

A WOMAN'S PREFERENCE 5

Sir John Cullingworth told me so. It's what I've always said ; all boys should know a language or two. Always lifts a man a rung or two above the crowd when the moment comes. A most valuable mental equipment."

A perfect knowledge of Spanish, the result of years of my boyhood and youth spent in Spain, was the one ewe lamb of my accomplishments ; that, and a bad pass degree at Oxford constituted the "valuable mental equipment " of my father's imagination.

"It has come in handy this time, sir," I assented.

"I hope you use less slang in Spanish than in English," said Lascelles, posing again.

"I'm afraid the prospect of our parting has got on your nerves, Cello."

"I wish you wouldn't be so disgustingly vulgar and personal as to use that ridiculous nickname for me," he retorted, angrily.

"I wish to see you in the study, Ferdinand, in about a quarter of an hour. I have something very important to say to you," interposed my father, rising to leave the room, as he generally did when my brother and I looked like having words.

"Very well, sir. I'll come to you."

"Do you know the news, Nand?" cried Mercy, as soon as the door closed behind him, and the look of her eye was full of mischief.

"No. I've only read a couple of newspapers this morning," I answered, flippantly.

"I don't mean news of the stupid newspaper sort ; I mean real, private, important news. This will be in the fashionable gossip next week : but it isn't public yet."