

Frank forced his way into his presence, but Mr. Brereton declined to listen to any explanations, and insisted on his leaving the room "unless he wished to be kicked out."

To his mother Frank told his story plainly and simply. She believed it, but being ill at the time of his visit could give him no material assistance beyond £20, all the money she had in hand. And with that Frank left his father's, an outcast for a crime he averred he had not committed.

After much consideration he resolved to return at once to Oxford, and present himself to Mr. Wickman, manager of the bank, whom he knew slightly, and with whom his family had had dealings for some years, and inform him of the true state of affairs, as far as he knew it himself. If Mr. Wickman adhered to his resolution for committing him for trial, he could do so without delay, as Frank would give himself up to the police.

Such was the scheme which he proceeded forthwith to put into execution.

He was coldly received by Mr. Wickman, who, nevertheless, evinced some surprise on seeing him, and still more on hearing his fresh version of the story. But he received the young man's protestations of innocence with an incredulous smile.

Frank's indignation was roused. "I know appearances are against me," he exclaimed, "but on my honour as a gentleman," (the corners of Mr. Wickham's mouth curled more than before, but Frank continued) "I swear I am innocent. If you will persuade the proprietors not to prosecute me, I will borrow money and pay the bank two hundred pounds which I never defrauded it of. But if you either cannot or will not do this, I will stand my trial, and will forthwith give myself up to the authorities. The verdict will, probably, be given against me, but that will not make me guilty!"

Mr. Wickman was fairly puzzled. In all his experience, he had never seen or heard of a case like this. This guilt—if guilt it was—looked very much like innocence. Nevertheless, as a prudent man, he was compelled to take time for consideration. So he requested Mr. Brereton jun., to withdraw, and to call again in the course of the evening, when he would tell him what conclusion he had come to.

Frank returned to his rooms somewhat lighter at heart, although he was aware that he had made no actual step. Thinking was useless, so, as his college career was inevitably at an end whatever Mr. Wickman's decision might be, he set to work to pack up his various effects, and to make arrangements for an immediate departure. Some hours later he again called upon Mr. Wickman.