

A MAN OF HIS WORD.

(Continued.)

"It is only your face and your name that are new," she said. "I have always missed you and wanted you; only I didn't know what it was that I wanted."

"Then perhaps any other man would have done as well," said Egbert, half laughing, half in earnest.

"Oh, no!" she exclaimed, vehemently, the color rushing into her face. "How could you think such a horrid thing as that! I never could have cared for any one but you. If I had not met you I should have gone on leading the same dull, empty, miserable life until I died. Besides you I have only my father in the world—not another soul! And I am afraid he finds me a most uninteresting companion," she added, with a sigh.

"Then he deserves to lose you," Egbert declared. "By the way, I suppose I shall have to face him to-morrow. Do you think he will be very angry?"

"I don't think so," answered Josephine, slowly. "That is, unless"—here she paused for a moment and glanced timidly at her companion—"unless you ask him for a great deal of money."

"My dearest girl, I am not going to ask him for a penny. I shn't refuse it if he offers it, because money is a good thing, and I don't see why he shouldn't give you a share of his. But if he prefers to keep it all for himself, let him! You are not afraid of being poor, are you, Josephine?"

"Not in the least. I think I should rather like it," answered Josephine, who had had no experience of poverty. "If we lived in a small house like your cottage we should see all the more of each other, and we should have no tiresome butler and footman to listen to all that we said at dinner. So that really it will be almost an advantage if papa does refuse to give us anything."

Egbert was not sure that he altogether concurred in that view of the case; but he did feel that, being so disinterested, he had no reason to dread Mr. Hobday; and it was in a spirit of serene complacency that he requested a private interview with that gentleman on the following morning.

III.

Mr. Hobday received his visitor in what, for want of a better name, was called his study. He was at that moment engaged in studying the book which of all others was the most agreeable to him—namely, his banker's book and was following the columns of figures up with his blunt forefinger to see whether any mistake had been made in the addition. There were no mistakes, and the total on the right side was a noble one. Although Mr. Hobday had retired from business, he still amused himself from time to time with speculative transactions, one of which, as he had learned in the City on the previous day, had just been brought to a successful termination. Moreover, news had reached him that Colonel Denne was in failing health, and might not improbably be forced to resign his seat before the next session. All these things had combined to put him into the best of good humors. He extended his left hand—his right being loath to relinquish the beloved bank book—and called out in a hearty, cheerful voice, "How do you do, sir? Glad to see you. Take a chair."

"I'm afraid I am interrupting you," said Egbert, choosing the most comfortable arm-chair that he could find, and sinking into it.

"Not at all—not at all," answered Mr. Hobday, politely; "I'm quite at your service." He took a last fond look at his balance, and then resolutely shut up the book, saying, "Now, what can I do for you?"

Egbert stroked his mustache, and took a minute or two for consideration. He was very much in love, his temperament was poetic, and his sensibilities were perhaps somewhat ultra-refined. The thought of Josephine and the hard, brisk, business-like presence of Mr. Hobday gave him a disagreeable impression of incongruity, and he wished that he had thought of making his demand by letter. "I want to speak to you, Mr. Hobday," he began, at length, "about a matter which is of great importance to me." And here he came to a full stop.

"Come," said Mr. Hobday, not ill naturedly, "out with it! Can't get it out? Let's see if I can help you, then. This important matter concerns somebody else rather more than yourself, may be?"

"Hardly that," said Egbert.

"I should say it did; but never mind. Now, you've got a favor to ask of me in connection with this matter; isn't that so?"

Egbert nodded.

"Well, Denne, you won't find me a hard man to deal with; but you'll find me a man of business. A fool and his money are soon parted. I'm not a fool. Your father had better understand at once that I shall make my conditions, and stick to 'em. I've always said that I meant to be member for Stillbourne, and member for Stillbourne I'll be."

Egbert perceived that a bargain was being proposed to him. He hastened to decline it. "I think you are under a misapprehension, Mr. Hobday," he said. "If I were asking you for money it would no doubt be reasonable that you should make conditions, as you say; but I am not asking you for money. I would rather not connect your daughter's name with money at all. And, in any case, I couldn't answer for my father, who has really nothing to do with the matter."

"The d-uce he hasn't!" ejaculated Mr. Hobday, staring. "And what, may I ask, has my daughter to do with it?"

"Why, everything," replied the young man, laughing a little. "Don't you understand that I am here to ask your consent to my marriage with your daughter?"

Mr. Hobday whistled. "Oh, that's it, is it?" He seemed more amused

than displeased at the first moment, but presently his features assumed a sterner expression, and he said curtly, "Well, sir, what's your income? and what settlements are you prepared to make?"

