

brief month's splash? Besides, I've never said I want to marry—I don't know what you're hacking at."

"You haven't 'said' it, but the danger is about as plain as pica to the average intelligence, all the same. My son, how old are you—twenty-seven, isn't it? Pack your bag, ask for your bill, and go back with me by the morning boat; and, if you're resolved to make an ass of yourself over a woman, go and live in gilded infamy and buy sealskin jackets and jewellery while your legacy lasts. I'll forgive you that."

"The prescription wouldn't be called orthodox?"

"You'd find it cheaper than matrimony in the long-run, I promise you. Now and again, when some man plays ducks and drakes with a fortune for a cocotte there are shrieks enough to wake his ancestors; but marriage ruins a precious sight more men every year than the demi-monde and the turf and the tables put together, and nobody shrieks at all—except the irrepressible children. Did it never occur to you that the price paid for the virtuous woman is the most exorbitant price known in an expensive world?"

"No," said Kent shortly, "it never did."

"And they call you 'an acute observer'! Marriage is Man's greatest extravagance."

"The apothegm excepted. It sounds like a dissipated copybook."