

and extreme middle-age, equally removed from youth and old age; and, as far as the memory of his friends served them, he had never been otherwise. He could as little have contemplated committing a deliberate heroism as of committing a deliberate folly or making an unsafe investment. He had a careful little manner, and he was studiously polite to his wife. The obscurity of his presence was really glaring, and he had to a remarkable extent what we may call the quality of obliquity, for it was next to impossible to remember that he was present.

"You may not have heard the news," he remarked, as he sat down, after bowing to Mrs. Montgomery's averted profile, "and I came here because I thought you would like to know it. Percy Gerard has just written to me, as his guardian, saying he intends to marry Lady Sybil Attwood. Of course I gave my consent, and they are engaged. I could not have desired a better match for him."

Mrs. Montgomery, having in her mind what the world said Lady Stoakley had planned for Blanche, cleared her throat delicately. But Lady Stoakley answered at once.

"My dear Jack," she said, "I have known it for months."

"But I only received the note after dinner, dear Mabel," he said; "so you cannot have known it so long, if you will pardon my contradicting you. In fact, you cannot have known it at all. Percy,