

Best Laid Schemes.

By A New Author.

(Continued from last week.)

Rash conclusion, Jack Danehurst. Most events have their consequences, and it has been known that those consequences have been of a nature quite unforeseen by the actors in the comedy of events. Perhaps we have not altogether done with Miss Fanny Manners.

The ease with which Jack had managed the affair, and the rapidity with which Miss Manners had sunk her demands to this sum, so small compared with what he had feared, did not seem to strike Allen as remarkable. Accustomed to be assisted in all his difficulties, he forgot his anxieties as soon as they were ended. Plunged into the nethermost depths of despair when threatened by events, he rose with the lightness of irresponsibility to extreme buoyancy the moment a danger was passed.

But to Jack Danehurst the simple manner in which things had settled themselves appeared remarkable.

"I wonder what it means," he said. "There's certainly something mysterious about it. I wonder," he mused, "if by any chance, Fanny Manners is already married?"

"What rot! Of course not," said Allen. "Poor little Fan, she was awfully fond of me," he went on, sentimentally reasserting itself in his atmosphere of safety. "What ideas you get into your head!"

"Nevertheless," said Jack, "I can't account for her giving way, unless she had some strong reason. Girls of her stamp don't compound breach of promise cases with the sons of millionaires for such small sums."

"Oh! well, it's all over now, so it's no good speculating about her motives," said Allen.

"Well, look here, old man," said Jack; "I don't want to wound your vanity; but, between you and me, I don't believe that girl cared a farthing about you, and I don't believe she was keen after the money either; in fact, I don't believe she would have made use of the letters at all."

"Oh! what the deuce are you driving at?" asked Allen, impatiently. "How can you know whether she was fond of me or not; and why should you think she meant any way?"

"She seemed to me," said Jack, "as I said before, to be acting a part. I can't get away from the impression that she is simply a cat-spaw of some one—some one who wanted to get money out of you, but not money alone."

"What the deuce do you mean?" exclaimed Allen.

"I mean," Jack went on, "that the whole affair has fizzled off in a very unusual way."

"Well, when I first spoke of it to you," Allen said, "you made light of it; it was nothing to bother about, and all that. Now you seem to have changed your opinion, and you want to make a great deal too much of it."

"Let me put the case to you," said Jack. "A woman—and an actress—carries on a flirtation with the son of a millionaire, who writes letters to her of a nature that would possibly extract an award of damages from a sympathetic jury and an admiring judge. A friend of the man calls upon the woman, armed with the very weak story that she will gain nothing by taking the matter into court, and offers her a ridiculously small sum (under the circumstances) for the damaging documents. Now, you seem to think her ready acceptance of these terms quite in the natural order of things?"

"Well!" interrupted Allen. "you

made the position clear to her, didn't you?"

"I certainly did my best to be lucid," continued Jack. "But what woman, and actress, would believe such a story as I told, unless—and this is what I want you to mark—she either had some very full and particular knowledge of the truth of my story from other sources, or some special reason for not pressing the matter?"

"Oh, hang it!" said Allen. "Shall I send round for your wig and gown?"

"Even supposing," Jack went on, disregarding the interruption, "even supposing she did not get the verdict and damages, think of the advertisement, which would have inevitably raised her from her present obscure position on the stage to principal parts, with proportionate salaries."

"Well, there's something in that," Allen yielded, reluctantly; "but I wish to goodness, Jack, you'd drop the forensic manner, and tell me what you really are getting at?"

"My dear fellow, I don't know what I am getting at myself," said his friend; "I'm trying to find out. You see, this affair is, in itself, unimportant; in the great majority of cases, a man in your position would simply have confided in his father, who would, acting under legal advice, have either settled with the lady out of court, or allowed the affair to come before a jury. Your position being exceptional, you were forced into another course of action, and you have escaped the consequences with great ease. That is the element in the case I don't like. When the cat releases the agitated mouse from her clutches, that animal, I daresay, congratulates itself that it has only to walk home with as much dignity of manner as possible; but it is not very long before the mouse discovers that its view of the situation is a mistaken one."

"I verily believe," said Allen, "that you are making all this to do because Druse introduced me to the girl; why don't you suggest at once that it is some deep-laid scheme of his that has induced Fanny to comply so readily?"

Jack was silent, but he could not help admitting to himself that such a state of affairs as Allen had sarcastically mentioned, would not seem to him altogether impossible. But he had no right, he was aware, to entertain such a thought. Still, right or no right, to think of Druse was, with Jack, to suspect him.

"Hang it," he said to himself, "Druse is becoming a regular Charles the First's head with me. If I'm not careful I shall fall a victim to moromania."

Allen was anxious to change the subject, so he said: "You'll dine with me at the Empyrean, and we'll go somewhere afterwards?"

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"No, not to-night," said Jack. "I can't, thanks, old man."

"Oh, I say," grumbled Allen, "you never can now. If anybody didn't know what a self-contained Johnny you are they'd think you had some special attraction. Can't you give it up to-night? We ought to celebrate the occasion, you know."

Jack thought, may, he was sure, that he could not give it up. He did not think it necessary to mention that it was an at-home at Mrs. Hilary's. Perhaps he anticipated being chaffed if he explained, for Allen had met that lively little lady, and Jack had never spoken in complimentary terms of her. So it might have been a little difficult to explain why he elected to go to an at-home, a form of entertainment he generally denounced at the house of a lady he derided. Perhaps he expected to meet the Connistons there, and was anxious to make his peace with the Baronet.

