

in resolute silence for some time. "D'ye call yourself a man o' brains? Why, a calf's head's got more! Ha! ha! ha!"

"You are indeed witty, Mr. Mactavish—as witty as courteous; but permit me to observe that perhaps you are no judge of the article," I answer, quivering with rage. Oh, if he were a smaller man!

"Ha! ha! ha!" is the only response, as Mactavish lolls back in his chair, watching me with amused eyes. "Ye're a fortunate little man, Jimmy Wilson. But the bigger the—well you know the proverb, so I won't offend your susceptibilities."

This man has always been my friend; I have, in fact, won more of his money at billiards than of any other of my acquaintance, and have never refused to make one of his dinner-parties, though a rude, uncultured set they were, deplorably ignorant of all the refinements of the utter and the intense; men to whom the lily's symbolism or the peacock's feather's meaning were nothing in comparison with their dinners and brutal exercises. I have endured their Boettian dullness and noise partly from friendship for this coarse Scotchman, partly from a desire to improve their intellects, such as they are, and a little, perhaps, because they all thought, most erroneously, they could play billiards, and staked money on that impression. And this is my reward for such self-abnegation! Still, I reflect that till I am domiciled at Beechlands as its heiress's husband Mactavish's acquaintance may be useful in various ways, so I do not break with him. But wait, my Scotch friend—wait, and you shall see what a memory James Wilson possesses!

#### CHAPTER IV.

Amy and I are riding along a flowery Devon lane which has interminable windings. She is on the treacherous chestnut mare to-day, and I am on a philosophical grey cob, who is fat, lazy, and not averse to taking long pauses for refreshment, which precisely suits my views. My uncle vows he's a slow, stupid brute, only fit for the plough, but I have concealed my genuine reasons for liking the cob under the pretence that he is so quiet I can compose my literary work on his back, and my uncle and cousin, who are charmingly credulous, swallow the story implicitly. Amy gallops on by herself when she wants a gallop, like the wild Australian she is, the cob and I usually remain stationary under some unbragous tree till she returns.

"And so, my fairest," I say, as we slowly walk our horses between the hedges, aglow as they are with blossoms, and knee-deep in ferns, "you are beginning to see there are more delightful things than riding and tennis-playing, that the lyre is for ever echoing in the heart that will listen to its life-music, that the symbolism of beauty is intense all around us."

I murmur all this softly, and Amy looks much impressed.

"Yes, Jim," she says frankly, "I must say I care far more for your kind of pursuits than I did. And—shall I tell the truth?" with a charming, smile—but her mouth is too large—and a blush.

"Certainly, my darling," putting my hand on hers caressingly, which that beast of a mare shies at, nearly capsizing me. Of course Amy sits like an Amazon, and soothes her directly.

"Well, then, Jim, when I first saw you I didn't like you at all, you seemed so—so—well, too much of a muff then, if I must say it. But when I found how clever you were, and how you write for the London papers, and are so appreciated by literary men—I feel mixed sensations here in my mind as I smilingly listen—"and how you are so true a student of all beautiful and poetical things, and don't care as most men do for money and so on"—humph!—"I—I came to quite an opposite opinion, and I suppose that's how we come to be—"

(To be continued.)

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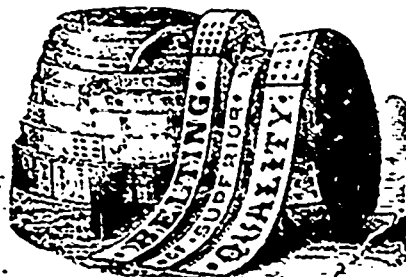
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