

indirectly, Furzedon, Charlie, Slade, &c., were quickly aware that Miss Devereux was once more residing under the shelter of her aunt's wing. Animated was the conversation between Mrs. Kynaston and Furzedon when, upon receipt of the news, the latter called in to see the lady who was kind enough to manage the tangled skein of his love-affair.

"And you think I'm right, Mrs. Kynaston?" said Furzedon, at the close of the conference of some half-hour's duration. "You would strike at once?"

"Decidedly," rejoined the lady. "Your plan of action is admirable. Come to the point without loss of time. Back out of it if you find it going against you; say you will not venture to press for an answer as yet—that when Miss Devereux knows you better she will be perhaps better able to recognize your devotion. Pshaw! Any man out of his teens knows the whole gamut usually run up and down on these occasions. And, remember, you must not be disheartened by one rebuff. Lettice is country-bred, and the provincial mind does not expand quite so early as that of a London young lady. Still, I think she is rapidly awakening, and already understands the insipidity of life at North Leach."

"Thanks, very much," rejoined Furzedon. "I shall do precisely what you recommend, and, acting further on what you tell me, return to the charge should Belisarius lose the Derby, pleading that the help Charlie could accept from a brother-in-law he would feel compelled to decline from a friend. Wish me good luck, Mrs. Kynaston, and I will bid you good-day."

"All success to you," replied the lady; "don't be too abrupt this time; and should it not be successful—ah, well! I shall see you before it is judicious to deliver the second assault. It may not be necessary, but, should it be so, I will advise you once more. May good fortune attend you!"

When a man's feelings are deeply interested, the asking a woman to marry him is doubtless, if not a *mauvais quart d'heure*, at least a very nervous one; but in Furzedon's case it was not so. He admired Lettice Devereux—he liked Lettice Devereux—and Mrs. Kynaston had persuaded him that she would make him a good wife. He had made up his mind to marry her, and was very resolute to attain his end, but, as for saying he was in love with her, that was quite another thing; he would feel no despair in case of rejection; he would still sap steadily forward to attain his object, as he would to attain any other object that he considered essential to his success in life; but let him once be convinced that this thing was beyond his reach, and he was not likely to either break his heart about it or to display any great animosity to those who should thwart his purpose. At the present moment he would have sacrificed ruthlessly any one who stood in his way, but, the game once given against him, he would trouble his head no further about his successful rival. A strong hater and vindictive man, when he took it into his head to feel aggrieved, but feeling no resentment towards those who got the best of him on any point, the thing once over.

Proposing with the expectation of being refused is, to borrow a phrase from the hunting-field, like "riding for a fall." It requires nerve, and is not exhilarating; but in both cases there must remain a feeling of much satisfaction when the thing is got safely done with. Furzedon by no means liked the business before him; but he had made up his mind to do this thing, and do it he would. And in this frame of mind he wended his way to Onslow Gardens as soon as he heard of Miss Devereux's arrival there. If he could make the opportunity, he would ask the question without further delay. The knotty question that puzzled him on his way there was, How he was to get Mrs. Connop out of the way? and that, at last, he was fain to confess was beyond him. He repented now that he had not besought his confidante's aid; Mrs. Kynaston, he felt sure, could have managed that matter for him had he but asked her. Now he could only trust to the chapter of accidents. When he arrived at Onslow Gardens he found both ladies in the drawing-room, and the thoroughly unembarrassed manner in which Lettice welcomed him would have convinced a far less shrewd man than Furzedon that, whatever her answer might be, her feelings would have very little to do with it. At all events, guided by Mrs. Kynaston's revelation and her own observation, Mrs. Connop came to the conclusion that Furzedon had no chance; "and," mused the old lady, "if he is fool enough to think so, the sooner that bit of nonsense is knocked out of his head the better." So, after a quarter-of-an-hour's desultory conversation, she rose, and, under some frivolous pretext about finishing a letter, left the room, and gave Ralph Furzedon the opportunity he desired.

He had one point in his favor, and that was, that he was oppressed by no nervousness. He had got his chance, and determined to come to the point as quickly as possible.

"I have been most anxious to see you, Miss Devereux," he commenced.

"Very good of you to say so," replied Lettice. "You can't have been more anxious to see me than I have been to see London."

"I have got something to ask of you—a great favor to beg of you."

"Stop, Mr. Furzedon," interrupted the girl. "Remember, it is unwise to ask favors unless you've good grounds for supposing they will be granted."

"I have very fair grounds for supposing that my request will be listened to, at all events. No man can lay claim to more. I am a great friend of your brother's, well known to all your people, well-to-do—I might go further, and say wealthy."

"It is quite unnecessary, Mr. Furzedon, to go through a catalogue of your social advantages," replied Lettice, with just a tinge of bitterness. She made no pretext of not understanding what her companion was driving at, but was a little nettled that he so persistently ignored the hint that she had given him. "To a friend of Charlie's," she continued, "I would grant any request that I had given him reasonable grounds for supposing I would say 'Yes' to."

(To be continued.)

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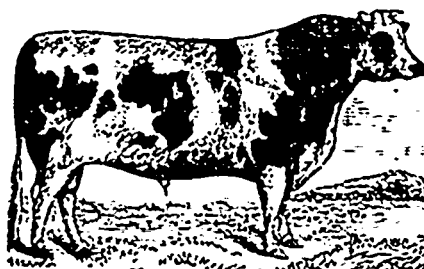
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