

a marriage settlement, and naturally, as Sylvia's guardian, I should expect you to give her out of your abundance. But then, Balfour,' said his lordship, with a gay air and a ferocious smile, 'I was thinking—merely as a joke, you know—what a rich young fellow like yourself might do to produce an impression on a romantic girl. Marriage settlements are very prosaic things; they look rather like buying a wife; moreover, they have to mention contingencies which it is awkward for an unmarried girl to hear of. Wouldn't a girl be better pleased now, if an envelope were placed on her dressing-room table the night before her marriage—the envelope containing a bank-note—say for £50,000? The mystery, the surprise, the delight—all these things would tell upon a girl's mind; and she would be glad she would not have to go to church an absolute beggar. Of course that is merely a joke; but can't you imagine what the girl's face would be like when she opened the envelope?'

Balfour did not at all respond to his companion's gaiety. In the drawing-room below he had betrayed an unusual enthusiasm of speech. But if Lord Willowby had calculated on this elation interfering with Mr. Balfour's very sober habit of looking at business matters, he had made a decided mistake.

Balfour laid down his pipe, and put his out-stretched hands on his knees.

'I don't know,' said he, coolly, 'whether you mean to suggest that I should do something of the sort you describe—'

'My dear fellow,' said Lord Willowby, with an air of protest. 'It was only a fancy—a joke.'

'Ah! I thought so,' said Balfour. 'I think it is better to treat money matters simply as money matters; romance has plenty of other things to deal with. And as regards a marriage settlement, of course I should let my lawyer arrange the whole affair.'

'Oh, naturally, naturally,' said his lordship; gayly; but he inwardly invoked a curse on the head of this mean-spirited Scotchman.

'You mentioned £50,000,' continued the younger man, speaking slowly and apparently with some indifference. 'It is a big sum to demand all at once from my partners. But then the fact is, I have

never spent much money myself, and I have allowed them to absorb in the business a good deal of what I might otherwise have had, so that they are pretty deep in my debt. You see, my lord, I have inherited from my father a good deal of pride in our firm, though I don't know anything about its operations myself; and they have lately been extending the business both in Australia and China, and I have drawn only what I wanted for my yearly accounts. So I can easily have £50,000 from them. That in a safe four per cent. investment would bring £2,000 a year. Do you think Lady Sylvia would consider—'

'Sylvia is a mere child,' her father said. 'She knows nothing about such things.'

'If you preferred it,' said Balfour, generously, 'I will make it part of the settlement that the trustees shall invest that sum subject to Lady Sylvia's directions.'

Lord Willowby's face, that had been gradually resuming its sombre look, brightened up.

'I suppose you would act as one of the trustees?' said Balfour.

His lordship's face grew brighter still. It was quite eagerly that he cried out,

'Oh, willingly, willingly. Sylvia would have every confidence in me, naturally, and I should be delighted to be able to look after the interests of my child. You cannot tell what she has been to me. I have tended her every day of her life—'

['Except when you went knocking about all over Europe without her,' thought Balfour.]

'I have devoted all my care to her—'

['Except what you gave to the Seven Per Cent. Investment Company,' thought Balfour.]

'She would implicitly trust her affairs in my hands—'

['And prove herself a bigger fool than I took her to be,' thought this mean-spirited Scotchman.]

Lord Willowby, indeed, seemed to wake up again. Two thousand pounds a year was ample pin-money. He had no sympathy with the extravagant habits of some women. And as Sylvia's natural guardian, it would be his business to advise her as to the proper investment.

'My dear lord,' cried Balfour, quite cheerfully, 'there won't be the slightest