

to me, because I will tell you a secret. I had prepared a nice little plan for dishing both you and Chorley.'

And here the old gentleman laughed again at his own smartness. Balfour was glad to find him in this pleasant humour; it was not every one, if all stories be true, that the member for Englebury received so pleasantly.

'I like the look of you,' said Mr. Harnden, bluntly. 'I don't think you would play any tricks.'

'I am very much obliged to you,' said Balfour, dryly.

'Oh, don't you be insulted. I am an old man; I speak my mind. And when you come to my time of life—well, you'll know more about electioneering dodges. So you've quarrelled with Chorley, have you?'

'Yes.'

'H'm. And you believed he would have given you my seat?'

'I thought with his help I might have won it—that is, if his representations were true. I was told you weren't very popular down there, Mr. Harnden.'

'Perhaps not—perhaps not,' said the old man. 'They grumble because I speak the truth, in Parliament and out. But don't you make any mistake about it—all that would disappear if another man were to contest the seat. They'll stick to me at an election, depend on that, Sir.'

'Then you propose to remain in Parliament,' said Balfour, rising. 'In that case I need not waste your time further.'

'Stay a minute,' said the old man, curtly. 'I told you I meant to dish you and Chorley.'

'Yes.'

'You and I might dish Chorley, and you might have the seat.'

Balfour was not an emotional person, but he was a young man, and desperately anxious about his chances of being returned; and at this abrupt proposal his heart jumped.

'There is something about that fellow that acts on me like a red rag on a bull,' continued this irascible old man. 'He is as cunning as a fox, and as slippery as an eel; and his infernal twaddle about the duties of a member of Parliament—and his infernal wife too! Look here: you are a young man; you have plenty of energy.

Go down at once to Englebury; issue an address; pitch it high and strong about corrupt local influence and intimidation; denounce that fellow, and call on the electors to free themselves from the tyranny of dictation—you know the sort of buncombe. That will drive Chorley over to me.'

'You are excessively kind, Sir,' said Balfour, who, despite his disappointment, could not help bursting out into a laugh. 'I have no doubt that would be excellent sport for you. But, you see, I want to get into Parliament. I can't go skylarking about Englebury merely to make a fool of Mr. Chorley.'

'There's a good deal of the greenhorn about you,' said the old gentleman, testily, for he did not like being laughed at, 'but that is natural at your age. Of course I mean to resign. I had thought of resigning in favor of that boy of Lord S——'s, who is a clever lad, if he would give up French radicals and atheism. But I will resign in your favour, if you like—at the last moment—after Chorley has been working for me like the hound he is. And what do you say to that, young man?'

Mr. Harnden rose, with a proud smile on his face. He was vain of his diplomacy; perhaps, too, it pleased him to patronize this younger man, to whom a seat in the House was of such infinite consequence.

'Do I understand, Sir, that you meant to give up your seat in any case?' Balfour asked.

'Certainly I did,' said the other. 'If I wished to retain it, do you think I should be afraid of you—I mean of any candidate that Chorley could bring forward? No, no; don't you believe any such stuff. The people of Englebury and I have had our quarrels, but we are good friends at bottom. It will be a very disgraceful thing if they don't give me a handsome piece of plate when I retire.'

'My dear Sir,' said Balfour, with saturnine simplicity, 'I will take care of that.'

'And I am not going to spend a penny in a bogus contest, mind that. But that is not your business. Now go away. Don't tell anybody you have seen me. I like the look of you. I think you have too many opinions; but as soon as you get into some small office—and the government might do worse, I will say—you will get cured of that. Good-day to you.'