique capital of Guienne between ten and eleven at night. Armed, however, with the same strong will that had carried him along thus far, Saxon set to work to pursue his search as vigorously in Bordeaux as in London and Bristol, and, if possible, to make up for lost time by even greater perseverance and patience.

Up to this point he had held no further communication with Grotorex. He was determined to act for himself and by himself, without help or counsel. He would, perhaps, have found it difficult to explain why he shrunk from sharing the responsibility of this task—why, from that moment when he had first divined the share which Helen Rivière might bear in his cousin's flight, he had jealously kept the supposition to himself, and determined to follow up this accidental clue unaided and alone. But so it was. He felt that the girl's name was sacred; that his lips were sealed; that he, and he only, must seek and save her.

He thought of her perpetually. He could think, indeed, of nothing else. Throughout the weary, weary miles of travel, by night, by day, sleeping or waking, the remembrance of her peril was ever before him. He had beheld her face but twice in his life; yet it was as vividly present to him as if he had been familiar with its pale and tender beauty from his boyhood. It wrung his very heart to think of her eyes—those pathetic eyes, with that look of the caged chamois in them that he remembered so well. Then he would wonder vaguely whether they had always worn that expression? Whether he should ever see them lighted up with smiles? Whether she had ever known the joyous, thoughtless, sunshiny happiness of childhood, and had made her father's home musical with laughter?

Musing thus, while the unvaried flats of central France were gliding monotonously past the car-