

ugly, and she thought this particular opera tedious and unmelodious. But it was a gala night,—Jean de Retzke was singing, princes and princesses and stars and garters were like the sand of the sea-shore for number, and it was a matter of course to be there. Also Mrs. Montgomery had distinctly been rubbing her the wrong way. She knew, and all London knew, why Lady Otterbourne disliked her, and all London knew that she resented and returned the dislike with great frankness and no show of dissimulation. She had tried deliberately and purposely—so thought Lady Otterbourne and the world in general—to catch Percy Gerard for her own daughter, Blanche. He was desirable in every way; she liked him; she believed him pre-eminently upright and respectable; and he was enormously wealthy. Those who were not fond of Lady Stoakley were free to believe that this last qualification was the only essential she demanded, and, with that candour which delights in stating malicious things, they said so. But in this they erred. She liked him, and she liked his millions; and she liked them each for their own sakes. Which she liked the best, it is beside the mark to enquire; but an uncharitable assumption would be entirely out of place.

Just before the curtain rose the door of the box opened and Lord Stoakley came in, but neither of the ladies took the slightest notice of him, and he did not appear surprised. He was a man of chronic