

## THE PLAYERS

consequently his energy. It was not long before he made his mark on the boards, for he had much in his favour. A handsome, interesting face, a good figure, a telling voice, and behind them all a clever brain. Still, it was but a second-rate touring company in which he found himself, and the recognition of his success was not likely, except by chance, to be taken up by influential managers. That chance seemed never coming, and Hugh Cargill, ambitious and, without vanity, believing himself worthy of better things, of a worthier success on a higher plane, began to weary of the second-rate bohemianism, the loose morality, the vulgar banalities of stage life. Poor and almost friendless though he was, his calling had the effect of making him feel an outcast. He told himself that were he to meet an old acquaintance in another walk of life they would both, for the same reason, viewed from opposite points, be inclined to avoid each other.

He did meet one; a man of some influence in the world of politics, who had known and pitied him during his service under the objectionable M.P. This man, Jasper Thornford, had strolled into the theatre of a provincial town to which electioneering business had taken him, and recognising Cargill in the theatrical Cressingham, had sought him out when the play was over, carried him off to supper at his hotel, and presently asked him bluntly whether