It is an excellent trait in a young man's character when he is anxious to make amends for any annoyance he may have caused a man older than himself. The cynic has observed that fathers of beautiful girls are often treated with much consideration. But why pays any heed to the harsh utterances of the cynic?

"Very well," said Allen, in an injured tone, "if you won't, you won't; but as you're so full of engagements I fix you now for September at the governor's place. Now you won't refuse?"

"Want me there to protect you against the fair lady, eh?" laughed Jack. "Well, so far as I know—"

"Oh, none of that!" broke in Allen impatiently; "you know well enough now. Say you'll come, there's a good chap. It always seems so odd to me that you've never been to the Grange. It's a jolly old place, too. You know it was my mother's? It's said to be one of the best specimens of the moated grange left in England. I always feel depressed there, though, in spite of my liking for it. Calamity seems to hang over it, for from what I remember of my mother, she was always a sad, pale-faced figure there. The incongruity, too, of my father's thick-set frame wandering through the rooms, and standing in unobscured contrast near some of our old Vandykes, our own people, always fills me with wonder."

Allen always spoke of the departed Henriots as "our people." He seemed unconscious of being an Aldridge; and to do him justice, it was not a snobbish assumption, but an innate sentiment. Selfish and irresolute, and possessing no strong principles, his one feeling with which there was anything of reverence mingled, was his memory of his mother. In fact, one might say it was his only strong feeling, as yet.

In speaking of her he dropped unknowingly, his slanginess and peevishness. Had Lady Gertrude Aldridge lived, her son's history might have been a different one.

CHAPTER IV.

It was a fortnight after the events narrated in the last chapter and London was shimmering in the hot clasp of August.

London is a marvellous city in every respect, and not the least wonderful feature about it is the possibility of finding within its area people who really like it in August. I have heard it whispered that there are people who like London at all times; but Nature has not been lavish enough towards me with the gift of credulity, perhaps, for I can scarcely bring myself to believe in this infatuation.

Certainly, Allen Aldridge was not one of these phenomena, but if he disliked London in August, he disliked the trouble of deciding for himself what place to exchange it for, still more. And so in London he remained, trying to kill time until the date of his visit to Dytton Grange should arrive.

True, he might have started for that place at any moment, but the society of his father, when there was no one staying in the house got on his nerves, and so he lounged about in an aimless sort of way, lunching at his deserted club, and dining wherever his fancy took him.

Jack was away; but had promised to join him at the Grange, as early in September as possible. Allen had seen him once only since the day when he had brought him the letters.

On that occasion, Jack had seemed not in his usual good spirits. Not being of a confidential turn of mind, he had not told his friend that the Connistons had not, after all, been at Mrs. Hilary's at-home, nor that he had called twice at their house, to find them not at home on the first occasion, and on the second to hear that they had abruptly left town for the Baronet's place at Hazelwood.

Upon hearing this Jack had decided that a week on the river would be of benefit to his health, and he seemed to think he would enjoy that holiday more if he went quite alone. At Medmenham he developed an engraving taste for love stories, and a habit (which was, of course, quite peculiar to himself) of identifying himself with the heroes when those interesting individuals were, young, good-looking, and not well enough off to contemplate marriage. And there, lying in a boat beneath the shade of the willows, pipe in mouth, and book in hand, he would leave him for the present.

Partly, no doubt, the result of his aimless existence, Allen was moody and discontented. He feared, too, that his father had a scheme afoot for marrying him, and he knew that what his father had definitely made up his mind to, he (Allen) would be powerless to resist.

He pictured the girl chosen for him as everything at which his nature would revolt. His sense of absolute dependence was so strong, and his lack of sympathy with his father was so great that, though it may seem unnatural, it almost amounted to dislike. Musing on these matters, he stepped from his house, which had drawn up outside a well-known restaurant not far from Piccadilly Circus. To his surprise and satisfaction he saw the figure of Druse standing in the doorway.

"What, still in town?" he exclaimed, as they shook hands.

"I might make the same remark with more pertinence to you," replied Druse. "I am a slave to business, while you," and the black eyes glanced from their half-closed lids, "you are a free man, Aldridge. As a matter of fact," he went on, "I have been away for a fortnight or so, but my brief holiday was cut short by a telegram, which fetched me at once back to town. Ah, you don't know what a miserable fate it is to have to slave for a living," and Mr. Druse smiled more than ever as he complained of his bad lot.

"I wish to goodness I was in your shoes, Druse," Allen exclaimed. "You are your own master and free to do what you like with your life, while I—"

"While you," said Druse, striking his small black moustache "have simply to exercise a little patience and then step into the inheritance of millions."

(To be continued.)

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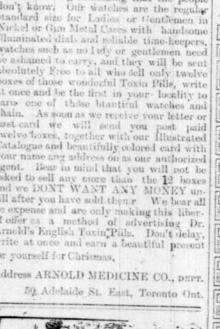
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Mixed for Truro	12.45
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Express from St. John	9.05
Suburban express from Windsor Jet	11.40
Express from Montreal and Quebec	12.00
Express from St. John and Sydney	12.05
Suburban express from Windsor Jet	12.15
Express from Sydney	12.15
Express from St. John	12.30
Mixed from Truro	12.40
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