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last. "I happen to know a little about pictures; enough, unfortunately, to be able to say that this is a copy, very clever and very well done, no doubt, but a copy all the same."

"I don't believe it," whispered Hugh to Sybil indignantly. "The man who painted that was a genius, he had his heart in his work, it was his own. The copyist could not put such colour and light into it."

Sybil nodded her sympathy and approval. She, too, loved the picture. It seemed impossible that Lord Sternholt could have heard the whisper, but their faces must have told him their thoughts.

"I see you don't believe me, young people," he said, smiling, "and I fear you won't like me any better for libelling an old friend. I don't blame you in the least. The more I look at it the less sure I am of my own judgment, so we'll vote the picture a genuine Velasquez unanimously. Now, am I forgiven?"

"Do you believe it to be genuine?" asked Hugh bluntly.

"I decline to criminate myself," laughed the earl. He turned from the pictures and admired the sketches and engravings.

"Your taste is perfect," he said to Mrs. Darley.

"My husband's," she corrected.

"His taste was indeed unquestionable," he replied with a bow and a smile to the gracious matron, who flushed faintly at the compliment. "But I have trespassed too long on your great kindness," he went on.

"Won't you stay to dinner?" Mrs. Darley asked timidly; "we have little to offer but a welcome."

"Delighted," he replied with well-bred frankness. "I have been roughing it in the village, enduring bad cooking for the sake of good shooting. I did not know how much I missed the delights of civilization till I came here and found them."

If he set himself to charm the company he certainly succeeded. To them he was a visitor from a new world. In twenty years of vivid adventurous life, he had been everywhere and seen everything. He knew how to talk, too, and make the strange scenes and adventures through which he had passed as real to his hearers as himself. Now and again he checked an exciting story in mid career and slid aside on a new track, as a skater when he verges on thin ice glides round the danger in an easy curve so smoothly that the onlookers have no inkling of the cause. For there were incidents in the variegated life of the Earl of Sternholt that were not for all ears.

ART was his hobby, and the boy and girl, in whom the artistic instinct was keen, listened entranced as he told them of the treasures of the great galleries of the Continent.

Now and again the boy, his shyness lost in his enthusiasm, ventured a word or two of fervid appreciation that amazed the earl.

"You love art, my boy, I can see that. But how did you come to know so much about pictures in this out-of-the-way spot?"

The boy's shyness came back with the direct personal question. "I have to thank Mr. and Mrs. Darley," he said, "for the little I know. He was very good to me when I was quite a child. He saw I loved pictures even then, and he helped me to understand them. Afterwards Mrs. Darley always made me free of the books and the portfolios. More than half his books were about pictures, and men like Ruskin make you see what they write about."

"You would like to be an artist, I suppose?" the man asked the boy when they were alone in the dining-room after the ladies had left.

"Oh, no, I could never draw or paint to please myself. I have tried often and was always ashamed of the result. But Sybil will be an artist, don't you think those sketches of hers wonderful?"

With a cigar between his teeth, Lord Sternholt got up from the table for a nearer view of the sketches to which the boy pointed. Surprise mingled with his admiration. To his trained eye the promise of the pic-

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