

"Ah, gentlemen," said Mr. Campion as they entered, "I wished to see you. Now what was it about? Let me see, I have a memorandum somewhere."

They all burned to suggest "The superintendentship," but had to wait whilst Mr. Campion searched all over his desk for a paper which was in his coat pocket. "Yes, yes, as I was saying," continued Mr. Campion, "about this important vacancy in the office. I may say, gentlemen, that I have watched your work very closely—more closely than you are perhaps aware—during the last few weeks. You have all come through the ordeal admirably. I compliment you on your efficiency. There has not been a trace of friction. You are all fitted—highly fitted—for the vacant post. Now let me tell you the conclusion I have come to. In the first place I inspected the first division clerks. Though not known to me personally, I recognise their ability and efficiency. I have no doubt that in due course they will attain worthy posts in the official hierarchy—if I may so term it. But I did not detect amongst these gentlemen any one of such supreme ability that I should think myself justified in promoting him above his seniors."

The Principal Clerks breathed again. For one moment they had had the idea that old Campion was going to promote a first division clerk over their heads.

"Now, to deal with you gentlemen personally, I have the greatest admiration for your work Mr. Saxelby, and it would be a great convenience to me to have some one in my immediate family circle with whom I could discuss the important and confidential details of the office business. Yet anything that savoured of nepotism would be most disagreeable to me. Besides, there might be objectionable remarks in the press; I could bear them myself, but the office, gentlemen, must be, like Cæsar's wife, above suspicion. Next,

I take your case, Mr. Morris. I have been deeply impressed by the way you did your work. It showed hearty devotion to the public service, and, in addition, you have the advantage of being very highly recommended to me by one of his Majesty's Ministers. I compliment you, Mr. Morris, on the high opinion the Cabinet have of you. Yet in this case there arises the question whether the Minister in charge of one department should be allowed to interfere with appointments in another department. It might create departmental jealousy. There might be allegations, of course utterly unfounded, of political influence in the civil service."

"Your reputation, sir," interposed Morris, "would be quite enough to cause any base slanders to fail."

"It is not my reputation I am thinking of, Mr. Morris. It is the reputation of the office. Now I must consider your claims, Mr. Bates. You are a supremely efficient civil servant. I like the ardour with which you enter into your work. Then, too, you have a high reputation outside the office as an excellent sportsman. In dealing with masses of men that reputation would tell. It would help you to maintain the strict discipline customary in this department. Still, on the other hand, what should I say if it were alleged that promotion in the office went by proficiency on the golf links? Could I justify to my own conscience an appointment on such ground? I doubt it. You see, gentlemen, I am in a dilemma. There are three admirably equipped candidates, and only one post. I have spent sleepless nights contemplating this problem."

The Chief paused for breath. The Principal Clerks looked at each other in amazement. Was he about to toss up or to draw lots for the appointment? Or, horror of horrors, was he going to suggest the introduction of an outsider?

"At last," continued the Chief, "I have thought out a solution. You