

'Why, sit down and have some lunch first,' Hilda rejoined with practical common-sense, 'and then talk it over rationally afterwards, instead of wringing our hands helplessly like a pair of Frenchmen in a street difficulty.' (Hilda had a fine old crusted English contempt, by the way, for those vastly inferior and foolish creatures known as foreigners.)

Thus adjured, Berkeley sat down promptly, and they proceeded to take counsel together in this hard matter over the outlets and claret provided before them. 'Ernest and Mrs. Le Breton told me all about your visit,' Arthur went on, soon after; 'and they're so much obliged to you for having taken the trouble to look them up in their sore distress. Do you know, Lady Hilda, I think you've quite made a conquest of our dear little friend, Mrs. Le Breton.'

'I don't know about that,' Hilda responded with a smile, 'but I'm sure, at any rate, that the sweet little woman quite made a conquest of me, Mr. Berkeley. In fact, I can't say what you think, but for my part I'm determined an effort must be made one way or another to save them.'

'It's no use,' Arthur answered, shaking his head sadly; 'it can't be done. There's nothing for it but to let them float down helplessly with the tide, wherever it may bear them.'

'Stuff and nonsense,' Hilda replied energetically. 'All rubbish, utter rubbish, and if I were a man as you are, Mr. Berkeley, I should be ashamed to take such a desponding view of the situation. If we say it's got to be done, it will be done, and that's an end of it. Work must and can be found for him somehow or somewhere.'

'But the man's dying,' Arthur interrupted with a vehement gesture. 'There's no more work left in him. The only thing that's any use is to send him off to Madeira, or Egypt, or Catania, or somewhere of that sort, and let him die quietly among the palms and cactuses and aloes. That's Sir Antony Wraxall's opinion, and surely nobody in London can know half as well as he does about the matter.'

'Sir Antony's a fool,' Hilda responded with refreshing bluntness. 'He knows nothing on earth at all about it. He's accustomed to prescribing for a lot of us idle good-for-nothing rich people'—('Very true,' the Progenitor assented parenthetically;) 'and he's got into a fixed habit of prescribing a Nile voyage, just as he's got into a fixed habit of prescribing old wine, and carriage exercise, and ten thousand a year to all his patients. What Mr. Le Breton really wants is not Egypt, or old wine, or Sir Antony, or anything of the sort, but relief from this pressing load of anxiety and re-