

of power and cleverness ; all else about him suggested dense commonness and grossness. But his history seemed to show that he must be astonishingly clever. He had been a sort of underling in the Great Hayes-Gaskel group of Anglo-American speculators ; and when, eight or nine years ago, this famous combination came to irretrievable ruin, all supposed that Stuart had collapsed with his superior officers. Yet now he was back again in London ; had made or re-made his fortune, bought a big house at Knightsbridge, and been given the K.C.M.G. in recognition of mysterious services rendered to the British Government during a time of earthquake or revolution.

The man who spoke of his impending supper party was Teddy Wace, a rich stockbroker. He was small, fat, black, with jewelled rings on his stubby little fingers, and black hair on the back of his hands. He was one of those drab-coloured, heavily sculptured little men who seem to be fashioned out of gutta-percha, who have deep thick voices and full chuckling laughs, who are nearly always opulent and who are often popular. Teddy was immensely popular in theatrical and musical circles, and was sometimes welcomed even in polite society.

Below Sir Gregory sat a fashionable doctor, and below him were more City men—friends of Malcomson,—who were chattering of chorus-girls and low comedians. Lower down there was a writer of books or plays—a shy, nervous, bulbous-headed creature, who, all through dinner, had looked here and there with observant questioning eyes—possibly making mental notes for a novel or a drama.

"How long are we supposed to sit here ?" asked somebody.

"Why don't the Duke make a move ?"

The glass roof was completely hidden by tobacco smoke ; there were more and more speeches ; each speaker promised to be brief ; each speaker broke his promise. They were still dwelling on the happy idea of these club dinners. The idea was so good that you could not touch upon it lightly and swiftly.

"Oh, I say—there's that beast Collingbourne going to speak."

"Hush," said the fashionable doctor reprovingly ; and he glanced at Seymour Charlton.

The bald-headed, bearded man who had risen on the other