

ings; he talking of the weather, the crops, the prospects of harvest, what duties he would have at Quarter Sessions or at the next meeting of the Guardians. He was a great talker, and of the sort who never take the trouble to see if their subjects of conversation are agreeable, and his monologue invariably revealed his bachelorhood of long standing, and Hesleton was sublimely unconscious of it.

He lighted a cigar as soon as tea was over, and, having put out of his mind the old women's gossip, began to whistle between the puffs of smoke. For a moment he stood gazing out of the window over the smooth lawns of the garden. And suddenly his wife spoke.

"Shall you be very busy to-night, John?" she asked.

"Busy? Why?" he said.

"I—I thought perhaps you would take me for a drive," she said.

"I'm going to be very busy," he said. "I've got to give Martin all his orders for to-morrow, and I'm expecting Stevenson, the pig-buyer, about those young pigs, and then I've got the week's books to go through, and after that I've the Highway accounts to check. But you shall go, in your pony-carriage, Letty; I'll tell Bill to harness the pony at once."

She had no wish to go alone, but the pony and carriage had been his last birthday present to her, and it seemed ungenerous not to use it. So she acquiesced, and went off to get ready, and Hesleton presently saw her drive away into the summer evening. His only thought was that it was good to be able to give her all these things. Then he turned away to find his foreman with whom he was busy for an hour. Then came the pig buyer, a bluff, plain-spoken man, who from long acquaintance with the objects of his merchandise had come to resemble them somewhat in personal appearance. Their business in the yard over, Hesleton, after the usual custom, invited him into the house to take a glass of spirits.

"Tell ye what, Hesleton," said the

pig-buyer in his blunt fashion, "yon's a right smart little pony and carriage 'at your missis drives—Gow, it is so!"

"Oh, you've seen it, have you?" said Hesleton carelessly, pushing a box of cigars towards his guest.

"Aye, I passed her at the Four Cross Roads—she'd stopped to speak to that there young Dan Mennill, as has just come home fro' foreign parts," answered the pig-buyer. "Tell 'ee what, there's no doubt 'at travillin' does improve the young 'uns—he were allus a fine lad, Dan, but he's changed into a right strappin' handsome man and no mistak'. But of course, ye wouldn't know him—he'd gone when ye cam'."

"Is he one of the Mennills of Low End?" asked Hesleton.

"Aye, but very different fro' any on 'em," answered the pig-buyer. "Varry different—might be another stock. Now about that theer Berkshire boar o' yours, Hesleton?—d'ye want to sell him? 'Cos if you do—"

When the pig-buyer had concluded his business and gone, Hesleton got out his account books, and sat down to his desk. For some reason which he could not explain the figures seemed to have no meaning, and he had done nothing with them when Letty returned, a little later. He did not look at her as she came into the parlour, but affected to be busy with the books.

"Had a nice drive?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered, almost indifferently.

"See anybody?"

These were the two questions he invariably put to her when she came in from a solitary drive.

"I met Dan Mennill, who has just come home from India," she said, just as indifferently. "He arrived this afternoon."

"I didn't know there was a Dan Mennill," said Hesleton.

"He went before you came," she answered. "We were all boys and girls together, but I should scarcely have known him."

"I hope he is not like his brother—or his father," said Hesleton.