

have preferred the little wooden pipe which was lying in his greatcoat pocket, only he did not dare ask for it. The Baronet took the largest and finest cigar in the chest, which contained twenty compartments, all filled with choice brands. Then he filled and drank a full glass of port, and then leaning contentedly back in his chair, the *vera effigies* of peace of mind, stable affluence, and benevolent comfort, instructed Reuben to open the case.

"You said, Reuben, that your son desires my help and advice, I believe. Well, John Gower, such help and advice as I can offer I am willing to give. What is it now? Is it an offer from some other works with higher salary? Are you discontented? Discontent with the young is a very, very mournful sign."

"If we were not discontented, we should always remain where we are," said John, bluntly. "Were you contented when you were a young man?"

"I was ambitious, perhaps; fired with the healthy desire of success."

"I am ambitious too," said John, roughly. "My desire of success is as healthy as yours."

"Well—well. What is it?"

"I have spent pretty well all my life about your works, Sir Jacob, as perhaps you know. If you do not know, it does not much matter. I was sent to school within the shadow of the furnaces, and it was my greatest pleasure as a boy to wander among the engine-houses and study the machinery. So that I suppose that by the time I was fourteen years old, which was when I was apprenticed to you in order to become a mechanical engineer, there was little in the place that I did not understand as well as the man who put the machinery together."

"A clever boy," murmured his father. "Always a clever boy, but self-willed."

"Naturally, when one understands a thing, one begins to try how it can be improved. Contentment won't do with machinery, Sir Jacob, whether you are old or young."

"Right," said the Baronet. "You owe, however, the best of your thoughts and all your work to your employer."

"That is the employer's theory," returned the young man, who was not in the least abashed by being in the presence of so great a man. "It is not mine. I have given you what you paid me for. Since my appren-

ticeship was finished, I have been one of your regular engineers, receiving the regular engineer's pay. I don't grumble at that, because it is what all get. If I were twenty years older and had a dozen children I should grumble."

"Come, John, come," said his father.

"No, father," said John. "I shall go on my own way. I came here to have my say out, and if Sir Jacob does not like to hear the truth, he may tell me so himself."

"Surely we live only in order to hear the truth ourselves, and to do good to others by telling it," said the Baronet. "It is the truth that some of my engineers complain of their pay? Is that what you would say, John Gower?"

"All your engineers, all your clerks, all your people, from the superintendent to the youngest hand, complain of your pay, Sir Jacob. When they read your fine speeches they say that charity begins at home."

"Go on, John Gower. I am accustomed to misrepresentation, and ingratitude I can bear. Go on."

"Well—" John made a face as if he was swallowing a very nasty medicine. "It doesn't do any good, I suppose, to fire up and tell all. But I suppose you know that there is not general contentment and satisfaction at the works, Sir Jacob?"

"I know that some among you," said Sir Jacob, knocking off the ash of his cigar, "have instigated my hands to strike. And I wish I knew who had done it. Because if I knew that man he should go, even if it were the son of Reuben Gower here. You will, perhaps, go down to-morrow, John Gower. You will tell them, from me, that I will not make the smallest concession, that they must accept my terms or stay outside altogether. Pray do not forget to tell them that even if they remain I will never give in."

This was a very proper sort of stroke, because the promise was certain to be told about, and people would connect bankruptcy with principle. Few men can do more than go bankrupt on principle.

"However, you did not come here, I presume, to teach me my duty—ME—my duty." Sir Jacob spoke calmly, as if he was not in the least annoyed by the young man's plainness of speech. In fact, he was not. North-country men are practical, and their dislike to humbug makes them welcome even rude language.