

OUR SOCIETY.

"No, no! of course not," said Sir George cheerily, "but you may have picked it up with those notes by mistake, when you won all that pile from Stevens. Still I think we had better stop now; it's getting late now, you know, my dear," he added to his wife. "I think you and Ethel had better be off to bed. You other fellows will stop and have another drink, I hope."

As soon as the ladies had left the room, he continued. "First of all, I trust to your honor that none of you gentlemen will ever refer to this matter again. Don't think, my boy," this to me, "that any of us imagine you picked the card up on purpose, but still, if the story gets abroad, unpleasant things are sure to be said."

So nothing more came of it at the time, but I cannot say that I enjoyed the few days that were left me at Monte Carlo. I saw next to nothing of the Chesterfields, for I fought shy of meeting Ethel. I was convinced that I hadn't picked up the card myself; but I couldn't believe that she had placed it in my case. That brute, Stevens, might have given it to me on purpose among his notes. That was much more likely.

I had been back at York a week or two before Stevens returned. He happened to find us playing the usual regimental loo after mess. He was asked to take a hand, but refused. "Why not?" someone said. "Well," he replied, "it is like this: while this fellow (pointing to me) is playing, I prefer to stand out." He was a little drunk, I fancy.

You can imagine the row that ensued. Everyone called on Stevens for an explanation. But he refused point-blank to say any further, save that he was under a promise to give no particulars.

"Nonsense," said I, "you ought to have held your tongue altogether," and I proceeded to put the whole matter before them as it happened, except that I kept Miss Chesterfield's name out of the story. "Of course," I added, "now that this man has insulted me, I must put the whole affair before the Colonel to-morrow, and let him deal with it. Till then, I shan't go on playing cards, if ever I do again."

The Colonel postponed the inquiry till the Chesterfields returned. I, of course, wrote to Sir George, and told him what had happened.

My friends in the regiment told me that public opinion was entirely on my side, but for all that I felt very miserable, for I realized that appearances were against me, and how hard it would be to clear myself.

One afternoon, a few days afterwards, when I was mooning alone in my quarters, my servant told me that a gentleman wanted to see me. I was greatly surprised to recognize Sir George, who was not expected back for a week or two.

"I came back at once," he said, "as soon as I heard how that scoundrel had behaved. He shall never darken my doors again."

"Then you think," I cried, "that Stevens gave me the card on purpose wrapt up in his notes?"

"No, no, my boy," he answered, "not so bad as all that; but he had no right to say a word about it, considering the circumstances. Ethel was the culprit. When I got your note, I told my wife and Ethel all it contained. Ethel burst into tears; she had been waiting, she said, to tell you herself. She had put it there as a joke, not understanding there could be any fuss about it, but merely to enjoy your embarrassment when you found it. Then she was frightened, but would have confessed, if I had not explained it away, as I did, before sending her to bed. And she didn't see you again before you left Monte Carlo. I told her what an awful thing she had done, and she hopes you may be able to forgive her. By the way, here is a note from Ethel to you."

Of course, I was delighted to be cleared, but it seemed a mean thing for the girl to have done. Still, as I remember the senior captain said that night at mess, unless women have played cards often, they never understand the accepted notions of honor concerning them. It was his experience that they generally cheated themselves, and that it was quite beyond their knowledge that a man incurs more odium in society for cheating at cards than he does even for eloping with his host's wife or daughter. But such is the fact;

therefore a man must never be accused of cheating unless there be absolute proof.

They made it so warm for Stevens in the regiment, that he exchanged on the first opportunity, and we saw no more of him. No, I didn't marry Ethel. I daresay it would make a better story if I had. But I'm afraid I never quite forgave. She married the fox-hunting parson of the next parish.

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