

## AT CROSS-PURPOSES.

(Continued.)

Stuyvesant read this brief letter with some surprise. He did not understand the reason given for the cancelling of the engagement. He glanced again over the letter, and he remarked in it what seemed to him like forced gaiety. Charley was naturally humorous. He had a keen perception of the comic, and his conversation abounded in unconventional fun. But this note was not what Stuyvesant expected from him. The humor struck him as artificial. It seemed to him almost as though the note was the result of effort. In general Charley was as light hearted a young fellow as could be found in all New York, and had a flow of spirits as far removed as possible from any suggestion of strain. And yet this was not the first time that Stuyvesant had seen signs of a certain constraint in Charley Vaughn.

He laid the letter on one side and began his breakfast. The sun, streaming in through the window behind him, set the room in a glow. As Paul was pouring out his coffee he remarked that the tray was not quite level; one corner was higher than the other; and beneath it he found a thin little book, inside of which was a bundle of slips of paper. In clearing off the table he had overlooked this. He recognized it at once as the pass book which he had sent to the Metropolitan National Bank to be balanced, and which he must have taken out of his pocket the night before. The bundle of slips was a collection of the checks which he had drawn during the past six months.

Only half a year before had Paul Stuyvesant opened his first bank account, depositing the check for the salary of his professorship. Before then he had only just about money enough to get along comfortably and to make both ends meet; and although in Europe he had drawn money through banking-houses, he had never before kept a balance at his banker's. Old as he was a check-book was still a novelty to him; and it was with a boyish pleasure that he broke the band which encircled the thin bundle and began to turn over the cancelled checks. To finger them made him feel more certain of his position; it gave him an assurance of his financial stability. As he glanced at them his mind ran ahead into the future, and he saw himself not only paying his own way but making a home for his wife. Then he paused, for in his hand, at the moment, was the very check he had drawn to pay for the engagement-ring he had given to Katharine Vaughn. Not a few of the other checks could be connected with her more or less directly. Here was one to a bookseller, and, while most of the books had been for his own use, it had paid also for an "Evangeline" he had sent to her. There was another next to it, drawn in payment of the little supper after the theatre-party which he had given her and which Mrs. Duncan had kindly matronized,—the supper at which Charley had flirted so funnily with the pretty girl from Yonkers. Yet a third was to the order of a florist; and as he looked at it there arose a vision of Katharine Vaughn as she stood before him at the ball, radiantly beautiful, supremely happy, and holding in her hand the bunch of roses he had provided for her.

As Stuyvesant turned this check over, he took up the one beneath it. He recognized that also, and he knew where the money had gone. The check was to the order of Charles Vaughn, and it had been posted to him only a fortnight before, to repay the money Paul had borrowed to pay his slight losses the last time they had played poker. He had been unlucky that evening, and he had not yet forgotten the four deuces with which Charley had beaten him all full. He smiled, as the recollection of a good game of poker seems to make most Americans smile. As he turned the check over on the others he was struck by the endorsements. Most of the checks had been deposited at once by the payees. This alone had apparently passed from hand to hand, almost as though it were a bank-note. It was endorsed four times; Charley had given it to M. Zalinski, who had handed it to James Burt, and he in turn passed it along to Eliphalet Duncan. Now, Stuyvesant knew Eliphalet Duncan as well as he knew Charley Vaughn; and they knew each other very well. That a check which he had given to Charley should find its way into the hands of Eliphalet, after passing through those of two unknown men like M. Zalinski and James Burt, struck him as peculiar. M. Zalinski—the name seemed somewhat familiar, although he could not place it at once; the handwriting was stiff and foreign; probably the man was a Polish Jew. The signature of James Burt was bold and irregular, as though it was the result of main strength misapplied.

Stuyvesant turned over the rest of his checks carelessly as he went on with his breakfast. Then he took up the *Gotham Gazette*, while he smoked a cigarette with his coffee. The newspaper happened to be so folded that the eighth page was under his eye. He had not more than glanced down the first column before he checked the cup which he was raising to his lips. A curt paragraph informed the readers of the *Gotham Gazette* that the case of James Burt, charged before Police Justice Van Dam with having burglars' tools in his possession, was postponed until the following Wednesday, at the request of his lawyer Mr. Eliphalet Duncan.

