

XLIX

A CHANCE had brought him the burden of unrequired wealth; and a chance had taken it away. Perhaps, unaided by chance, he would never have completely emancipated himself from the futilities. Perhaps he might again and again have struggled upward to the light, and then have fallen back into the rubbish-heap. But he was free of it now. He stood alone at last—or with one other by his side—in the full clear light.

For a little while longer he was troubled by a too attentive newspaper press. "*Noblesse Oblige*" in blackest, solidest capitals—that was a familiar head-line just then on fluttering newspaper bills, with such racy slangish additions as "The Earl pays the Score," and "Lord Brentwood will clean the Slate." He was the most popular man in England, the darling and hero of the loud-voiced public. The cheers he had heard outside the Law Courts were echoed in many parts of the town: wherever he drove through the streets, he was in peril of being recognized, of hearing more vocal choruses, of stopping the traffic, of requiring the police to extricate him from his noisy admirers. Crowds stood outside Andover House, refused to believe that he was not somewhere hidden within his voluntarily surrendered palace. In view of this popular excitement, one could not expect the newspapers to leave him alone. They gave their readers what they might truly have called "Special Brentwood numbers": portraits of him at all ages, sketches and photographs of the possessions he was renouncing—the picture gallery at Collingbourne Court, the docks at Stonehaven, the model cottages at Gridtown, etc. They gave leading articles, chatty discursive articles, personally descriptive articles, philosophically reflective articles.—"Very often of late years the public has been confronted with the unedifying spectacle of a member of the peerage involving himself in unsuccessful commercial specu-