

"Oh!" Mrs. Sampson did not say what she felt, that, on the whole, she would have been glad to dispense with Mr. Carteret's company for that one evening. She had planned a little programme in which Sir Jacob should spend the after-dinner time, which was not long, with Mr. Gower, Rose with Mr. John Gower, leaving herself free to exchange pleasant things with Henry Bodkin. And now the programme was all upset by the intrusion of Julian Carteret.

Perhaps he would not come.

But he did; came before any of the rest arrived; came with a face all aglow with satisfaction half an hour before dinner; and was there to welcome the three unwonted guests before Sir Jacob appeared.

Reuben is quiet, but at his ease, in the big house, whose grandeur does not overwhelm him. He respects its owner, not the house, and he looks sad to-night because he knows that in a few days all these splendid things will pass away and become the property of some one else. Sitting at meat with a man who is to be a bankrupt in a few days is like taking a cheerful meal with a man the day before he is hanged. Wonderful, too, that Sir Jacob looks so cheerful and talks so bravely.

John Gower is a young man with a ruddy countenance, curling brown hair, strong features, and red hands marked with hard work. Late dinners and dress-coats are not his usual style of life; but he is here to-night with a definite object, and he tries to be agreeable. Picture to yourself a young man of twenty-two, who is absolutely ignorant of the tolerant carelessness of London, who is incapable of conversation, and who is always, whatever he does or says, in earnest. If you look in his face you will see lines about the eyes already; they are the lines of thought and anxiety. If you look in his eyes you will see that they are eyes which are steadfast and firm—eyes that mean success. John Gower means to succeed. John Gower is of the stuff whence England has got her greatness; he can fight; he can work; he can wait; he can be frugal; he believes in himself as strongly as any fighting man of Queen Elizabeth's time; and he believes in the might, majesty, and glory of the machinery among which he is always at work.

Mr. Bodkin has not quite put off with his secretarial garb the secretarial demeanour. He is ostentatiously respectful to Sir Jacob;

he listens to his utterances as if they were proverbs to be remembered; he even repeats them softly to himself. The secret of this behaviour is not a disposition to grovel on the part of Mr. Bodkin, he is no more a groveller than any other poor devil who is just a pound or two this side of nothing: it is the admiration which a man who at forty-five finds himself a complete failure has naturally conceived for a man who seems to be a complete success.

The dinner is not very brilliant; Sir Jacob's seldom are; when the great man is silent, there is little conversation, and what Julian Carteret says is generally flippant, and falls on unresponsive hearts except for that of Rose. When the ladies go things are a little worse for Julian. Never, perhaps, was a more discordant group of men got together to circulate the decanter. Sir Jacob, calm in conscious superiority, lays down the law, while he absorbs copiously:—it is, as I have said, a mark of this man's strength that he can, and does, drink immense quantities of wine without feeling in the slightest degree affected. It is a Princely—a Royal—quality to possess. Reuben, hanging his head, listens gravely and sadly. John listens impatiently, drinks nothing, and looks as if he would like to contradict. Mr. Bodkin listens deferentially, and looks as if he would like more talk; he also sticks manfully, like Sir Jacob, to the port. Julian listens with an air as if the whole thing was an inexpressible bore, and keeps the claret within reach.

Presently Sir Jacob asks if no one will have any more wine. No one will.

"Then, Julian," he says, "you will take Mr. Bodkin into the drawing-room with you. We have a little business to talk over here."

A good opportunity. He has Rose to himself at her piano for a whole hour; the drawing-room is large, and Mrs. Sampson with Bodkin are at the other end. "I believe, Rose," whispers Julian, "that Bodkin is making love. Isn't it shameful? and actually in our presence?"

When the door was shut, the Baronet went to a sideboard, and from a drawer produced an inkstand and a packet of paper. Then he rang the bell.

"Coffee in half an hour. Do not disturb us until then. And, Charles, cigars."

Reuben Gower did not smoke; John refused a cigar because he wanted to have all his wits about him, and because he would