

brought me a note from Lord Middleton and arranged a meeting between us."

"Precisely," Smith answered with effrontery, "as I arranged this meeting."

On that for the first time my lord's self-control abandoned him. He started to his feet. "You lie!" he cried, vehemently. "You lie in your teeth, you scoundrel! Sir—pardon me, but this is—this is too much! I cannot sit by and hear it!"

By a gesture not lacking in kindness, the King bade him resume his seat. Then, "*Peste!*" he said, taking snuff with a droll expression of chagrin. "Will anyone else ask a question. My Lord Dorset has not been fortunate. As the *Advocatus Diaboli*, perhaps, he may one day shine."

"If your Majesty pleases," Lord Marlborough said, "I will ask one. But I will put it to Sir John, and he can answer it or not as he likes. How did you know, Sir John, that it was the Duke of Shrewsbury who met you at Ashford, and conferred with you there?"

"I knew the Duke," Sir John answered clearly. "I had seen him often, and spoken with him occasionally."

"How often had you spoken to him before this meeting?"

"Possibly on a dozen occasions."

"You had not had any long conversation with him?"

"No; but I could not be mistaken. I know him," Sir John added, with a flash of bitter meaning, "as well as I know you, Lord Marlborough!"

"He gave his title?"

"No, he did not," Sir John answered. "He gave the name of Colonel Talbot."

Someone at the table—it was Lord Portland—drew his breath sharply through his teeth; nor could the impression made by a statement that at first blush seemed harmless, and even favourable to the Duke, be ignored or mis-