

THE GATE OF HAZARD 17

Madrid isn't a very safe place just now. Let me see, what was his reason? Oh, I know—because of 'the equivocal position of the whole Spanish question, owing to the unsettled relations with America,'" and she looked up at him audaciously.

"I think that's a very powerful reason," agreed Lascelles, solemnly; he did not perceive the double application of the phrase. "There can be no doubt that the possible war with the States, and the attitude we have been compelled to adopt, might render the position of both American and English people in Madrid fraught with some danger. I think Ferdinand is quite right." He was so earnest that he was entirely surprised when Mrs. Curwen received his remark with a burst of hearty and very mischievous laughter.

"I must be off," I said then, seeing the prudence of retreat. "I have lots to do. Good-bye, Mrs. Curwen. Take my advice and don't go to Madrid. You're much better off in London."

"Good-bye, Mr. Ferdinand—till we meet in Madrid;" and the expression of her eyes was almost a challenge as we shook hands.

She was a good-enough little soul, and pretty and fascinating, too, in her way; but she did not appeal to me. I was perfectly sincere in my advice to her not to come out to Madrid, and the news of her marriage either with Lascelles or anybody else would not have disturbed me in the least.

On my journey I thought over the incidents with no stronger feeling than that of a kind of neutral amusement; and although I would gladly have stopped in London for awhile and regretted sincerely the separation from Mercy, the moving bustle of the journey, the