

TOM'S FORTUNE.

BY H. MACOSQUIN.

"Excuse the question, Harry; but is there any person to whom you feel bound to tell everything you know?"

We were alone, Tom and I, in my bachelor quarters, enjoying a chat and an after-dinner cigar. The talk had fallen away into a dreamy silence for some time, when Tom suddenly straightened up in his chair and, without apparent reference to anything, shot the question at me.

"No," I said, "there is no such person—am I not a lawyer? But why?"

"Well," said Tom, with a little nervous laugh, "who am I?"

I daresay the expression of my face justified Tom's shout of laughter, but I was indignant enough at the moment, and, therefore, distinctly stiff.

"Let me see. Poor Smith introduced you to me at the Club, I believe. Said you were a friend of his, just arrived from Tierra del Fuego, or some place."

"Just so," said Tom, with a very provoking coolness. "But since poor Smith is dead, and beyond cross-examination, and as it is 'some place,' and not Tierra del Fuego, that I hail from, does it not strike you that the information is a trifle vague?"

Tom and I had "taken to" each other from the moment of our first acquaintance, three months before. I had introduced him to my womankind—a lonely aunt and cousin—and between them and myself he divided his time. And a strong suspicion on my part that it there was not an understanding between my chum and my cousin, there very soon would be—and you can easily imagine that the corner into which Tom's cool questions and statements had driven me was anything but comfortable for a young barrister, ambitious to be ranked among the knowing ones.

"Well, well, old fellow," said Tom, "I should not make your kindness to myself an accusation against you; but, you see,

—or you will, when I tell you what I am driving at,—that I am in an awkward position. The fact is, I want to marry your cousin if she will have me, and although I can satisfy you and her mother easily enough as to my means, I am afraid you will have to take me, personally, on trust. Literally, there is not a soul in the world in any better position to vouch for me than you are yourself. All poor Smith knew about me was that I brought a letter of introduction from a friend of his in British Columbia, and all the writer of the letter knew was, that we were in each other's company a good deal during the few months I spent in Victoria, and liked each other. Now I shall tell you my story, and then we can consult as to further revelations."

"Tell it all," I broke in, "and leave nothing for further revelations."

"Of course, I shall tell *you* all; but I'm not clear about telling Mrs. Blanton, or even Grace. You see, it's a queer yarn."

"Fire away, then, and, as you say, we can consult about it."

"Well," said Tom, as I lit a fresh cigar and settled back in my chair, "although my name is Thomas Charles Morton, I was always known as 'Charlie' until I saw fit to drop my second name. My father and I were left alone in the world about six years ago, and shortly after that he brought me out to Canada with him—I am English—but he died in the hotel at Montreal a week after we landed, and as soon as the funeral was over I went on to British Columbia. I had about a thousand dollars, which I thought a fortune; and I suppose all boys want to go west. I—"

"Hold on," I interrupted, "I thought you said six years ago." You must have been a pretty well grown boy then."

"What age am I now?"

"Well," and I paused a moment as I balanced the rather abundant gray threads in his hair against the youthful com-