Stuyvesant laid down the paper and stared straight before him in deep thought. He had found apparently the connecting link between two of the four endorsements on his check. James Burt had paid it over to Eliphalet Duncan as a retainer. That seemed simple enough. But who was M. Zalinski? And how came Charley Vaughn to be paying money to a man who had dealings with a burglar? These questions he put to himself repeatedly, and he found no answer. Charley was neither eccentric nor fast; and it was no easy task to account for his having passed Stuyvesant's check to a man who passed it on again to a house-breaker. The combination of circumstances was singular, certainly, but probably it was of no significance whatever. Charley had behaved queerly of late in more ways than one, it

was true, but no doubt he could explain in a few words this curious linking of his name with a malefactor's. Paul said to himself that he was attaching too much importance to a trifle, and that a perfectly innocent explanation would be forthcoming in due time. Of course, if Charley were in trouble in any way, Stuyvesant would do all that he could to help the boy out. Katharine Vaughn was a bond between them. Paul was very fond of Charley for his own sake also, and he was ready to go great lengths, if he could relieve the young fellow from any worry which might be wearing on him. Stuyvesant was not eight years older than his future brother-in-law, but he felt toward him as an orphaned older brother might feel toward the younger brother he had brought up. Not only for Kitty's sake but for Charley himself he would gladly do whatever might be in his power.

For a few minutes Paul sat silently thinking, and not conscious of the series of concentric smoking-rings which he was blowing, one through the other. When his cigarette burned down and scorched his fingers, he aroused himself. Lighting a second cigarette, he took up the newspaper again. He turned it, and on the first page he found this despatch from Paris, set forth with a hydra-like protusion of "display heads:"

## "THE EXTRAORDINARY THEFT OF A PICTURE!"

The art world of Paris was thrown into a high state of excitement to-day by a rumor that the great painting of Mary Magdalen, by Titian, had been stolen from the handsome apartment of Mr. Samuel Sargent, the well known American millionaire and chief owner of the Transcontinental Telegraph Company. This is the great picture which was so romantically recovered two years ago, after having been lost to sight for nearly two centuries. It was painted in Ferrara in 1520, for Lucrezia Borgia, and it had been lost since the beginning of the eighteenth century. It is a single head treated in the great artists most glorious manner. Mr. Sargent has been away in Russia for more than six months, leaving his magnificently decorated apartment in the Avenue de l'Opéra locked up. When it was opened the Mary Magdalen was gone. It had been cut from the frame. The police do not know when the robbery had been committed; but they say they have a clue to the thieves."

"Now, that is very curious indeed," said Stuyvesant to himself. "This is the second paragraph in to-day's paper which is of interest to Charley."

Just then there came a sharp knock at the door.

## CHAPTER III.

Stuyvesant looked up as he cried, "Come in!"

The door opened, and Charley Vaughn appeared. He walked straight to the blazing fire and began rubbing his hands.

"Well!" said Stuyvesant, interrogatively.

"Don't talk to me till I've thawed myself out," Charley answered. "It's a climb to get up here to this seventh heaven of yours, and it's lucky there's an alleviator. A man who had to clamber up to this sky parlor on his hind legs would be entitled to join the Alpine Club. And the way the wind whistles up and down the perpendicular railroad out there would make a man shiver even if he had been up Mont Blanc."

Charley Vaughn was a lively little fellow, with curly blonde hair and a quizzical face. He wore a pair of eye-glasses, behind which his sharp blue eyes were never still.

"Is it very cold out?" asked Stuyvesant.

"It isn't the cold I mind," Charley replied, taking a cigarette from a cup of cloisonné enamel which stood on the mantle-piece. "It's the confounded uncertainty of the thing. I'm in Greenland's icy mountains one day and on India's coral strand the next. In the course of a week Old Probabilities serves us up a great deal of weather of assorted sizes,—if you don't see what you want, ask for it."

"If you want a match you will find a box on the book case behind you," suggested Stuyvesant, smiling.

"Thank you," returned Charley, gravely. "Let me beg of you not to rise. I can help myself. I should hate to put you to any inconvenience."

He lighted his cigarette, and then took up a favorite masculine position on the hearth-rug with his back to the fire and his feet well apart. He puffed away in silence for a minute, glancing about the room. At last his eyes fell on the breakfast-tray.

"You got my letter, I see," he said, watching Stuyvesant closely.

"Yes," answered Paul dryly.

There was an awkward pause for a few seconds. Charley kept his eyes on his host until Stuyvesant happened to look up; their glances met, and the guest, with a little nervous laugh, dropped his gaze to the floor.

"I came in to explain how it is," Charley began, in a hesitating way, in marked contrast with his glib speech at his entrance.

Stuyvesant smoked on silently.

"I can tell you how it is," pursued Charley. "I like the Bishop of Tuxedo: he's a white man, for all he's a green-sharp. And so I thought you wouldn't mind my postponing our engagement for to-morrow."

There was another awkward pause and then Stuyvesant said,—

"I thought you hated stained glass with a holy hatred?"

"I do hate it, of course; but—"

"But you like the bishop so much that you are willing to make an exception in his favor?"

"Exactly," said Charley, quickly seizing at the explanation obligingly offered.

"Ah!" Stuyvesant rejoined with significance.

"Now, what do you mean by that contemptible *ah*?" cried Charley, with a show of indignation.