

out any attempt at concealment every eighteen months.

Lady Stoakley was probably to be classed as a selfish woman, but she certainly had the maternal instinct. She had worked and slaved on her daughter's account, and she was willing to go on doing so as long as she could stand. She had taken her to balls and "At Homes" and concerts with the most devoted regularity, and there was no denying that the engagement of Percy Gerard to somebody else was a blow. How Blanche herself would take it she could not guess, but it was always impossible to guess how Blanche would take anything. She was a young lady with a great gift of giving surprises to those who knew her best, and her mother had long ceased to be surprised at her except when she behaved in a way that was not surprising. Certainly she had been fond of Percy; and, Lord Stoakley being his guardian, it had been natural for him to be often at the house. Indeed, as long as he had been at school he had spent his holidays there, and the two in those days had been the most excellent friends. Nor had the boy-and-girl intimacy ever ceased; but what Lady Stoakley did not know was whether it had ripened in a manner corresponding to their years. Blanche was on somewhat intimate terms with a rather large number of eligible and ineligible young men, and it was impossible for any one but herself to know how