"I don't quite know what to say about settlements," Egbert answered. "As for my income, it's a little uncertain just now, I confess; but I could make it larger by putting my shoulder to the wheel. My father gives me an allowance which I suppose might be considered liberal. In a word, I am poor; but I consider that I can afford to marry."

Mr. Hobday gave a short laugh. "Very sorry, Denne," he said, "but it won't do. What you offer doesn't happen to tempt me. Many men, I know, would be ready to pay a good round sum for the sake of connecting themselves with the nobility; but I'm not one of them; and an honorable don't count for much, anyway. If I choose to go in for that kind of thing, I don't see why I shouldn't marry the girl to an earl or a viscount. Plenty of 'em would be glad enough to take her, by all accounts. As for you, you're not the man for my money. I bear no malice against you for trying it on; but I don't feel called upon to support ornamental idleness; that's all. Come, let's say no more about it."

"I told you before," said Egbert, with some warmth, "that I am not asking you to support me. I am asking for your daughter, and you can leave over penny you possess to charities, if you choose."

"Rubbish!" returned Mr. Hobday, knitting his shaggy brows. "Don't tell me! You know as well as I do that I'm not going to chuck about my hard-earned money among hospitals and asylums. Whatever I've got my daughter will have at my death; and I mean she shall have a handsome income when she marries, too. But I don't mean you to share it with her."

Egbert was silent for a few moments. Appeals to the tender side of Mr. Hobday's nature did not seem likely to be effectual; nor, indeed, was it by any means certain that Mr. Hobday's nature had a tender side to be appealed to. However, he ended by saying, "Don't you think your daughter's wishes ought to be taken into consideration? No doubt I am very unworthy of her; still I know from her own lips that she loves me, and that encourages me to persist."

Mr. Hobday did not think this argument deserving of articulate refutation. He only ejaculated, "Oh, pooh, pooh, pooh!" in a derisive manner; after which he got up, stuck his hands in his pockets, and walked away to the window.

Egbert rose too, and followed him. "You can't expect me to take this as final, Mr. Hobday," he said.

"Can't I?" retorted the other, wheeling round and facing him. "Let me tell you that I do, though, young feller!"

"I do not take it so, at all events. It seems that you have nothing to urge against me, except that I am what you call an idler; and, as to that, I can only repeat that I have no intention of idling any longer. I don't believe you yourself could give any reason for your refusal."

"Now look here, Denne," broke in Mr. Hobday, "I'll have no more of this. You don't suit me. I'm not bound to give you reasons. I'm a man of my word, and I say this marriage shan't take place. There's an end of it."

"As far as that goes," returned the young man, "I also am a man of my word, and I venture to say that it shall take place. After your daughter is of age you won't be able to prevent it, and we will wait till then, if necessary. I believe I can answer for her as well as for myself."

Mr. Hobday frowned heavily. "I wouldn't be defiant, if I were you," said he.

"You give me no choice," replied Egbert.

"Oh, very well!" rejoined Mr. Hobday—"very well! Now you'll just please to walk out of this house, double quick, march! And if ever I catch you about the place again I'll have you took by the shoulders and turned outside the gates. So now you're warned."

It is difficult to retire with dignity under such circumstances, and Egbert was sensible of his failure to accomplish that feat. There was, however, nothing to be done but to retire; so he took up his hat and went. As he walked down the avenue it occurred to him that, the first part of the programme sketched out by Staveley having now been fulfilled to the letter, he could do nothing better than carry out the sequel, and request advice of that precient philosopher.

Mr. Staveley lived all by himself in a rather large house known as The Grange, which had had no mistress for close upon half a century. The mother of the present owner had died at the time of his birth, and he himself had never married. Reasonable, plausible and otherwise, for his calibers were forthcoming in sufficient numbers; but the days had long since gone by when his friends desired to see him change his condition. In principle, a man with a certain amount of acres may always be said to neglect his duty by remaining single; but, by reason of his freedom from home ties, Staveley had become, in a scriptural as well as a literal sense, the neighbor of the whole country-side, which had acquired the habit of applying to him in all difficulties, and was very well satisfied with him as he was. Besides, he had an excellent cook. He was surveying some recent improvements in his garden when Egbert Denne joined him, and he did not wait for the young man to unfold his errand before saying, "I trust he didn't kick you."

"No, he didn't do that," answered Egbert; "but I am not sure that he wouldn't have done it if I had stayed another minute in the room. What a confounded old ruffian he is!"

"Ah, I told you you wouldn't find him a pleasant father-in-law."

"I should be willing to overlook his unpleasantness if he would consent to be my father-in-law; but he won't. I spoke very civilly to him, and told him I didn't want his money, and so on; but he wouldn't listen to me for a moment. The end of it was that he lost his temper, and told