

That he had, all these years, 'been something' did not enter into his head as he walked downstairs, shoes in his hand, lest his shod feet might make a disturbing vibration inside his mother's room, by the open door of which he had to pass. She slept nowadays with door and windows wide open, since the last faddist to whom she entrusted her health had recommended a course of open-air treatment, in order to overcome that anæmia which made her perpetually feel too tired to do anything but go for drives, listen to Teddy reading the most sentimental trash with which the circulating library was competent to supply her, scold him in a feeble and dribbling manner in the intervals, parade her greatness to sycophantic inhabitants of Lambton, and, generally, under the guise of unselfish ill-health, devote a very ingenious mind to the task of making herself as comfortable as possible. As a matter of fact, she succeeded in making herself very comfortable indeed, for if the whole attention of an adult human being is directed towards that one end, the chances are that however real ill-health may be, he (and especially she) usually attains a very solid measure of success, unless some natural deficiency of the brain prevents her from forming sufficiently coherent plans. Mrs. Teaton (Honourable in her own right, being the daughter of a peer) had no such natural deficiency, and she was very well satisfied with her position as invalid empress of Lambton, without duties to her subjects.