

L——, as he turned off and went down toward Queen Anne's Gate. 'I would have sent you some game if Lady Sylvia had been home; it would be no use to a club man.'

Balfour walked on, and in a second or two found himself before the clock tower of the Houses of Parliament, rising in all its gilded pride into the blue summer sky. Once upon a time—and that not so long ago—all the interests of his life were centered in the great building beneath that tower. When he had first entered it—even in the humble capacity for member for Ballinascreen—a new world of activity and ambition seemed opening up before him. But at this very moment, strangely enough, the mere sight of the Houses of Parliament appeared to awaken in him a curious sort of aversion. He had been going down to a morning sitting, rather because he had nothing else to do than that he was interested in the business going forward. But this first glimpse of the Parliament buildings caused him suddenly to change his mind; he turned off into Parliament Street, and called in at the offices of Mr. Billy Bolitho.

Mr. Bolitho was as cheerful and bland as usual. Moreover, he regarded this young man with sympathy, for he noticed his reserved and troubled air, and he at once divined the cause. Did not every body know that some of these large firms were being hardly hit just then? The fine old trade in Manchester goods had broken down before markets glutted with gray shirrings and jeans. The homeward consignments of teas and silks were no longer competed for by the brokers. The speculations in cotton to which some of the larger houses had resorted were wilder than the wildest gambling on the Stock Exchange. It was a great thing, Mr. Bolitho knew, to have belonged to such a firm as Balfour, Skinner, Green, & Co., in the palmy days of commerce, but these fine times could not last forever.

'Come, Balfour,' said Mr. Bolitho, brightly, 'have a glass of sherry and a cigar. You don't look quite up to the mark this morning.'

'Thank you, I will. I believe idleness is ruining my health and spirits—there is nothing doing at the House.'

'Why don't you start a coach, and spend

your forenoons that way?' said Bolitho gaily.

'I will tell you what I will do with you, if you like,' said Balfour, 'I will drive you down to The Lilacs. Come. It is a fine day, and they will give you some sort of dinner in the evening. You can be here by ten to-morrow morning.'

Mr. Bolitho was seated on a table, his legs dangling in the air, and he was carefully cutting the end of a cigar.

'Done with you,' said he, getting on his feet again, 'if you first lunch with me at the Devonshire.'

This, too, was agreed upon, and Balfour, as the two walked up to St. James's Street, did his very best to entertain this kind friend who had taken compassion on his loneliness. And as they set out in the shining afternoon to drive away down into the quiet of Surrey, Balfour strove to let his companion know that he was greatly obliged to him, and talked far more than was his wont, although his talk was mostly about such roads as Lady Sylvia knew, and about such houses as Lady Sylvia had admired.

'Have you heard the last about Englebury?' he asked.

'No.'

'Old Chorley has been struck with remorse of conscience, and has handed over that piece of filched common to the town, to make a public green.'

'That public green was nearly keeping you out of this Parliament,' observed Mr. Bolitho, with a demure smile.

'And there is to be a public gymnasium put up on the ground, and I have promised to go down and throw the thing open. What do you say, Bolitho; will you take a run down there, and drink a glass of wine with old Chorley, and show the boys how to twist round a trapeze?'

'I am very glad you have made friends with Chorley,' said Mr. Bolitho. 'He might have done you a deal of mischief. But I do think that you are becoming a little more prudent; no doubt you have found that all constituencies are not Ballinascreens.'

'I may have become more prudent,' said Balfour, with the indifference of a man who is mentally sick and out of sorts, 'but it is not from any desire to remain in Parliament. I am tired of it—I am disgusted