

ably. 'If a lady falls over head and ears in love with you merely from seeing your manly form in the street without ever having so much as exchanged a single word with you, the compliment's a higher one, of course, than if she waited to learn all your virtues and accomplishments in the ordinary manner.'

'Dinner?' Gascoyne asked, with a dubious glance towards his bedroom door. He was thinking how far his evening apparel would carry him unaided.

'No, not dinner; a picnic next Saturday as ever was,' Thistleton replied, all unconscious. 'The ladies of the Rives d'Or invite us both to lunch with them on the green up yonder at Sant' Agnese. It's an awful lark, and the pretty American's dying to see you. She says she's heard so much about you—'

'A picnic!' Paul interposed, cutting him short at once, and distinctly relieved by learning of this lesser evil. 'Well, I dare say I can let it run to a picnic. That won't dip into much. But how did the ladies at the Rives d'Or ever come at all to cognise my humble existence?'

Thistleton smiled an abstruse smile. 'Why, Armitage told them, I suppose,' he answered carelessly. 'But do you really imagine, at the present time of day, my dear fellow, every girl in the place doesn't know at once the name, antecedents, position, and prospects, of every young man of marriageable age that by any chance comes into it? Do you think they haven't spotted the fashionable intelligence that two real live Oxford men are stopping at the Continental? I should rather say so! Gascoyne, my boy, keep your eyes open. We've our price in the world. Mind you always remember it!'

Paul Gascoyne smiled uneasily. 'I wish I could think so,' he murmured half aloud.

'Yes, we've our price in the world,' his friend continued slowly, cigar turned downwards and lips pursed, musing. 'The eligible young man is fast becoming an extinct animal. The supply by no means equals the demand. And the result's as usual. We're at a premium in society, and, as economic units, we must govern ourselves accordingly.'

'Ah, that's all very well for rich men like you,' Paul began hurriedly.

'What! do you mean to say,' Thistleton cried, rising and