

By this time the proud blood has mounted to her face.

"I came to you for advice, not for a discourse on the conscience," she says, with a splendid look of injured dignity. "I know I am right; and I know that she is right, children or no children. You say that Lord Willowby will probably refuse—"

"Balfour says so, according to your account."

"Very well; and you explain that he might be called on to make good the money. Could not he be induced to consent by some guarantee—some indemnity—"

"Certainly, if you can get a big enough fool to become responsible for £50,000 to the end of time. Such people are not common. But there, sit down, and put aside all these fantastic speculations. The immediate thing you want is Lord Willowby's consent to this act of legal vandalism. If he refuses, his refusal will be based on the personal interests of his daughter. He will not consider children or grandchildren. Long before her eldest born can be twenty-one, Lord Willowby will be gathered to his fathers; and as for the risk he runs, he has not a brass farthing that any one can seize. Very well: you must explain to Lady Sylvia, in as delicate a way as you can, that there might be youthful Balfours in the days to come, and that she must consider whether she is acting rightly in throwing away this provision—"

"But, gracious goodness! her husband wants her to do so, and she wants to do so—"

"Then let that be settled. Of course, all husbands' wishes are law. Then you must explain to her what it is she is asking her father to do, and point out that it will take a good deal of appealing before he consents. He has a strictly legal right to refuse; further, he can plead his natural concern for his daughter's interests—"

"He ought to have more regard for his daughter's honour!" says she, warmly.

"Nonsense! You are talking as if Balfour had gone into a conspiracy to get up a fraudulent settlement. It is no business of hers that the firm failed—"

"I say it is a matter of strict honour and integrity that she should give up this money; and she *shall* give it up!" says Queen T—, with an indignant look.

"Very well, then; if you are all quite

content, there only remains that you should appeal to Lord Willowby."

"Why do you laugh?"

"Lord Willowby thought he would get some money through Balfour marrying his daughter. Now you are asking him to throw away his last chance of ever getting a penny. And you think he will consent."

"His daughter shall make him," said she, confident in the sublime and invincible powers of virtue. Her confidence, in this instance, at least, was not misplaced—so much must be admitted.

CHAPTER L.

A NEW COMPANION.

THE arrival of the new sovereign to take possession of the ceded dominions had been made known to the people at Eagle Creek Ranch; and soon our poor Bell was being made the victim of continual interviews, during which agents, overseers, and lawyers vainly endeavoured to get some definite information into her bewildered head. For what was the use of reporting about the last branding of calves, or about the last month's yield of the Belle of St. Joe, or about the probable cost of the new crushing machines, when the perpetual refrain of her thinking was, "Oh, good people, wouldn't you take the half of it, and let me have my children?"

Fortunately her husband was in no wise bewildered, and it was with not a little curiosity that he went off to inspect the horses and two carriages that had been sent on to Denver for us from the ranch. My lord was pleased to express his approval of these; albeit that one of the vehicles was rather a rude-looking affair. The other, however—doubtless Colonel Sloane's state carriage—was exceedingly smart, and had obviously been polished up for the occasion; while, as regards the horses, these were able to elicit even something more than approval from this accomplished critic. He went back to the hotel highly pleased. He believed he had got some inkling that life at the ranch was not wholly savage. The beautiful polished shafts and the carefully brushed dark blue cushions had had an effect on his imagination.