

Harcourt's rooms, where they found a party of seven already assembled.

Raymond, who knew every one there, after shaking hands with some and bowing to others, retired into a corner,—an odd habit of his—and resumed his watch. He seemed ever to be studying men's thoughts and motives, and trying to make them agree with their actions.

In a few moments he was joined by Vere Brandon.

"Have you heard from Lowood lately, Mr. Raymond?"

"From Lowood? Yes, some three days ago. Is there anything to interest you in that neighbourhood?"

"Much. Besides being the residence of your charming ward, it is also that of a very dear friend of mine, Allan Merton, the incumbent, whom you doubtless know."

"Slightly. And what piece of scandal or misfortune have you ferretted out from Lowood?"

"Mr. Raymond, your expressions are not particularly suitable. Indeed I might be justified in taking offence. . . ."

"Then don't come for it. We know each other well enough, Mr. Brandon, to do away with your usual blandishments. You are aware that I have not the slightest respect for you, and I am aware that your sole motive in addressing me is to impart, more or less skilfully, disagreeable news. Out with it, and do not waste your time on one who is not worth it."

"Really, you amuse me. Pardon, as far as I may apply the word to you. My meaning is that I cannot penetrate the reason of your decided hostility to me. Surely none of my actions or words have ever given you ground ——"

"I am forced to interrupt you again, Sir; but you are beating about the bush. We will say, if you prefer it, that my sarcastic temper makes me look for evil only in men. It will not matter, for all the same, I shall have found plenty in you. And now will you be good enough to tell me what has happened to my ward, Eveilyn D'Aston?"

"Your penetration is remarkable, Mr. Raymond ——"

"Say rather my knowledge of you pretty thorough."